

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 Planning & Housing Committee,

We wholeheartedly support the necessary rezonings for six proposed shelter sites throughout Toronto. Homelessness in the City of Toronto has increased by nearly 110%¹ over the last three years and visible homelessness has appeared in suburban neighbourhoods where street-facing populations were previously absent. While our letter addresses all sites and the obstacles encountered throughout the consultation process, our commentary will mostly focus on the 66-66Y Third Street site as that location is local to our community.

Unhoused residents are being failed by a lack of affordable housing and appropriate supports in Toronto. They face imminent emergencies like extreme weather conditions (heat and cold; days of low air quality from wildfire smoke) or precarious tenancy conditions (e.g. abusive partners or family) that necessitate more immediate intervention than prolonged housing application processes can guarantee.

From the City of Toronto's 2024 Shelter Needs Assessment, outdoor homelessness has more than doubled to 1,615 people since its previous 2021 peak, which occurred during the COVID pandemic and then momentarily receded; owing to services, facilities and businesses opening back up that provide informal shelter. Moreover, as with any methodology counting outdoor homelessness, it is likely for observers to undercount the number of total unhoused people in Etobicoke-York, wider Toronto or any given geographic area. Haven on the Queensway reports serving more than the number of outdoor unhoused people counted in the SNA (111)² on a weekly basis.

These facts expose the extent our supports and fallbacks have deteriorated from tri-governmental disinvestment. Unhoused Torontonians' human rights to housing and shelter must be fulfilled. Furthermore, other TSSS projects such as the George Street Revitalization are facing delays resulting from problems with site acquisition and renovation. These six sites will help build redundancy and resiliency into the City's shelter network.

The City of Toronto's Capital Variance Report for the 12-month period ending December 31st, 2024 shows that out of TSSS' approved \$142.5 million budget, it only spent \$62

¹ From Figure 4; Street Needs Assessment Results Report for the City of Toronto, 2024

² From Figure 9; Street Needs Assessment Results Report for the City of Toronto, 2024

million. \$80 million remains that has been carried over into this year, with underspending attributable to project delays. It is urgent that Toronto approve these shelters as soon as possible so that the unspent funds can be allocated and spent this year towards application and construction costs. As inflation diminishes the funds' real value and input costs (e.g. materials, labour, land) are projected to increase amid an increasingly stagnant Canadian economy, the City of Toronto will get the most value out of its funds now rather than later. We risked losing and may still lose concomitant housing and shelter funding such as Housing Accelerator Fund monies because of the sixplex compromise vote, making action on this front critical.

Succumbing to organized NIMBYism will only bleed people, literally and figuratively. Any further delay risks cutting shelter spaces and leaves more people out in the cold (or heat). Consultations have focused on either tiptoeing around opposition groups or even catering to their wishes; we have already lost 30 shelter spots at 66 Third Street. A lot of discussion has emphasized why the shelters are not compatible with their neighbourhood contexts, rather than discussing how they complement and tie into the in-progress Lake Shore Boulevard West Avenue Study or other Avenue studies, secondary plans and City sub-plans.

They have emphasized the negatives. Instead, we could be emphasizing the positives, imagining and talking about what our relationships between future shelter residents and other community members will look like; how folks can reintegrate into our communities and feel at home instead of being cast away. We can imagine a future where the shelters have fulfilled their mandate and could be remade and adapted to become supportive or affordable housing.

In the meantime, the current regime of moving people around by forcing them solely downtown breaks up social networks and makes it difficult for them to reconnect. Critically, having access to shelter in the suburbs allows shelter residents to live in settings where those that can drive can keep their cars; a transport method often still essential for accessing work in transit-poor Employment Lands and one residents may be used to. A move into the urban core would force residents to make a choice between an automobile or sheltering in their home communities; breaking up that normalcy.

Succumbing to organized NIMBYism will also hurt the City's financials, bleeding budgeted funds and future tax revenues. Property values, property taxes and business activity are not affected by trying to address homelessness, but by the inability for people to find a place to live. Not being able to live near where one works has been the major factor driving up commute times and killing small businesses. Future shelter residents having housing and being able to live and work in their desired communities

will spur on community hubs and lead businesses to thrive. Folks in shelters would also be able to access community centres and enroll in K-12 schools; a boon for public services.

In New Toronto, we envision a shelter where the people we regularly feed at Hand in Hand; who stay in touch with their friends and family; or access other services from other groups in our community, can continue to nourish those bonds. Where they can get the help they're used to while having a comfortable place to stay. This is the kind of compassion we need right now and the kind that will save and prolong lives.

Our shelter will prioritize seniors who if left on the street, would age much faster than their housed counterparts. We want to see our elders age with dignity and in that vein, urge our councillors to vote to approve the shelters. We hope to stay involved with progress at 66 Third beyond the point of rezoning and to do whatever we can to house our existing community members as well as build and sustain meaningful relationships in Etobicoke and beyond.

Thaddeus W. Sherlock,
Etobicoke-Lakeshore Shelter Support Coalition