



## **Introduction**

We are writing to you today from the Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre (PARC) Board Advocacy Committee, situated in Toronto, Ontario, on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, covered by Treaty 13 and the Williams Treaties.

The idea of PARC began in 1977 when a group of volunteers observed the large number of adults living in Parkdale rooming and boarding houses. Many were survivors of the psychiatric system, had little money, few family contacts and no real place to go and connect with peers. On March 17th 1980 PARC opened its doors as a pilot community mental health program.

Our passion for providing member-driven programming, employment, food security, social space and safe supportive affordable housing, has evolved and grown to meet our members' needs for over 40 years. Housing acquisition is a renewed focus for PARC and its members as housing affordability is eroding in Toronto. PARC serves unhoused individuals in our ward and relies on support from a number of funding sources, including the City of Toronto.

## **Strengthen MURA and Prioritize Protecting Existing Affordable Housing**

Affordable housing is a critical issue for the people of Toronto, and is acutely felt in Parkdale. As important as it is to increase the affordable housing stock, we must also invest in protecting the current stock of affordable housing. Nationally, for every one unit of affordable housing that is created, we are losing eleven more existing units of affordable housing (1). We applaud the City for recognizing this issue and initiating the Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition Program (MURA) intended to assist non-profit and cooperative housing providers, community land trusts and Indigenous housing providers in acquiring and protecting affordable housing units in their communities.

This solution was devised and successfully enacted in our very own Ward 4; following the pilot period and its permanent establishment, Ward 4 Councillor Gord Perks successfully lobbied for an expansion of funding in 2022 (2). PARC was fortunate to be the direct beneficiary of the pilot period and with much appreciated help from the City, we successfully acquired and protected 40 units of affordable housing at 1501 Queen St. W. (3). We know first-hand how outcomes improve for tenants who are able to remain nearby their support systems and in this case due to close proximity, tenants had improved accessibility to a range of other social services PARC provides.



We need a range of tools to solve the housing crisis in Toronto. Protecting existing affordable housing stock is a timely solution matching the urgency of need as compared with the time it takes to build new developments. We recommend expanding the program and funds accordingly, and echo Councillor Perks's request for \$10m City reserve funds to be allocated to this key housing program.

### **Support for the 2020-2030 HousingTO Action Plan**

HousingTO is a comprehensive, 10-year strategy to improve housing for all City residents, including people experiencing homelessness. We support the City's recent move to increase the number of units delivered by the plan, particularly for affordable and rent-geared-to-income units, and the expedited use of public lands. As a non-profit housing provider, we appreciate the recognition of our role and expertise in the October 17, 2023 report "Generational Transformation of Toronto's Housing System to Urgently Build More Affordable Homes," (4) which clearly articulates the need for improved, sustainable support for community non-profit and co-operative housing providers, and City development support to deliver critical housing solutions for our clients.

We will be making a submission during the federal pre-budget process whereby we plan to reiterate the requests made of the federal government by the City, particularly the need for all orders of government to fund the \$500-800 million/year needed to transform housing for a generation of Torontonians. The stipulations to the federal government in terms of loan guarantees, lending criteria for non-profits and a harmonized definition of affordability are essential for non-profit housing providers in fulfilling the critical need for shelter we see in Parkdale and across Toronto.

### **City of Toronto Shelter & Respite Services Matter to Us**

We support the proposed budget of \$82 million dollars that City staff has proposed for Shelter and Housing. New and enhanced initiatives are welcomed as Toronto experiences an acute housing affordability crisis and forces many to seek refuge in shelters and respite programs.

According to the City's Daily Shelter and Overnight Usage, on November 17th 2023, 9,250 people used the shelter system and on the shelter system flow data page, the number of people actively homeless in the past three months (August, September and October) is 10,111 (5). We welcome the 450 new dedicated shelter beds dedicated to refugee claimants.

We are aware the federal government has promised \$97m in funds (6) to help the City solve this most urgent issue, and that they have not yet delivered on their promises. We plan to reiterate the need to deliver this funding immediately in our federal pre-budget communications, and on a larger scale, review and deliver a new deal for Toronto in the federal budget. In the face of budget difficulties, we strongly advocate for the City to continue to deliver critical services for refuge, respite and shelter for the City's most vulnerable residents.



PARC has been working with members for over 30 years to provide safe and affordable housing. Many of the people we have been working with have utilized shelter and respite services and then been able to secure housing in Parkdale with support from PARC. The Homelessness Prevention Program is vital to ensure people continue to be housed.

### **Conclusion**

We thank you very much for the consideration of our recommendations. We would like to note our appreciation for the comprehensive and consultative budget process that has been conducted for the upcoming budget. The City faces major challenges and we recognize the efforts being made to fulfill the expectations and needs of Torontonians.

We welcome any opportunity to discuss our shared values and goals.

Best regards,

Shannon Hirsch  
PARC Board Secretary, Advocacy Committee Chair  
[smmhirsch@gmail.com](mailto:smmhirsch@gmail.com); [board@parc.on.ca](mailto:board@parc.on.ca)



## Sources

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