

**Weston King Neighbourhood Centre**  
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Monday, July 14, 2025

**To:**  
Planning and Housing Committee  
City Clerk's Office  
Toronto City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

**RE: Support for Proposed Shelter in York Centre (Ward 6), Keele and Wilson site**

Dear Chair and Members of the Planning and Housing Committee,

The Weston King Neighbourhood Centre is a drop-in centre made up of frontline workers supporting the unhoused and low-income community members in Weston, Mount Dennis and the surrounding neighbourhoods. We are writing to express our **strong support** for the proposed shelter in York Centre, at the Keele and Wilson intersection. We are also **strongly opposed** to the inflammatory language and rhetoric being used by Roman Baber, Member of Parliament, York Centre. As an organization deeply embedded in this community, we see the urgent need for more shelter capacity every day—and we also see the profound harm caused by misinformation and stigma.

We are especially concerned by public opposition to this project, including statements from Mr. Baber, which wrongly characterize people experiencing homelessness as dangerous or rabid drug users. These portrayals are inaccurate, discriminatory, and harmful. His portrayal of people who use drugs in this way is inhumane. Mr. Baber is expressing that since some people experiencing homelessness use drugs, they do not deserve shelter—**EVERYONE** deserves shelter. Mr. Baber's letter and attempts to rally public outrage from privileged community members, ignores the lived experiences of thousands of Toronto residents who are struggling—often silently—with poverty, displacement, and systemic inequities.

Mr. Baber cites a murder at the Toronto Plaza Hotel on Sunday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025. Despite being open as a shelter for nine years, he is only able to point to this one occurrence—from my research, in the nine years, this was the only murder. While still tragic, I must add, the victim was inside the shelter, not someone just walking by. This shelter does not pose a threat to public safety; on the contrary, it will contribute to the well-being of the community, allowing the most marginalized members of our communities to connect with community workers, social workers, healthcare, and other harm reduction services that will help support happy and healthy lives. Furthermore, contrary to harmful stereotypes, people experiencing homelessness are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. Many live with trauma, chronic illness, or disabilities and are seeking safety, stability, and a chance to rebuild their lives. The belief that shelters "attract crime" is not supported by evidence. What shelters do attract is relief for people in desperate need.

## **The Reality of Homelessness in Toronto**

According to the City of Toronto's **2024 Street Needs Assessment**, as of October 23, 2024:

- 15,418 people were experiencing homelessness, including 1,615 sleeping outdoors and 12,304 in the shelter system.
- Refugee claimants made up 6,350 of those in shelters.
- Insufficient income is the leading cause, with 81% stating that rent-geared-to-income housing would help them exit homelessness.
- 22% became homeless after being evicted.
- Equity-deserving groups—including Indigenous, Black, racialized, 2SLGBTQ+ people, youth, women, and people with disabilities—remain overrepresented in this crisis.

## **The Reality of Homelessness in Toronto's North West**

The northwest region of Toronto remains significantly underserved in terms of homelessness services, including both drop-in centres and emergency shelters. While areas like Downtown Toronto and Scarborough have comparatively robust infrastructure, there are only three shelters located north of Highway 401 and west of Yonge Street. This geographic disparity means that residents in the northwest who lose their housing—or who are already experiencing homelessness—are often forced to leave their communities in order to access shelter.

This displacement has serious consequences. It disrupts social networks, community ties, and access to local supports such as schools, health care, and community agencies. It also increases the number of people living on the streets or in encampments in the area, simply because many are unwilling or unable to travel far from the neighbourhoods they know and trust. People in northwest Toronto are left with two difficult choices: either leave the community they've known for years to seek shelter in an unfamiliar part of the city, or remain in the area they know, but without access to safe, indoor space.

When people can access shelter close to their community, their chances of achieving housing stability improve significantly. Familiar surroundings and proximity to existing supports are critical factors in successful transitions out of homelessness. Expanding shelter capacity in the northwest is not only a matter of fairness—it's a strategic investment in more effective, compassionate, and localized service delivery.

## **A Shelter Strategy Rooted in Evidence**

The proposed site is part of the City's **Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS)**, which aims to:

- Create 1,600 permanent shelter beds across 20 new, smaller, purpose-built, community-integrated sites between 2024 and 2033;

- Replace 1,280 aging hotel-based shelter beds and add 320 new beds to support system growth;
- Ensure at least 20% of sites are Indigenous-led, with built-in pathways to permanent housing;
- Deliver a \$674.5 million infrastructure strategy, of which only \$258 million is funded to date, with the City actively advocating for federal support. Toronto

As of 2024, six sites have been secured, and a seventh was added in 2025. These shelters are designed for dignity and safety, with 50–80 beds per site, offering transitional supports like housing case management and wraparound health services. This strategy is not about warehousing people—it is about responding to a humanitarian crisis with dignity, structure, and evidence-based planning. Furthermore, research consistently shows that access to housing and support services reduces crime, drug use, and community instability, addressing precisely the issues Mr. Baber is concerned about.

## **The Cost of Inaction**

In 2025, over 300 people are turned away from shelters every night due to a lack of capacity. Climate crises have intensified, putting unsheltered people at serious risk of dehydration, frostbite, and death. As of March 2025, the City recorded 283 encampments, not including those in alleys, transit terminals, or hidden spaces.

While micro-shelters and encampments may offer temporary relief, they cannot provide long-term safety or stability. The City's own research shows that purpose-built shelters are far more effective, scalable, and adaptable—including for future conversion into permanent housing.

In 2024 alone, 4,344 people moved into permanent housing, many with support from COHB and shelter-based outreach programs. This shows what's possible when people have access to coordinated, community-based services like the proposed shelter.

## **Our Call to Action**

Toronto is in the midst of a housing and shelter crisis. We urge the City Council to move forward with this site and others like it—although it is important to listen to all sides and consider dissenting opinions, we need to ensure only factual and evidence-based input informs these decisions. The need is urgent and the evidence is clear.

Instead of blocking life-saving infrastructure based on fear or misinformation, we call on all levels of government and the public to stand with those most in need. As a city, we must respond not with fear—but with compassion, strategy, and resolve.

Thank you for your commitment to housing justice and for considering this submission.

Sincerely,



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Gamin Teague  
Drop-in Manager



Monica Pierce  
Drop-in Coordinator

