



July 14, 2025

Attn: Councillor Gord Perks (Chair) and Members of Planning and Housing Committee

**Re: Item PH23.3 - Advancing Six Sites for the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) - City-Initiated Official Plan Amendment and Six Zoning By-law Amendments - Decision Report - Approval**

Dear Chair Perks and Members of Planning and Housing Committee,

Good afternoon, councillors my name is Sébastien, and I'm here today as a member of the Toronto Underhoused and Homeless Union — and also as someone with direct, lived experience of homelessness in this city for five long years.

Please pass the proposed amendments - we need these 6 new shelters.

I've only recently been housed, but I'm paying full market rent while surviving on ODSP. That means my entire cheque goes straight to rent. Every month is survival mode.

Throughout my time being unhoused, I never stayed in a shelter — not because I didn't try, but because the system had no availability. I've spent hours and days calling Central Intake. In January, I made 107 calls in 7 days. Not one bed. I eventually gave up. Although Open Data guidelines recommend daily follow-ups for those seeking shelter, I was informed by SMIS operators that callers are often instructed to call back every hour. This not only made it harder to get help but shows how far the system's actual practice is from the policies meant to support people like me.

When the shelters failed me, I turned to the only place I could find that felt somewhat safe — Pearson Airport. During the winter, it was warm, there were bathrooms, and the police presence made it feel like I could actually sleep without fear. That was my safest option. A public airport.

This month, I called Central Intake again on Monday, July 7th, to see if conditions had improved. The wait time was 92 minutes—unacceptably long, especially during July, which the city's data shows as the quietest month for shelter demand. If this is the best case, what happens in colder months?

I'm not here to point fingers at shelter staff or frontline workers — many of them are doing their best. But this system is not working. People are being left outside, in crisis, because the infrastructure just isn't there.

Fix Central Intake. Add a callback system for 7 days so that people don't have to call hundreds of times to maybe get a bed. If space opens up, call them back. This is basic technology and basic dignity.

Include an 'Average Wait Time' data table in Toronto's Open Data portal to provide public visibility into service delays.

Involve people with lived experience in the planning and evaluation of housing and shelter services. We know what's working, and more importantly, what isn't.

We need real investment in deeply affordable housing. We need shelter systems that respond to people when they need help — not after 107 calls. And most of all, we need you — the decision makers — to see us not as statistics, but as neighbors.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sébastien Desormiers

