

From: [Lee Soda](#)
To: [Economic and Community Development](#)
Subject: [External Sender] My comments for 2025.EC22.3 on July 9, 2025 Economic and Community Development Committee
Date: July 8, 2025 2:11:06 PM

To the City Clerk:

Please add my comments to the agenda for the July 9, 2025 Economic and Community Development Committee meeting on item 2025.EC22.3, Highlights of the 2024 Street Needs Assessment and advancing the City's Shelter Infrastructure

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.

Comments:

From: Lee Soda, Executive Director Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA)

Date: July 8th, 2025

Dear Chair Councillor Bravo and Members of the Committee,

I am writing today in support of the **Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) and the urgent development of new, purpose-built shelter spaces across Toronto** recognizing that vocal opposition persists. As Executive Director of a large multi-service social service Agency in Scarborough (Agincourt Community Services Association ACSA) serving those experiencing homelessness for over 25 years, a community leader and resident of Ward 20, I believe I have a unique perspective of the situation. While community concerns should never be dismissed, we must distinguish valid questions from unfounded fear. Much of the resistance is rooted in stigma, not fact. Homelessness is no longer a downtown Toronto issue, it is an issue that persists throughout all corners of our city and must be dealt with in a manner that is data informed, and results driven.

People experiencing homelessness are **already members of our communities**. They are not dangerous outsiders, they are seniors on fixed incomes, youth escaping unstable homes, people with mental health challenges, and workers who can no longer afford rising rents. These are our neighbours in need, not threats to avoid.

Let's clarify the facts:

- **Shelters do not increase crime.** Professionally managed shelters increase safety, offering secure spaces for people who would otherwise be in public spaces without support. It is incumbent on the city to ensure that adequate resources are available to ensure shelters are successfully integrated into all neighbourhoods and communities.
- **Property values are not significantly impacted.** Studies show no consistent link between shelters and declining real estate values.

Shelter residents are not transient or dangerous. They are people working toward better futures. The fear and misrepresentation of people living in shelters comes from lack of understanding of the systemic issues contributing to this very real issue in the city.

Toronto's shelters are regulated spaces. They are **professionally operated and staffed** by trained teams, this includes caseworkers, housing navigators, mental health professionals, and support staff, who are trained to help clients move toward stability, self-sufficiency, and permanent housing.

Shelters are part of a broader system that includes long-term housing, employment supports, and healthcare. They are **transitional stepping stones**, they are not final destinations, and collaborative actions must be taken to ensure that shelter users are supported with a holistic approach to ensure a shelter stay is short in duration and actionable steps and guidance are part of the road to permanent housing.

To make this work, **the city must maintain an open, inclusive dialogue** with communities. Residents have a right to be informed and involved, and the City has a duty to:

- Proactively address concerns when they arise.
- Co-create the new spaces with residents and shelter users alike
- Communicate clearly about shelter operations.
- Be transparent and accountable in management.
- And foster **community collaboration** instead of division.

This is not about imposing change from above. It's about **building mutual trust** and reinforcing the idea that safe neighbourhoods include, not exclude, those who are most vulnerable.

The proposed 1,600 new shelter spaces are not just timely, they are essential. These must be developed in collaboration with people with lived and living experience, designed with flexibility for future conversion to permanent housing, and operated with integrated supports including harm reduction, mental health care, and client-centred case management.

I've been working and living in Scarborough for over 30 years, I'm very aware of the evolving landscape of our suburbs over the years. I'm also aware of the strength, pride, and diversity of our suburban communities. Residents in our communities want their voices heard and their concerns addressed. In fact, a very large part of our work at ACSA Community Services is to increase civic engagement and ensure diverse voices are invited to the table for decision making.

We **don't get to choose our neighbours**. But we do get to choose what kind of neighbours we will be. I want my Toronto, our Toronto to be known for the way it cares for its people, all its people.

Thank you for your time, and for your ongoing leadership in making Toronto a city where everyone can belong.

Sincerely,

Lee Soda

