City Council

MM8.29	ACTION			Ward: All

Securing Shelter and Support for Refugees - by Mayor Olivia Chow, seconded by Deputy Mayor Jennifer McKelvie

* This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.
* This Motion is not subject to a vote to waive referral. This Motion has been added to the agenda and is before Council for debate.

Recommendations

Mayor Olivia Chow, seconded by Deputy Mayor Jennifer McKelvie, recommends that:

1. City Council request the City Manager to immediately make available temporary shelter for a minimum of 150 refugees and further find locations for an additional 100 refugees thereafter.

2. City Council express its gratitude to the Provincial Government for its additional contribution of $6.67 million to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, and matches the provincial contribution by approving a one-time draw of $6.67 million from the Tax Stabilization Reserve Fund. This combined effort will immediately provide permanent housing to upwards of 1,350 households.

3. City Council request the Federal Government to provide its historical 2/3 funding to this top up to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, in order to secure permanent housing for thousands more people.

4. City Council direct the City Manager to develop an outreach strategy to invite property owners in the region who are willing to provide rental accommodation to refugees claimants to notify the City, so the City can use the Housing Benefit to move people into permanent housing rapidly.

5. City Council direct the City Manager to continue providing refugee-serving shelter spaces to meet the unique needs of refugees while also ensuring everyone regardless of status is able to access the City's shelter system as spaces become available.

6. City Council direct the City Manager to explore partnerships with individuals, non-profit organizations, faith groups and other community agencies who are offering shelter and assistance to unhoused refugees and request the Provincial and Federal Governments join in this support.

7. City Council request the Federal and Provincial Governments to provide access to additional facilities and personnel to shelter and support refugees.

8. City Council authorize the City Manager to work with the Federal Government and enter any necessary agreements with refugee-serving organizations such as the Red Cross in order to

immediately establish a federally-funded reception centre for those refugee claimants arriving at Pearson International Airport; this centre will provide a welcoming space that offers centralized services for newly-arrived refugees claimants.

9. City Council express its gratitude to the Federal Government for providing $97 million in funding through the Interim Housing Assistance Program and reiterates its request for the full $157 million needed to cover the costs of supporting existing refugee claimants in Toronto's shelter system.

Summary

Refugees arriving in Canada deserve to be treated with dignity and require a safe roof over their heads.

We are in a crisis. Toronto's dedicated refugee shelter space is full. Toronto's base shelter system is full. Each night, over 300 people are turned away from our shelter system and forced to find somewhere to spend the night. Over half of these people are refugees and refugee claimants.

Toronto's shelter system accommodates nearly 9,000 people. Of that, more than 35 percent of the people in the system are refugees. On any given evening, upwards of 100 refugees and refugee claimants are waiting and sleeping outside the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre at 129 Peter Street. The situation is desperate.

Recently, as part of her transition, Mayor Olivia Chow had the privilege of meeting with refugee serving organizations, frontline shelter workers and other civil society partners who shared information, needs and recommendations on actions for this crisis. The Mayor is grateful to the advocates for pushing all levels of Government to act.

Mayor Olivia Chow, Deputy Mayor McKelvie, and Senior City Staff have worked with the Provincial and Federal Governments, as well as Mayors from across Ontario, to find immediate and longer-term solutions to address this crisis. This is just the first step in addressing this crisis. All orders of Government are continuing to work together on a long-term, sustainable plan to make sure people have dignified shelter and housing when they arrive in Toronto or anywhere else in the region. The intergovernmental tables continue and the Mayor's conversations with the Premier's Office and the Prime Minister's Office are ongoing as we work together to help people find housing and supports.

The Federal Government's announcement of $97 million in Interim Housing Assistance Program funding was a welcome first step, but will not meet the full needs of all refugees arriving in Toronto and across the region. It will however help provide a short term stop gap today. The City is currently incurring $157 million in costs to shelter and support the existing 3,100 refugees in the shelter system. For this to continue, the City will require additional financial support from the Federal Government. Funding is also needed to assist the increasing number of recent arrivals.

We are requesting that the Federal Government develop a refugee reception area that can provide access to services when refugees arrive, which is similar to what was done for Ukrainian refugees, through the Red Cross' First Contact program.

Further, we can ensure people can access permanent housing by increasing our investment in the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, which is a rent supplement program that helps move people out of shelter and into housing. This will help open up more spaces in the shelter system as more people are securely housed. The Ontario Government has committed will match

Toronto's investment in the program, which will house approximately 1,350 households, and Mayor Olivia Chow is hopeful the Federal Government will come to the table as well.

Background Information (City Council)
Member Motion MM8.29