

September 15, 2025

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee  
**From:** Diane Chester, Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety  
**Re:** 2025.EC23.6

‘Ignorance is the deliberate cultivation of ignorance.’ – George Orwell. This quote underscores how governments can intentionally keep citizens uninformed to maintain control and avoid accountability. The City of Toronto’s handling of its nearly one-billion-dollar homelessness program reflects this very concern: by withholding detailed information about funding allocation, decision-making processes, and measurable outcomes, the city is deliberately preventing residents from fully understanding how public resources are being spent, fostering confusion, eroding trust, and limiting public scrutiny.

### **Toronto’s Homelessness Services: Gaps in Transparency and Accountability**

Toronto Shelter & Support Services spends nearly **\$1 billion annually** in an effort to address homelessness. Yet, the City’s *2025 Homelessness Services Resource Inventory* reveals how little the public truly understands about the full costs, impacts, and effectiveness of these programs.

The inventory, while cataloguing service types, capacities, and divisions, is **far from comprehensive**. It omits critical considerations such as:

- **Neighbourhood impacts** and associated social costs
- **City response services** (police, fire, paramedics, 311, bylaw enforcement)
- **Performance benchmarks** tied to:
  - Financial and operational efficiency
  - Housing outcomes and shelter utilization
  - Supportive services (case management, health care, addiction supports)
  - Safety, quality of care, and long-term outcomes

Without these measures, the City cannot provide a full picture of system performance—or ensure that billions of taxpayer dollars are being invested effectively.

### **Neighbourhood Impacts: An Overlooked Cost**

High concentrations of facilities and drop-in centres in specific areas, such as **Queen and Bathurst Streets**, create measurable strain on public safety and municipal services. Between 2018 and 2023, there were **6,349 calls to Toronto Police within 200 metres of this intersection**. These included unwanted guests, overdoses, assaults, emotionally distressed individuals, disputes, and ambulance responses.

Neighbourhood residents and businesses feel these impacts daily. Residents alter walking routes, avoid public spaces, and reduce interactions with neighbours—weakening social cohesion. Businesses experience declining foot traffic and increased security costs. Over time, these pressures erode trust, fuel complaints and legal challenges, and contribute to “hollowed out” neighbourhoods.

### **Missing System-Wide Supports**

The inventory also excludes critical **City divisions and community supports** involved in homelessness response, such as:

- Property acquisition and zoning departments
- Legal and compliance divisions
- Public space and complaint response teams
- Neighbourhood-based supports (churches, food banks, meal programs, and drop-in centres)

By omitting these contributors, the City obscures the scale and complexity of its homelessness response and **leaves invisible the full resources sustaining the current system.**

### **Missing City Divisions in the Homelessness Services Inventory**

The City's *Homelessness Services Resource Inventory* also fails to capture the wide range of **divisions that directly and indirectly support Toronto's homelessness response.** Their exclusion hides the true scale of resources, costs, and risks involved.

Key missing contributors include:

- **Property & Legal Functions** – Real Estate Services, City Legal, Toronto Building, and City Planning manage land use, zoning, permits, and legal compliance for shelters and supportive housing.
- **Operations & Oversight** – MLS (by-law enforcement), City Manager's Office (coordination), SDFA (social planning), Housing Secretariat (affordable housing), and Toronto Ombudsman (accountability).
- **Community Supports** – TESS (income and employment services), Toronto Public Library (informal frontline support), TTC (de facto shelter space), and 311 Toronto (resident complaints and service requests).

By omitting these roles, the inventory underrepresents the **true scope of interdivisional effort** and fails to show how homelessness impacts multiple systems across the City of Toronto. A comprehensive accounting is needed to ensure transparency, accountability, and effective policymaking.

### **Recommendations & Next Steps**

To ensure accountability, transparency, and neighbourhood well-being, the City of Toronto should:

1. **Establish Public Performance Benchmarks**
  - Track key indicators such as shelter utilization, housing outcomes, recidivism, service costs, client well-being, etc.
  - Publish quarterly and annual performance dashboards for public review.
2. **Conduct and Publicly Report Neighbourhood Impact Assessments**
  - Measure the effects of service concentrations on public safety, residents, public space, and local businesses.
  - Implement real geographic balance in service placement to reduce overburdened neighbourhoods.
3. **Enhance Financial Transparency**
  - Publicly disclose full all program costs, including indirect expenses such as policing, paramedic services, and bylaw enforcement, legal services, real estate services, etc.
4. **Integrate and Publicly Report Cross-Divisional/other Supports and Costs**
  - Include the roles of zoning, property, legal, and other divisions.
  - Incorporate the contributions of non-profit and community partners (faith-based organizations, food banks, volunteer networks).
5. **Prioritize Systemic Improvements**
  - Stop temporary sheltering and work actively and aggressively toward long-term housing solutions.
  - Ensure evidence-based decision-making informs policy, funding allocations, and program design.

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