

From: [Atia Haq](#)
To: [Economic and Community Development](#)
Subject: [External Sender] Comments on behalf of Shelter and Housing Justice Network (SHJN) for 2023.EC.7.8 on October 24, 2023 Economic and Community Development Committee
Date: October 23, 2023 10:28:56 PM
Attachments: [SHJN Deputation - ECDC - October 24, 2023.pdf](#)

To the City Clerk:

Please add my attached comments, on behalf of the **Shelter and Housing Justice Network (SHJN)** to the agenda for the October 24, 2023 Economic and Community Development Committee meeting on item 2023.EC7.8: Shelter System Pressures and Responses, Including Planning for Winter 2023/2024

I would like this attachment to be accessible by the public on the website, reflected as a communication sent on behalf of SHJN, if possible. I understand that my comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.

Comments, on behalf of the Shelter and Housing Justice Network - SHJN (pdf attached)

Kind regards,

Atia

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This email is being written from the traditional and ancestral territories of the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat, Seneca and Petun Nations, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River. As a settler in Tkaronto, I am committed to disrupting colonial violence through concrete action.



October 23, 2023

attn: Economic and Community Development Committee

**City's inadequate winter plan is deadly in the face of the shelter and housing emergency
Council must take immediate action to prevent harm, injury and death this winter**

Last week, the [City released its Winter Plan](#), which with the current state of the housing and homelessness emergency is severely inadequate. This summer, 24 hour drop-in centres and shelter, respite, detox, mental health crisis, and gender-based violence beds were all full, leaving many people stranded outside. As temperatures drop, even more people will need access to safe shelter, and the City's plan of one 24-hour respite site with 40 spaces, 170 warming centre spaces across four sites opening at -5° C and "additional" spots through reduction of physical distancing in already overcrowded shelters will not meet the need and contribute to unsafe conditions.

The City must urgently address the shortcomings of this plan and open more space or the situation faced by unhoused people across Toronto will become even more dangerous and deadly. In 2022, a total of [191 people experiencing homelessness](#) died in Toronto. In a City as wealthy as Toronto, this is not acceptable and is not inevitable. This emergency is a direct result of reckless and murderous social policies, and unhoused people, advocates and researchers have been sounding the alarm for decades about a system in crisis.

The [City's own data](#) indicates that this September there was an average of 278 "unmatched calls" daily to Central Intake. These are not just numbers; they are people facing daily life or death situations trying to survive the ongoing displacement, dehumanization, and organized abandonment. The need for shelter is well beyond this number, which does not include people who have stopped even trying to find indoor space, including:

- People staying outside, where in April 2021 approximately [742 people](#) were sleeping outdoors, including in encampments.
- People experiencing "hidden homelessness" (i.e. couch surfing, staying in violent/abusive relationships due to inaccessible housing options)
- Refugees staying outside the shelter system, where the City estimates [1,500 refugees](#) are staying outside the shelter system in churches, community organizations, bridging hotels and programs supported by the Red Cross that will not have the resources or facilities to safely provide shelter over the winter.

The City's plan to shelter more people in existing congregate shelter facilities will worsen already drastic conditions. Crowded conditions are [known to](#) contribute to poor sleep, high stress, increased violence, worsening mental and physical health and greater likelihood for infectious disease outbreaks. People who are unhoused are more likely to [experience chronic illnesses and poor health](#) and are at a greater risk of severe illness from infectious diseases.

During the COVID-19 pandemic approximately [2,759 shelter hotel rooms](#) for adults were opened to facilitate physical distancing and isolation, and as a result thousands of people accessed better living conditions. [Since 2022](#) approximately [888 shelter hotel rooms](#) have been closed and another [327 rooms](#) are slated to close by the end of this year. This means hundreds more people with nowhere to go and facing ongoing displacement right in the depth of winter.

