



TO: Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC)  
DATE: Tuesday May 29<sup>th</sup> 2024  
RE: EC12.13 - The City's Encampment Approach and Strategy

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the City's Encampment Approach and Strategy (EC12.13). My name is Savhanna Wilson, representing the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). We are a network of partners across Toronto dedicated to ending homelessness, serving as the non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board for the City's housing and homelessness service planning. We also co-convene the Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee with the Toronto Shelter Network (TSN), TSSS, and the Housing Secretariat. TAEH members actively participated in the City's engagement processes for this report. We support the ECDC committee adopting the recommendations of the General Manager of TSSS for a more just, compassionate, and human-rights-centered response to the urgent needs of encampment residents in Toronto.

We commend the City of Toronto for seriously considering recommendations from stakeholders and for its extensive engagement process. The commitment to hearing diverse perspectives, especially from those living in encampments, is evident. We appreciate the City's dedication to improved transparency and accountability, shown by including the engagement report and hiring an external facilitator. This demonstrates genuine effort to ensure community input shapes the encampment response strategy.

As we are all acutely aware, the City of Toronto is facing an unprecedented crisis of homelessness and housing insecurity. Emergency shelter and housing services are struggling to provide adequate support for those in need, and as the city becomes increasingly unaffordable, people have fewer options for safe and adequate indoors spaces, leading to the emergence of encampments as a community response to the safety concerns **they** share living outdoors.

The Toronto homelessness services system has been under significant pressure due to the lack of affordable housing and a shelter occupancy rate of almost 97% on any given night – the system simply cannot keep up with the demand. This underscores the urgent need for more affordable and supportive housing options – but we must recognize that long-term housing solutions will not happen overnight, and that we must collectively ensure that people's immediate needs are met while the important strategies outlined in the City's Generational Transformation and Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy are enacted.

While this report is a welcome step in the right direction, we acknowledge that there is much work to be done. We must transition from pilots towards scaled implementation of successful coordinated

service models like those at Allan Gardens and Dufferin Grove. Not only are these models more compassionate, supportive, and just, they are also a better use of City resources. For instance, the \$1.7 million cost of providing supports, referrals, and safe relocation to either housing or indoor spaces for encampment residents contrasts starkly with the \$2 million cost of forced clearings at Lamport, Bellwoods, and Alexandra parks with no guarantee of a safe landing.

People most impacted by this crisis – those who are living outdoors – face multifaceted challenges including physical and mental health, the opioid epidemic, and systemic oppression. While we recognize the concerns of businesses and residents near encampments, the safety of our communities must include the safety of those living in encampments. Neglecting the critical need for supports for unhoused individuals makes our communities unsafe for **them**. Our response must uphold shared values of community, care, and compassion – and we believe this report demonstrates moving in that direction.

Homelessness is a violation of the human right to housing, and encampments are a stark embodiment of this. Any response to homelessness must begin with a human rights approach, as endorsed by the Toronto City Council in the Housing Charter and the Housing TO Action Plan. It is crucial that the City urgently leverages the wisdom and expertise of the Housing Rights Advisory Committee to clarify the definition of the progressive right to housing at the City of Toronto, and also lays out practical, implementable tactics for ensuring that they are realized.

The City of Toronto is at a critical juncture in addressing homelessness. While this report demonstrates progress being made, there is further need to clarify the actions that will lead to its successful implementation, a plan to scale up models like Allan Gardens and Dufferin Grove, increasing affordable housing options, and addressing the root causes of poverty. Toronto can, and must, create more equitable and sustainable housing system, and TAEH and its partners are committed to supporting the work of the City and other community advocates to ensure that the Encampment Response Strategy is responsive to the needs of encampment residents.

We urge the Economic and Community Development Committee to adopt the Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments in Toronto Report. Together, we can make meaningful strides towards ending homelessness in Toronto.

Thank you,



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