

PH16.5: Improving Outcomes for Toronto Residents through Implementation of HousingTO 2020-2030

September 22, 2020: Planning and Housing Committee deputation

My name is Melissa Goldstein and I'm an affordable housing and homeless advocate and concerned resident, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Before I begin, I wanted to congratulate and thank City staff for raising the bar in Toronto for housing and homelessness plans. What we're reviewing is a real improvement in terms of content, structure and design. It's solid and impressive work, and I appreciate your effort and the comprehensiveness of all the plans and proposals that you're putting in front of us today, and all the work you've done so far on starting to implement them. I do wish we had had more time to read and digest all of this material though, so if it is at all possible to make these materials available more than a week in advance of committee meetings, I think we would all really appreciate it. The quality and level of public engagement and participation is really affected when we don't have time to review documents thoroughly.

I think overall, the specific actions identified in the plan indicates that we're on the right track, which is encouraging. But to be honest, I'm still working through the 139 pages of the implementation plan, and so in addition to expressing support for doing more to prevent eviction, which is such a critically urgent issue, and emphasizing the importance of establishing an independent Housing Commissioner, I just wanted to highlight one issue with the accountability and transparency aspect of the implementation plan itself.

The Implementation Plan is supposed to help the City and the public track all of the actions, targets and measures and will be used to monitor progress on the implementation of HousingTO over the next decade. The problem is that it doesn't include any baselines and it doesn't include much in the way of concrete targets. It's hard to track progress when we haven't identified where we are starting from and when we haven't identified specific goals we're working to meet.

For example, Vancouver tracks the supply of their affordable housing stock, and rather than setting targets for new development alone, as we have done, they set targets for the level of affordable supply that should exist in a neighbourhood. They state how much currently exists and they identify how much they need. Then they set incremental targets for achieving their end goal, while monitoring the rate of change of the existing supply and implementing mechanisms to manage the rate of change if it's necessary to ensure the goals of their housing plan are met. We need to be taking a similar approach to implementing our Housing Plan. Performance measurement should be about evaluating how well we are doing in achieving our goals, so that we can adjust our strategy if what we're doing isn't getting us to where we ultimately want to be. Without clear baselines for each measurable target, we can't do that. It's great that we're setting out to improve housing affordability for 40,000 renter households, but how many renter households are currently paying more than 30 percent of their incomes on rents and how many renter households do we want to be paying more than 30 percent of their incomes on rent ten years from now?

Without those baselines and meaningful targets, it's hard to make sense of whether the targets identified in the plan will be adequate to ensuring we meet the housing plan's goals and vision. It also makes it hard to anticipate what our housing and homelessness situation will be ten years from now.

Thank you for your time today.

Melissa Goldstein, Ward 9 resident