

Submission to the Planning and Housing Committee

July 15, 2025

Re: 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 members of the Planning and Housing Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Maytree to express my support for amendments to the Official Plan and zoning by-laws that are needed to advance six shelters sites in the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS).

These efforts come at a time when homelessness is on the rise. The 2024 Street Needs Assessment found that over 15,400 people experienced homelessness in Toronto last fall — nearly double the number in 2018. Some groups continue to be overrepresented, including Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Refugees also made up many of those using shelter services.

The homelessness crisis is not just about housing—it reflects deeper systemic failures that prevent people from living a life with dignity.

At Maytree, and as I shared with the Economic and Community Development Committee last week, we’ve documented how stagnant social assistance rates, rising rents, and underinvestment in affordable housing have eroded progress towards realizing the right to adequate housing. Having an adequate home—one that is safe, affordable, and meets basic needs—is not a nice-to-have, but a fundamental human right the City committed to uphold in its Housing Charter.

However, reaching a state of adequate housing for all takes time, which is why this right is subject to progressive realization. This principle means that the City must devote its maximum available resources—not only financial, but also policy, legislative, and planning tools—toward advancing this right. It also means recognizing that such a complex challenge can’t be addressed at one time, by one solution, or by one government alone.

But addressing homelessness is a bit different. Under international human rights law, it is a “minimum core obligation” of governments. This means that emergency shelters, though far from adequate housing, must be offered immediately and without exception.

It’s in this spirit that I support the proposal to amend the City’s Official Plan and make several zoning by-law amendments to advance the six shelter sites being discussed today. These

changes are necessary to immediately address the growing homelessness crisis by creating more shelter spaces that are better equipped to address people's needs.

I also echo the calls from the Right to Housing Toronto network about the broader HSCIS to:

- Deliver the 1,600 shelter spaces that are part of the plan with urgency, prioritizing permanent, purpose-built, and community-integrated facilities;
- Meaningfully engage shelter residents, including those from equity-deserving groups, during the implementation of this strategy;
- Ensure this strategy is linked to long-term housing solutions, including the expansion of diverse, affordable, and supportive housing options, rental assistance, and pathways to permanent housing;
- Align this plan with the HousingTO Action Plan, the Toronto Housing Charter, and other citywide strategies to ensure a coordinated, rights-based response to homelessness.

Given the urgency and magnitude of the challenge, the City should also remain open to creative housing solutions, such as micro-shelters.

In summary, it's clear that the City needs to act swiftly, and in a coordinated way, to better support people who are unhoused. The proposed planning changes to advance six shelter sites are a step in the right direction towards realizing this goal, and, over time, the right to adequate housing for all.

Thank you,

Elizabeth McIsaac
President
Maytree