

EC 25.5 Deputation 21 Oct 2021- Doug Johnson Hatlem

Thank you and good afternoon. I want to encourage the Economic and Community Development committee gathered here to vote against the reception of the 2021 SNA.

That first bit of real text on page 5 reads: "The number of people experiencing homelessness on April 21, 2021 is estimated to be 7,347."

This is wildly false.

Contrary data, also directly from the City of Toronto's website states that there were 7,516 actively homeless people in Toronto in April 2021.

What is a mere difference of 169 people, you might ask, seems decent?

I am glad you asked.

The 2021 Street Needs Assessment numbers, as also stated clearly on page of 5 of the document, include exactly 795 people staying in quote "provincially-administered

Violence Against Women shelters, health and treatment facilities and correctional facilities."

Those provincial figures *are not* included in the Shelter Flow's "actively homeless" data.

So in reality, there is a discrepancy between this report and the City's own, more reputedly calibrated numbers showing that nearly 1000 additional people were unhoused in April of 2021.

Why the discrepancy? A discrepancy that means less than 90% of Toronto's unhoused population is counted in this report, a report with figures already being falsely blared in the media as "exactly how many people are homeless in Toronto right now."

These "point in time counts" used across North America have been widely criticized for a number of reasons, including the one that gives rise to our basic discrepancy.

As noted on p. 60 of the report very directly, and I quote: "this definition of homelessness excludes the "hidden" homeless (e.g., staying temporarily with family or friends) which is challenging to measure." Exactly as noted by Ms.Mendoza, our second speaker.

The definition of "actively homeless" used by contrast in the Shelter Flow data on Toronto's website includes people, often couch surfing in precarious circumstance, who have stayed in the shelter system at least one night in the last three months without leaving the system for permanent housing.

Good?

Very good.

As a street pastor at Sanctuary, I do know of other people regularly who are, indeed, unhoused, bouncing from living with a half dozen other people in a studio apartment to squatting in an abandoned building to using a tent in a park or ravine to crashing on a TTC car and likely not counted in this report. Or even in the Shelter Flow data.

Nonetheless, the shelter flow data does capture another sizeable portion of Toronto's unhoused population not caught in these flash counts, counts that are used to figure out basic funding for homelessness services in this City.

For many years, the most fundamental flashpoint between people who are homeless plus their advocates like myself and the City and its bureaucracy has been a rigid dishonesty about basic numbers.

The shelters are overcrowded every single damned night.

Data obtained via freedom of information shows that last Fall and Winter, an average of 117 calls a night to Central Intake ended with the caller being told there was no space available, to call back in an hour or two.

Thirteen thousand, seven hundred eighty.

This is the minimum number of times that people seeking shelter called into Toronto's Central Intake hotline in November 2020 through February 2021 and were definitively told that there was no room in the inn for them.

"Hello, I need to get a bed tonight, I feel like I'm getting frostbite."

"No, not right now. Call back in an hour or two."

"Hello, my partner beat me up this morning, please, I am begging you."

No ma'am.

Thirteen thousand, seven hundred and eighty.

And, as we head into another winter, this committee, by and large, looks the other way, insists that it is all just a communications problem, votes or abstains when it comes to dealing squarely with the grotesque human rights violations of police officers clubbing, dragging, arresting, sexually assaulting, and demonizing those who stand up for the thousands of people who have no where to go.

Yes, I said thousands, not just a single thousand. Since April, the shelter flow data shows an average increase per month of 296 people unhoused in this City. The latest figures from the end of September are out.

8,760 people are now actively homeless in Toronto, excluding the provincially run systems for which we must add another 795 at least, for a grand total of 9,555.

That's 2,208 more people than accounted for in this report. And about precisely the same number of people that the system cannot sleep each night as it is already over capacity.

And one more thing. One thing this report gets right that should permanently put a sock in the mouths of those on this committee and beyond on Council who have blamed refugees for this crisis.

Horse hockey.

We've seen a drop of around 2,500 people in the refugee portion of the system, nearly bottoming out to zero.

And still the cruel words and calloused hearts. And outrageous physical violence. Will it ever end? Will. It. Ever. End?