

Good afternoon. My name is Greg Cook and I am an Outreach Worker at Sanctaury.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about this important item.

I will primarily be speaking to the SSHA/United Way COVID-19 Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy Report.

First I'd like to acknowledge some of things in the reports that are in the report that are vital to be aware of and act on.

People who are in Black and Indigenous communities are way over represented in the shelters and encampments in Toronto. It is important to acknowledge this and ensure that any plan takes concrete actions to both be anti-racist and also change the material conditions that create these outcomes.

The report also acknowledges that the solution to homelessness is housing. It's actually pretty simple. If you look at the responses to the survey's, creating housing that is affordable for people is what most participants highlight.

The report also acknowledges that as a result of high levels of unemployment and the sky high costs of rent we will likely see thousands, tens of thousands more people evicted than usual. This will likely mean thousands more in encampments.

The document says on page 19.

“Recent surveys found that between 8% and 13% of Toronto renters were unable to pay their rent in either April or May—months where COVID-19's economic impacts were just beginning to unfold. The Toronto Foundation estimates that if the portion of Toronto renters unable to pay rent remains around 10% moving forward—a projection it calls “optimistic”—between 130,000 and 260,000 renters will be at risk of eviction.”

The report goes on to quote me on page 19 and say “If we don't prevent evictions, there will be tents in the thousands. The impacts will be impossible to ignore.” This report was written in July, this is happening as we speak. I'm aware that SSHA estimates that there are 450 tents in

Toronto at the moment, however they quoted the same numbers in May and they have since moved 800 people from encampments into hotels. The city also counted 533 people sleeping outside in 2018, which I know was low, by looking at their methodology.

We are in the middle of an unprecedented emergency, the situation will get much worse. The previous version of this report, acknowledged that the actions recommended here won't actually stop this from happening. The City needs to use all the power it has to stop evictions and they haven't. Instead we have councillors busy wringing their hands while dozens of people are evicted each day.

Please, put a motion forward to make evictions illegal.

This report goes on to suggest that the City disinvest from emergency shelters. The math on this doesn't add up and the consequence to people's lives will be catastrophic. According to the report -

In 2019, 26,000 different people used Toronto's shelter system, most of whom exited the shelter system within three months. A smaller group of approximately 5,000 people (22%) stay in the shelter system for six months or more - pg 10 - if you minus this group of 5000 people from the total number then in May 2019 7,578 shelter beds existed, that equals at least 3 different people used 1 of those shelter beds in 1 year

- Consequently there will continue to be a need for temporary shelter (housing) on an ongoing basis, especially given the current economic situation and prediction that The Toronto Foundation outlines in the report.

We need to both build and acquire new units of RGI that is affordable for people and also continue to ensure people have emergency shelter beds to use. Otherwise thousands more will be in tents.

This report also doesn't acknowledge that the shelter system is full. This is the primary reason people are outside in encampments. I understand that Gord Tanner finally acknowledged this on a call that my co-worker was on. City councillors need to know this. The public needs to know this.

Finally this report doesn't actually have any details on what the City government will do for the hundreds, thousands of people that will be sleeping outside this winter. What's your plan?

I finish with my recommendations.

2. 2000 more more rooms by January. They opened 2000 hotel rooms in 4 months. The City can do it again.

3. Robust Harm Reduction services at all shelter sites.

4. -10,000 RGI Housing units in the next 24 months  
- 5000 modular units on City land, ie City owned golf courses  
- 5000 Conversion of hotels and office buildings

5. The 11 Housing Now sites should have 10,000 social housing units in 5 years. These are shovel ready projects. All the housing on them needs to be public. No private housing on public land.

6. Make evictions illegal.

7. A moratorium on clearing encampments and an end to police and private security guard harassment and ticketing of people in encampments.

8. Winter Survival gear for those in encampments. Including fire safety gear like fire extinguisher, and sand as well as sleeping bags, access to food and water, winter clothing like mitts, toques, long underwear, jackets and wool socks.