

From: David Walsh Date: July 4, 2025

To: Economic and Community Development Committee - ecdc@toronto.ca

Subject: Comments for ECDC Meeting 22 on July 9, 2025

To the City Clerk: re ECDC - Agenda Item 2025.EC22.3

Please add my presentation to the agenda for Meeting 22 on July 9, 2025

- on item Shelter System Pressures and Responses.

I would like to address the ECDC Committee

I understand that my comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.

David Walsh – david@dwalsh.ca

speaking for ‘Crisis in Our City Network

David Walsh is president of St Joseph Community Ventures - a non-profit corporation that supports innovative community projects. It is one of four non-profits that are partners in Carrot Common on Danforth Ave. See www.carrotcommon.com.

Presentation

Thank you for the opportunity to address the ECDC Committee on July 9, 2025.

I would like to emphasize three points in my presentation:

1. The need to provide separate options for refugees and individuals without addiction problems. They have different needs and do not require the same level of support. Locating them elsewhere will free up spaces in existing shelters.
2. Actions to support micro homes and many tiny home communities as interim steps until more RGI housing can be built. Residents from these communities can transition to housing when available.
3. The need to engage more with individuals and organizations from the community who want to help the City address the crisis of homelessness.
Refugees have been taking about 50% of current shelter spaces. The City is issuing proposal calls for other shelters, but any new shelter will take years to build. Other municipalities are seeing micro homes as an interim solution, and Toronto needs to do likewise. These alternatives offer different supports and less structure than City shelters.

Many refugees can function well on their own with basic supports, and they don't need to be in highly supervised shelters. Refugees should be located in areas that have access to public resources.

Has the City considered the possibility of purchasing or leasing blocks of small condos. Given the state of the condo market, there could be opportunities to secure blocks of units for refugees in new buildings – managed by non-profits or co-ops.

This would certainly be a good financial option for the city considering that the city is paying \$6,000 per month for about 200 hotel rooms each month.

I worked with one refugee group on a suitable building of 20,000 sq.ft. at the n/e corner of Sherbourne & Gerrard - #311 Sherbourne. We met with Councillor Moise who was open to the idea, but there was concern that it might not meet the City's distance restriction of being too close to other non-profits. This is a missed opportunity. The City should allow for flexibility on the 'distance rule' and other restrictions for such properties. That building is still available for a 10 year lease, and this is an example of how the City is missing out on viable options for housing for refugees. There are other similar buildings downtown available as well.

I have served as a Director of Fred Victor, Homes First Society and several other non-profits. John VanNostrand and I were Directors of the first Homes First building at Jarvis & Shuter, and we were both involved in securing housing units for Tent City back in the early 1980's.

Toronto Star columnist Matt Elliott has pointed out that the TTC has over 30 large parking lots and only 1/3 of them are well used. Some of them would be good sites for micro home projects? The City needs to support creative and effective interim shelter initiatives.

I am involved with a network of homeless advocates and we have written several letters to Mayor Chow over the past two years - offering ideas and a willingness to help, but we have not had any reply beyond form letters. Attached is a copy of one of our letters.

If one thing is clear from the experience of other cities, it is the need to involve members of the community who want to help,

It is a puzzle why Toronto has not welcomed contributions from the community when many other municipalities have engaged with citizens and supported their initiatives – including Kitchener, Peterborough, St Thomas and Prince Edward County. And in Fredericton NB, a city with a population of 72,000, a businessman recently completed a project with 99 tiny homes and a resource center. Another example is the project of 3 homes at Broadview & Danforth where a house was sitting empty, and a group of us inquired with Loblaw Corp. They rented us that house and two more houses beside it. These 3 houses have been operating now for over 15 years and provide shelter for 26 men who have completed addiction treatment.

A Toronto Star article outlined the City's covid experience with hotels and Gord Tanner stated "It was certainly a learning point for us – how people value their own space". This is a strong feature of the micro home model, so this model needs to be implemented on a large scale until RGI rental units are available. Sincerely

David Walsh
St Joseph Community Ventures

John McKnight has been an inspiration to many of us. He speaks of a movement being born at the local level that is energized by the power of caring. He has played a role in fostering initiatives such as the “Joshua Committee” and “Project Friendship” to influence people who were once isolated in institutions to become part of everyday life in a community. He has been featured on the CBC IDEAS Program *in 2015 – ‘Community and its Counterfeits’*.

“As we think about our community life, we recognize that something has happened to many of us as institutions have grown in power: We have become too impotent to be called real citizens and too disconnected to be effective members of community. There is a mistaken notion that our society has a problem in terms of effective human services. Our essential problem is weak communities. While we have reached the limits of institutional problem-solving, we are only at the beginning of exploring the possibility of a new vision for community. It is a vision of regeneration. It is a vision of re-associating the exiled. It is a vision of freeing ourselves from service and adversarial relationships with institutions. It is a vision of centering our lives in community.”

Letter to Mayor Olivia Chow -- May 3, 2024

From: Crisis in Our City <crisisinourcity@gmail.com>

Sent: May 3, 2024 12:16 PM

To: mayor_chow@toronto.ca

Subject: Letter to Mayor Chow re Shelter Crisis

Dear Mayor Chow,

As we move into summer, we note that the City has closed the five warming centers and we are concerned for those who will not find shelter in our overcrowded system. It's distressing to see that the encampments are often the only option for many in our wealthy city. With the continuous influx of newcomers adding pressure to our taxed shelter system, we need to increase our shelter bed capacity year round. We know that heat alerts are on the rise and, with few options, spaces like hospitals are becoming over-crowded.

We would like you to take action on the following:

empty and under-utilized spaces:

Lease empty or under-utilized indoor spaces that could be converted to low barrier 24-hour respite centers, managed by the City or by non-profit housing groups with funding support from the City.

refugee specific spaces:

There is a vital and urgent need for refugee specific, culturally appropriate shelter services.

community partnerships:

We urge the city to consider the role of non-profit organizations, such as Matthew House, FCJ, Christie Refugee Welcome Centre, and Romero House that can provide wrap-around supports for newcomers, particularly refugees; and they can provide both housing and supports at a much reduced cost from the current hotel arrangements.

Our request is for the City to support these options because we need to respond now, as we wait for affordable housing.

Sincerely,

Crisis in Our City Network

Quaker Committee for Refugees

Salvadoran Canadian Association

COMPASS Refugee Centre

Christie Refugee Welcome Centre

Matthew House

Centre for Refugee Children

FCJ Refugee Centre

Quaker Committee for Refugees

FutureWatch

Rwandan Canadian Healing Centre

Delta Family Resource Centre

My Brother's Keeper

Toronto Urban Hub-Mission Canada

Ugandan Muslim Association

Contagious Hope Project

Ethiopian Association

Ugandan Muslim Association

