



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,

My name is Saleh Sheihk, and I live in Regent Park, and I am executive member of the Toronto Underhoused and Homeless Union. Like many newcomers, I entered the shelter system and experienced homelessness here in the City of Toronto.

Now that I am housed after spending nearly two years in the shelter system—not because the system is fixed, but because I managed to find a way through it with the support of others—I have become a devoted advocate.

We must act like this is the emergency that it is and pass the amendments without delay.

I remember being here when we were advocating for reimbursement for a Black-led group supporting refugees. On that very same day, some people stood here arguing to stop a respite centre from opening in their neighbourhood simply because they didn't like how it looked from their windows.

That moment took me back to when refugees were forced to sleep on sidewalks outside shelters, because some City staff said it was a federal responsibility. "Not in my city," they said. And so, it was left to community organizations to step up when the system failed.

In 2022, the City Council passed a motion affirming that City staff have the authority to secure land wherever it is available to build new shelters and address the housing crisis. That was a necessary and bold step—one rooted in equity and urgency.

But now, that commitment is being challenged. Proposals to revisit or stall the implementation of that decision signal a dangerous step backward. We are losing hard-won ground.

We need the City to **uphold its previous Council decision**, not just as a matter of policy, but as a matter of human rights. The City of Toronto has both the **legal authority** and the **responsibility**, under its **Housing Charter** and through its commitments in the **National Housing Strategy Act**, to treat housing as a human right and take all reasonable actions to prevent and end homelessness.

Why is it that people who are homeless are always the ones who must fight for their right to exist?

Homelessness is rising. Housing is increasingly out of reach for so many. And I'm here to remind you who this affects. It affects me. It affects your neighbours. It affects thousands of people who don't have the privilege of speaking here today.

Even my own housing will be at risk in a couple of years if my Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) is not renewed. It took me a long time to find a unit. What would happen to me if I lost it?

When laws and policies are shaped by power and money, they always come at the cost of those with the least. They remind us, again and again, that some lives are valued less than others. We need policies rooted in justice and human dignity, not shaped by privilege or fear.

I am one of the faces of those left behind.

We must invest in deeply affordable housing. We must act like this is the emergency that it is—because real lives, including mine, depend on it. This is not just a homelessness issue. **This is everyone's issue.**

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Saleh Sheihk

