



Wednesday, July 9, 2025

attn: Economic & Community Development Committee Members
Councillors Bravo, Carroll, Kandavel, Malik, Mantas, Moise
cc: Toronto City Council; Office of the Mayor

re: EC22.3 - Highlights of the 2024 Street Needs Assessment and advancing the City's Shelter Infrastructure

Dear Economic & Community Development Committee Members,

The recently released [Street Needs Assessment Report](#) highlights the state of the crisis that unhoused people and advocates have been sounding the alarm on for years. We are in a housing emergency. The data shows that in just three years, double the number of people have become unhoused, with the report indicating that 15,418 people were unhoused in October 2024. This is an unprecedented crisis. The number of people impacted by the fact that housing isn't affordable is a devastating reality, and immediate action must be taken.

It is unconscionable that in this moment, [city councillors are debating whether they should be able to stop new shelters from being built](#) in their ward under the guise of "community consultations" when they should instead be demanding immediate action in light of this report that outlines the unprecedented scale of suffering and death that the housing crisis entails. These dehumanizing debates take place on stolen land, where Indigenous community members are disproportionately unhoused due to historical and ongoing colonial violence. It is not up for debate that people have the right to safe shelter. As elected representatives of all residents, including unhoused people in this city, it is your responsibility to ensure this right is protected and not undermined, especially amidst a housing emergency.

Rather than ensure that people survive intersecting emergency situations, have access to meeting their basic needs or addressing the root causes of the housing emergency including the financialization and commodification of housing, skyrocketing rents and stagnant social assistance rates, many councillors continue to espouse violent and xenophobic rhetoric blaming refugees for the shelter emergency and debate people's right to survival. This is a continuation of the organized abandonment of poor, unhoused, disabled and racialized people that is legislated and normalized through policy decisions and prevents the operations of safe, accessible and life-affirming shelters and services. Recent heat waves highlight the severe inadequacy of the current system.

The impacts of homelessness disproportionately affect communities that have been violently displaced from their own Indigenous homelands, including First Nations people here on Turtle Island, and Black people who were forcibly brought to these lands through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. State complicity in imperial and colonial violence continues to displace people from their lands, in so-called Canada, and around the globe. The Street Needs Assessment Report indicates that 31% of people living outside are Indigenous, while Indigenous people make up only 3% of the general population in Toronto. At least 58% of unhoused people identified as Black, where Black people make up 10% of Toronto's population. The report identifies this is rooted in anti-Black racism and discrimination while later reinforcing a racist and xenophobic framing that scapegoats refugees for a



system in a decades-long crisis. The City must meaningfully engage with and adopt the recommendations from the [Office of the Ombudsman report: An Investigation into the City's Decision to Stop Allowing Refugee Claimants into Base Shelter System Beds](#).

Meaningful consultation is needed with physically disabled unhoused people on the intersections of disability and homelessness. The recent Street Needs Assessment indicated that 41% of people staying outside are on ODSP, up from 34% in 2021, and people with physical mobility issues are represented in 35% of people living outside and 19% of people in the shelter system. Disabled people are disproportionately impacted by the housing emergency while simultaneously navigating the disabling contexts of poverty, incarceration, environment, violence, and barriers to healthcare access.¹ The inaccessibility of many shelters, respites, and rent-geared-to income or supportive housing units means disabled people are constantly faced with barriers to surviving inhumane conditions and to finding stable housing.² Despite evidence that a growing number of disabled people are becoming unhoused, people with disabilities are not considered a “priority group” within the City’s [Coordinated Access](#) approach to housing and supports, an example of the ongoing erasure and disregard for disabled unhoused people within these systems.

The City must stop amplifying discriminatory and dehumanizing rhetoric that further marginalizes unhoused people in this city. In reality, people who are unsheltered and unhoused face a higher risk of violence, illness, injury and death. Their safety matters and people deserve access to the means of survival. Ultimately, this means housing for all and until this happens there must be safe options for unhoused people to survive without fear of harassment, criminalization, injury and death.

In this increasingly hostile environment towards unhoused, poor and marginalized people, while “neighbours” across the city organize against services that “threaten” their comfort and where we see violent legislation from the provincial government under the guise of “safety,” City Council must protect measures that ensure people have access to a safe indoor space, and implement measures that promote housing security. The Street Needs Assessment Report states, “A coordinated multi-sectoral and intergovernmental approach across different service systems continues to be needed to address homelessness.” This Committee must take this recommendation seriously and instruct City Council to initiate an emergency task force including all levels of government, frontline workers and people with lived experience of being unhoused to meaningfully address this emergency. People deserve housing; the City government must act to ensure this is the case. These are matters of life and death.

We encourage you to read the [Dignity and Housing for All Report](#), coauthored by the Toronto Underhoused & Homeless Union and Shelter & Housing Justice Network for a fulsome list of interventions and demands and will be paying attention to your actions on this matter.

Signed,
Shelter & Housing Justice Network
[Instagram](#) || [Twitter](#) || [Facebook](#) || [Email](#)

¹ Chin, Natalie M., Centering Disability Justice (November 9, 2021). 71 Syracuse Law Review 683 (2021), Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3959992>

² Luke Reid (March 31, 2022). [Issues for Persons with Disabilities: Security of Tenure in Canada](#). Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, Canadian Human Rights Commission.