



January 11, 2024

Councillor Alejandra Bravo

Chair of the Economic and Community Development Committee

**Re: Item EC9.4 Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS):  
Real Estate Strategy and Lease Extensions**

Madame Chair and Committee Members,

The Toronto Shelter Network (TSN) represents more than 34 organizations that collectively deliver Toronto's 24-hour homelessness services, including shelters, respite centres, 24-hour women's drop-ins, transitional housing and the COVID-19 shelter hotels. We enhance the collective capacity of homelessness service providers in Toronto through knowledge sharing and learning, collaborative planning, research and advocacy, and champion access to housing with dignity for people experiencing homelessness.

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness is a network of over 100 partners across the city, united in the vision of ending homelessness – a vision they share with the City. They also serve as the City's non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum alongside Toronto Shelter and Support Services and the Housing Secretariat.

Over eleven thousand people are staying in shelters, bridging hotels and other emergency shelter programs every night. Almost 300 people are turned away from Central Intake nightly, and there are almost 500 families on the family placement wait list in Toronto. There are also 33 encampments over 135 sites. The demand is getting higher by the day and is expected to remain so in the foreseeable future.

As such, we must act quickly to urgently meet the immediate needs of people in Toronto seeking shelter.

TAEH and TSN are jointly expressing our support for Toronto Shelter and Support Services' Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS): Real Estate Strategy and Lease Extensions.

We agree that the goal of HSCIS for a long-term proactive approach to improve the stability of the shelter system by transitioning from 44% to 60% purpose-built shelter spaces, and address the unprecedented need for shelter beds, can be addressed through the report's recommendations:

- expediting the redevelopment of city owned sites and acquiring new sites for purpose-built shelters including sites from school boards, other public agencies and other orders of government.
- renewing existing leases and contracts until permanent sites are available to provide multiyear stability to shelter capacity.
- working with the Housing Secretariat on the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan to ensure a full spectrum of shelter and housing options by developing rent geared to income and supportive housing to transition people out of the shelter system or divert them from entering

We also support other measures proposed to expedite the process of developing permanent housing solutions for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, including approving pre-development costs and developing pre-qualified lists of project design and delivery suppliers. We also urge adopting recommendations to source opportunities outside of the downtown area in areas that lack homelessness services, and to build smaller shelters for better integration into local communities.

We know that the ultimate solution to homelessness is housing, and we also recognize the urgency of supporting people in the immediate term. In considering the best way to achieve both meeting immediate needs and also planning towards the future, we want to underscore the importance of designing any shelter space for future conversion into affordable and supportive housing.

It is critical that City-owned real estate be maximized, and that the shelter system be housing-focused and include a range of supports and services such as harm reduction, primary health and mental health services, as well as client-centred case management. These critical supports must be integrated into the operational design of all shelters to enhance dignity and safety, and to meet the diverse needs of all Torontonians experiencing homelessness.

While these initiatives will no doubt result in a more secure and better designed shelter system, we must continue to emphasize the funding and service disparities that currently exist, as was demonstrated in the HSCIS report of October 10, 2023, and will

potentially be further exacerbated by this strategy. Parity in funding must ensure homelessness services are consistent across the sector.

We also urge the City to collaborate with the homelessness services providers, community partners such as TAEH and TSN and people with lived and living experience of homelessness in their planning and strategy to carry out the implementation of the HSCIS.

It is the responsibility of the whole of Toronto to ensure that there are safe and adequate shelter spaces and supportive and affordable housing across the city. The recommendations in this report help to move us towards this goal.

Thank you,

Leslie Gash

Toronto Shelter Network

Savhanna Wilson

Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness