



Attn: Toronto City Councillors, Mayor Olivia Chow

Re: Motion to review process of community consultation re: shelter sites DM31.1 -  
Commencing Public Consultations for Communities Impacted by New Shelter Locations - by  
Councillor James Pasternak, seconded by Councillor Parthi Kandavel

Dear Toronto City Councillors and Mayor Olivia Chow,

We are writing you from the Toronto Underhoused and Homeless Union – we are people who are currently homeless and underhoused. There are over 210 members in our growing and active union.

We are devastated and outraged to hear that the process of city selection of viable shelter sites is up for debate. The creation of these shelters are critical to our human survival. Dozens of members of TUHU have attempted to get a shelter bed in recent months, only to be turned away, over and over, from central intake. Current shelters are busting at the seams – we need many more options created as soon as possible, across the city. There is no time to debate the details of shelter locations, as these conversations are often guided by voices of the privileged as a tool to delay progress, while the voice of those who need those shelters in order to survive is overlooked. This is an urgent matter because homelessness kills – we have several friends in our union alone who have died in the short 2 years of our growing existence.

As it seems that residents of shelters are often feared and dehumanized, we want to remind you that shelter residents are people just like homeowners are, who have not had the same luck, privilege, or opportunity as they have. We largely don't have family money or family support nets. But instead of being supported by our community, we are being judged for our circumstances.

We are people who volunteer, we care deeply about our neighbours, we work, we vote, and most importantly, *we are people!* Our lives matter too. Shelter is a basic need, and in a city experiencing a housing crisis where land is at a premium, their existence anywhere should not be up for debate. Shelters – although they are not the ultimate solution to the housing crisis – provide a place to sleep, to eat, to get out of the elements, to get connected to resources and supports. They are a necessary safety net in a city that does not have ample affordable housing available for all.

Shelters should be plentiful and spread evenly across the city, in all sorts of neighbourhoods. Concentrating shelters all in one neighbourhood usually puts a huge strain on local services and resources. But to have shelters embedded in communities across the city offers opportunities for us to get a fresh start in a new community, where we can have a safe place to sleep, volunteer, work, and get connected to resources we need in order to thrive. Shelter residents should be seen as an asset in communities, not a hindrance. We are people ready and willing to work in our communities, to volunteer, and to contribute.

It is incredibly difficult and takes many months or years for city staff to find and secure buildings for shelter locations. To then make any potential shelter properties up for debate would be a horrid waste of city resources.

In addition, there is a very large representation of people with disabilities in the homeless population. It is already incredibly difficult to find accessible indoor shelter space in the city, so the urgency to commence building all of these shelters and more is even more pertinent to the survival of those of us with disabilities.

A Councillors role in community is not to fear monger, but to build bridges and to educate. Instead of fanning the flames of segregation, we urge all city councillors to help their constituents see the opportunities for diversity in their

neighbourhoods – and encourage sharing the wealth of safe and thriving communities especially with those who need it most. Shelter residents are contributors to their communities, and must be seen as such.

We call on your support to vote against commencing public consultations for individual shelter sites. We do not have time to waste, for years on end, deliberating on the location of safe shelter space. This is a bustling metropolis of a city, and none of us have any right to choose our neighbours. Our lives are depending on the forward motion of these shelters. And our humanity or worthiness is not up for debate.

Sincerely,

The Toronto Underhoused and Homeless Union