While City Council [voted to declare homelessness an emergency](#) in May 2023, little has been done to meaningfully address this situation. The former Mayor's budget cannot be a reason for continued disregard for human life. An emergency declaration must elicit emergency measures and an emergency response.

Instead, in the last few months as these crises worsen, we have seen xenophobic and anti-Black practices in action, the scapegoating of refugees and asylum seekers for the housing emergency, the downloading of City responsibility onto community and faith groups without support, and the continued displacement, criminalization and harassment of poor and unhoused people, all on stolen land. This is all happening in a context of escalating transphobia and right-wing attacks on safe supply and harm reduction programs, making the world and its systems even less safe for unhoused people, especially when existing at multiply marginalized intersections including Indigenous and Black people, individuals with precarious status, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, trans and queer people, women, youth, disabled people, people who use drugs, and many other groups.

The City must implement creative solutions, in collaboration with and guided by people with lived experience and most impacted by this emergency. City Council must use all the tools at their disposal to remedy the crisis situation they have inherited through socially murderous policies and a complete disregard for the humanity of unhoused people, including fierce advocacy for provincial and federal government intervention and prioritizing the wellbeing of people over profits through disrupting the negative impacts of financialization and gentrification.

In August, a collective of over 30 organizations and advocacy groups signed onto SHJN's [Housing Emergency Letter](#) demanding that the City of Toronto take immediate action to ensure safe shelter and housing for all. The City must ensure that unhoused people survive this winter with dignity and humanity through the implementation of the following demands:

1. Immediately reinstate low-barrier, year-round, 24-hour respite centres, until adequate shelter space is available (i.e. vacant storefronts and community centres). The need for adequate shelter is year round, not only when temperatures reach -5° C. Ensure these facilities meet shelter standards and have dignified conditions including enough showers and bathrooms and proper sleep surfaces (i.e. beds with mattresses).
2. Immediately stop the closure of shelter-hotels and implement a moratorium on evictions. Open at least 2,700 additional non-congregate shelter spaces now.

3. Implement a moratorium on encampment clearings and stop the harassment of residents and destruction of survival gear. Divest from policing and harassing marginalized communities and invest in providing access to safe shelter and housing.
4. Immediately open refugee reception centres in Toronto and advocate for promised federal funds to support refugees and asylum seekers. Advocate to the provincial government to ensure healthcare coverage for all, including undocumented migrants.
5. Convene an emergency task force including federal and provincial governments, frontline workers and people with lived experience to coordinate a response to the ongoing shelter and housing crisis in Toronto.
6. Advocate for the provincial and federal governments to each fund at least 4500 rent supplements to address the number of people experiencing homelessness. Advocate for the provincial government to enact a rent freeze, apply rent controls to all rental units, enact vacancy rent control and eliminate above-guideline-increases for rent.
7. Reallocate funds to immediately activate the \$5 million for services that promote survival for unhoused residents, including harm reduction and survival supplies for people in encampments as promised in Mayor Chow's platform.
8. Advocate for the provincial and federal governments to build rent geared-to-income social housing in Toronto: 10,000 units immediately to address homelessness and 90,000 units to address the growing waitlist. Advocate for the provincial government to enact a rent freeze, apply rent controls to all rental units, and enact vacancy rent control.
9. Intervene in the negative impacts of financialization of the housing market through measures including expropriation of properties for RGI housing, including 214-230 Sherbourne Street, prohibitive vacant unit and land transfer taxes and implementing requirements for RGI units in all new builds.
10. Advocate for the provincial and federal governments to increase social assistance rates to respond to the worsening homelessness and housing emergency, ongoing global pandemic and increasingly unaffordable costs of living, as has been implemented in other emergency situations (e.g. CERB, which was \$2000).

City Council has the power and responsibility to ensure all residents have access to safe, accessible and truly affordable housing and must act immediately to prevent more deaths and injury this winter. We will be paying attention.

Signed,

Shelter & Housing Justice Network

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