



To Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

During the pandemic, the City of Toronto raised the bar. Heeding the call from advocates, service providers, and unhoused people, the City established shelter-hotels to mitigate the threat of COVID by allowing people access to single rooms to self-isolate and stay protected from viral spread. But the value of these spaces surpasses COVID and viral transmission, and the benefits they offer cannot be overstated, and should not be eliminated as we move forward through the pandemic.

The plan you are considering today seeks to decommission these spaces by next spring. From the perspective of COVID, the threat to unhoused people is far from over, especially considering the low rate of vaccination compared to the general public.¹ But shelter-hotel rooms also offer real safety apart from COVID: according to the research findings of the [Meeting Crisis with Opportunity Report](#), compiled by the Toronto Shelter Network alongside Dixon Hall, 42% of shelter-hotel residents cited the ability to sleep in a private room, as opposed to a congregate dorm, as the top-rated benefit of their accommodations.² For people staying in congregate settings or who are living outdoors, the ability to access private space or have the health benefit of a full night's sleep is next to impossible. In addition to this, 41% of residents cited shelter-hotel spaces as overall safer for them, understanding that violent assault and theft are commonplace within congregate shelters.³ Knowing that people are actively safer and healthier in shelter-hotels, how can we backtrack to conditions that are worse than where people are staying now?

Any medium and long-term plans for Toronto's shelter system must begin with a commitment to non-congregate shelter beds. It is neither safe, nor is it dignified, to consider placing beds as little as one metre apart in congregate settings. Similarly, it is neither safe nor dignified to contemplate placing two people in a shelter-hotel room together, knowing that in the past strangers have been paired, including at the Roehampton Hotel. If beds are to be decommissioned at the Better Living Centre, the East Beaches Days Inn, and other locations, non-congregate beds must replace them. The City also has a duty to plan for the expansion of non-congregate beds based on the real and projected need, and ensure that the shelter system never surpasses the maximum threshold of 90% capacity, as it has consistently done for years (unfortunately, and against Council's own direction).

While we are deeply appreciative that the City secured shelter-hotel spaces, as had been advocated for, we must recognize that there is ample room to improve

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(22\)00037-8/fulltext#seccestitle10](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(22)00037-8/fulltext#seccestitle10)

² https://www.reddoorshelter.ca/sites/default/files/tsn -meeting_crisis_with_opportunity-full_report_-final_-july_1_2021.pdf

³ Ibid.



on health and safety issues in these spaces. The City must support shelters to uphold and apply the Shelter Standards, including minimizing service restrictions and ensuring appropriately and adequately trained staff. The City must also uphold its human rights obligations by addressing and acting upon the accessibility concerns of residents living in the shelter system. The health and safety of people who use drugs must be supported by working with residents to implement adequate harm reduction measures. The aforementioned asks are already inherent to the City's own commitments and obligations, and must be strengthened in any transition plan of our shelter system.

Again, we have seen the City step up and do better. You have done better, and you can continue to do so in support of the welfare of unhoused Torontonians by reconsidering this transition plan. We cannot return to congregate shelter beds, and we must commit to non-congregate spaces. We must strengthen our own commitments to shelter residents by upholding the Shelter Standards and the City's own human rights obligations. Understanding that permanent housing, and especially sustainable, affordable social housing, is not available for every person whose shelter bed is at risk – and, in fact, the Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan fully recognizes this barrier – we have a duty to allow people to stay where they are until better options are found and agreed upon for every single resident.

Finally, we ask you to reconsider the increase to Star Security to enhance surveillance of shelters. There is no evidence that the presence of private security enhances the safety of shelter spaces, or promotes a sense of safety among residents. This funding could be better applied to the City's own pilot projects, and to upstream community supports like drop-ins that unhoused people rely upon for their wellness needs.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Diana Chan McNally

Training and Engagement Coordinator, Toronto Drop-in Network

March 24, 2022