

Date: June 25, 2024 (Supplement to my letter of June 17, 2024)

To: Mayor Chow and City Council Members

Re: EX15.3, Toronto City Council June 26-28, 2024 – SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT to Advancing the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) and the 2025 Shelter Infrastructure Plan (Report for Action), dated June 25, 2024 [7 days after the June 18th meeting of Executive Committee, to which my other Letter was addressed].

The 9-page Supplementary Report from the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, presents additional context and detail on the process for program and operator selection for new shelter sites to be developed through the new Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy for the HSCIS and the 2025 Shelter Infrastructure Plan. The information contained in this Supplementary Report is new and substantive, calling for a more fulsome response which is what I am providing in this second letter. Please note that I have been given only a few hours to compose this letter. I hope you will take the time to read it.

Page 2 confirms that “...the proportion of people with complex mental health and/or substance use issues is increasing.” This is an understatement of the fact.

Page 3 presents the City’s Street Needs Assessment (SNA) as a useful tool to determine the needs of shelter residents. Where is the concurrent assessment of public safety risks for other residents living in public and private housing in the immediate vicinity of a shelter? Data is readily available on impacts to community health and safety, including police reports on assaults, break-ins, hold-ups, and other crimes committed by residents of shelters. Why not use this data to accurately report (and reflect on) a more holistic view of community health, safety and well-being? The laser focus on the needs of unhoused individuals is commendable but it is unrealistic, reckless, and potentially very risky not to take a more holistic view, especially in densely populated residential areas where many other individuals live, work, and attend school.

The 2022 John Howard Society Report, *No Fixed Address*, suggested that a very large percentage of individuals are unhoused at the point they are released from custody or paroled. Many are on probation with conditions that should limit where they reside. It would be useful, therefore, if the next TSSS (to be conducted in October 2024) included data on the percentage of shelter/encampment residents who are registered and being tracked in some way with the justice system (recently released or paroled, awaiting trial, out on bail, on probation, or on the national registry for repeat sex offenders). If the City intends to place shelters within residential areas and adjacent to elementary schools and daycares, then the community has the absolute right to know what percentage of the shelter population is a potential safety risk.

On Page 4, the Service Triage, Assessment, and Referral Support (STARS) Intake and Triage module in the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) is described. Nowhere in this description is the issue of risk (real or potential) to public safety mentioned. This is an oversight that the City must correct in the interest of public safety. The following questions need to be

asked of any potential shelter resident: Is this person on the national registry of repeat sex offenders? Is this person a potential threat to a child living in the vicinity of the shelter? Is this person on probation or awaiting trial for a violent assault or robbery with a weapon? Are they carrying a weapon? Is this person a potential threat to someone else living or working in the vicinity of the shelter?

It is essential that the City balance assessment of “level of support” for shelter residents with “risk to public safety” for others living, working, and attending school in the immediate vicinity of a shelter.

The Shelter Service Model, presented on Page 4, also needs to reflect the needs of BOTH shelter residents and residents, workers, and students in the immediate vicinity of a shelter.

The Framework model or “intentional connections” presented on Page 5 does not acknowledge the community in which shelters are sited. Is the broader community not also part of the “seamless journey” from unhoused to housed described in such idealized terms?

The phrase “community engagement” on Page 6 is a misappropriation of terms. In my view, the plan is to avoid genuine community engagement (which is democratic and time-consuming) and shame/sideline anyone who dares to question a decision – even if that decision directly impacts their community. This amounts to Community Coercion, not community engagement. There is obviously something wrong with “the plan.”

I take offence to the suggestion, also on Page 6, that professional help is needed to manage “complex and potentially contentious community engagement processes.” What exactly is being suggested here? Do citizens not have a right to question or dispute a decision that is contentious or debatable? Why do we have to be “managed” to a point of conformity when we believe (and can demonstrate) that the decision is full of holes?

With regard to the “community walk” mentioned on Page 6, I’d like to emphasize that the so-called community walk held for 629 Adelaide Street West was a complete charade. Not only were the immediate neighbours (those of us who cared the most) excluded but they were also warned by BMG in writing not to attend or it would be perceived as a threat. In the end, the vast majority of those on the walk were NOT from the community. Our estimate is that only 2-3 actually lived in the area – so it was not a community walk in any shape or form. This aspect of so-called “community engagement” was a major failure.

The section on “Neighbourhood Integration and Site-Specific Programming” is pure Pollyanna or Pie-in-the-Sky dreaming, in no way related to reality. No-one living, working or attending school near a shelter is going to feel comfortable or safe associating with shelter residents who are on probation or out-on-bail for assault or other violent crimes, on the national registry for repeat sex offenders, or grappling with untreated drug addictions or mental health conditions that render them unpredictable, volatile and potentially dangerous.

As mentioned in my previous letter, there is no point for the federal government to pursue the Online Harms Bill or for parents to get all worried about online filters to protect their children from disturbing images – IF the City of Toronto is going to host drug users (including those with severe untreated addictions) in residential neighbourhoods, near schools, and turn a blind eye when shelter guests inject, inhale, scream, yell, expose themselves, masturbate, assault themselves and others, etc. in real life and in full public view, for all to see including children – right in front of their schools and homes. Unfortunately, what I have just described is the REALITY. Talking about “community integration” is simply ludicrous under the current circumstances and conditions. We need protections. We need separation distancing provisions.

The “Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines (SDTG)...is intended to...enhance positive outcomes for shelter users, staff, visitors, and the surrounding community.” It sounds good on paper but that is definitely NOT what is happening at 629 Adelaide Street West. It was a poor site selection from the beginning and with each new revelation it is just getting worse. There is NO DEDICATED OUTDOOR SPACE. The building opens directly onto a busy road. There is no fencing around the property which backs onto many private homes...We have presented these and many other physical reasons why this site is dangerous for everyone concerned. And, YES, the City’s decision is contentious because it was made without a proper assessment, it violated its own SDTG, and it is basically just wrong.

On Page 8 the Report holds up a number of shelters that adhere to SDTG as “recent successes.” City Council needs to be aware that should 629 Adelaide Street West ever open it will most certainly not be held up as a success. To the contrary, it will be one of the greatest mistakes that Toronto Shelter and Support Services ever makes. St. Felix is NOT a “successful operator” in our view – they have a very bad reputation in communities where they currently operate. Their negative impact on the community when they were sited on Augusta is well documented. If they are allowed to set up operations at 629 Adelaide Street West, they will destroy Portugal Square and our community. Both shelter residents and neighbourhood residents will be at loggerheads about the lack of “appropriate outdoor space” and infringements on the property rights of neighbouring homes and businesses, public safety issues concerning children and the elderly, and crime of every nature will increase.

Does the City really want to launch a multi-million dollar disaster as a way to highlight its grand new infrastructure plan? Does anyone think this will reassure Torontonians that you care about their communities?

Stop being so stubborn and reconsider the site selection decision for 629 Adelaide Street West based on the accumulated mountain of information (reasons to cancel the site selection) that we have presented over the past 10 months.

Respectfully,

Jill Patrick
Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety