

Submission to the Economic and Community Development Committee
Re: Expanding Emergency Shelter Infrastructure in Toronto EC22.3

From: Elin Goulden, Social Justice & Advocacy Consultant, Diocese of Toronto

Date: July 8, 2025

Dear Chair Councillor Bravo and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you in my capacity as Social Justice & Advocacy Consultant with the Anglican Diocese of Toronto in strong support of Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) and the urgent development of new, purpose-built shelter spaces across Toronto.

Homelessness is a growing crisis in our city. The recently released 2024 Street Needs Assessment found that the number of people experiencing homelessness in October 2024 had more than doubled since April 2021, with more than 15,400 people in need of basic shelter. With the shelter system operating at capacity – indeed, turning hundreds of people away every night – the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness has more than doubled since 2021. Nor are homeless people confined to the downtown core. Our Anglican parishes, which are often among the first places where people seek support, have seen this explosion of housing need in every part of the city.

The 2024 Street Needs Assessment notes that insufficient income and a lack of affordable housing is the leading cause of homelessness. As rents climb and rental properties are redeveloped, more and more people are finding it impossible to find housing they can afford, and are at risk of becoming homeless. This can happen anywhere. Shelter services should thus be available to meet these needs in every part of the city.

Homelessness traps people in a battle for survival. Unsheltered homelessness, especially, puts people at risk of physical and mental health challenges, violence, and criminalization. A safe and secure shelter offers the first step toward physical recovery, mental health stabilization, reconnecting with family, and accessing income support or employment. It's also where people can finally access basic health care, harm reduction services, and trauma-informed supports without fear of displacement or criminalization. And yet, growing numbers of our neighbours are left without access to these most basic needs.

The ripple effects of housing reach far beyond the individual. When people are housed, communities become stronger. Hospitals see fewer emergency visits. Streets become safer. Families are reunited. Children are able to thrive in school. Entire neighbourhoods become more vibrant, stable, and connected.

There are, sadly, loud voices in neighbourhoods across the city who resist offering even basic shelter and services to those in need, who may admit that people need shelter, but always “somewhere else.” This is the thinking that leads to greater disparity, to increased delay in the face of a growing human crisis. Contrary to what these voices claim, providing shelter and housing supports is not a burden on a city nor on neighbourhoods, but the infrastructure of care that makes everything else possible.

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.

As outlined in previous submissions from community agencies, this moment calls for:

- Purpose-built, smaller shelters that are community-integrated and dignity-focused
- An equitable distribution of shelter services across all wards
- A long-term view that links emergency response with the broader HousingTO 2020–2030 Action Plan
- Sector-wide funding parity and multi-year operational stability

Toronto must also remain open to creative, interim solutions such as micro-shelters and modular housing, particularly as we face urgent encampment displacement. Barriers such as zoning and land access are real, but so is the urgency to act. We encourage this committee and Toronto City Council to work with organizations such as Two Steps Home to create these flexible options that can be rapidly deployed to shelter people moving out of encampments into more permanent housing.

Housing is a human right. It is also a catalyst – for community care, for public health, and new possibilities for both individuals and neighbourhoods.

Please move forward swiftly with the implementation of new shelter sites and long-term housing solutions. The time to act is now.

Yours faithfully,

Elin Goulden

Social Justice & Advocacy Consultant, Anglican Diocese of Toronto