

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

9 July 2025

Dear Councillor Bravo and Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

I write to you as a Toronto Resident and as the Executive Director of Disability Justice Network of Ontario regarding the 2024 Street Needs Assessment and Toronto's upcoming work to advance the City's Shelter Infrastructure.

As is our longstanding position, emergency shelters are not housing and there must be a continued focus from the City to ensure that building *actually* affordable, *actually* accessible housing is the end goal of our work. That said, members of disabled communities in Toronto need action now—therefore, we need to ensure that shelter spaces reflect the needs of these same communities.

One way the City can support this is to implement a variant of the Accessible Housing Working Group (AHWG)'s [Guidelines on Increasing the City's Supply of Accessible Affordable Housing](#) in shelter settings as well. We say a variant of these guidelines as they must be developed further through direct and clear community leadership by unhoused disabled people—as there can be “nothing about us, without us”. But, still, these fresh housing guidelines would be a good starting point to build from—particularly if many of these spaces could be transitioned to become permanent housing.

Further, such spaces must operate with integrated support around harm reduction, low barriers/regulations to become residents, and engage meaningfully with offering culturally appropriate access and living space. Restrictive, culturally inappropriate, isolated, and inaccessible shelters fail us—only harming both disabled individuals and the whole community.

It is also our position that disabled people need to thrive in our communities wherever we are. As such, shelter spaces need to be integrated into communities across the city. Disabled people cannot be shuffled to the margins and away from community connections at any time, let alone when we most need support. Ableist landowning residents and other neighbours simply should not have the last word on this issue—our disabled, unhoused neighbours also deserve to be part of and remain in our communities.

Relatedly, we also know that the population of unhoused disabled people on social assistance programs alone is skyrocketing. We would hope that you would take this moment to also advance political pressure on the Province to massively increase the housing allowance portion of our social assistance systems and further the demand for [full rent control](#).

To conclude, we know that the City of Toronto has the tools, resources, and ample voices of lived experience from our disabled communities to make the right choices here. We hope that you will center those most impacted and, from this point forward, allow unhoused, disabled Torontonians to lead towards a better housing and emergency shelter system. Any future plans for this system must be led by and for unhoused abled and disabled people from city strategic plans to implementation an governance once these spaces are operating.

With sincerest respect,



Brad Evoy

Executive Director, Disability Justice Network of Ontario

P: 289-780-3566 (DJNO) | E: brad@djno.ca | W: www.djno.ca



info@djno.ca | djno.ca | @djnontario

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