



# Homelessness

## Services

## Capital Infrastructure

# Strategy

OCCUPANCY LOAD  
77 Clients + 7 Staff  
+ 2 Support Staff

## Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the City of Toronto is located on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississauga and Chippewa bands.

## A Big Thank You

The City of Toronto and Smoke Architecture would like to express our deepest gratitude for the many people that contributed to this work. Chi miigwech (a big thank you) to Elder Garry Sault for opening and closing many of our engagement meetings, and grounding us in the teachings and wisdom of the lands we live and work on here in Toronto. Chi miigwech to Elder Tina Sault for sharing Anishinaabemowin words that helped to develop the foundational goals of the Strategy. This Strategy would not be possible without the insights of many staff across homelessness services in the city. Thank you to everyone who took the time to meet with us and share your insights. Chi miigwech to Donald Chretien who provided beautiful artwork for this Strategy, and the many insights that helped frame this Strategy.

## About the Contributors

The creation of this Strategy was facilitated by Anishinaabeg owned architecture firm Smoke Architecture. Engagement sessions were held to listen and receive feedback from staff and partners in the homelessness service sector. The process was informed by Indigenous methodologies. With the intention to conduct the work in a good way, most engagement sessions were opened and closed by Elder Garry Sault of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The team continued to meet with Elder Garry Sault and his wife Elder Tina Sault to form the Strategy.

## The Contributors

### ELDER GARRY SAULT

Elder Garry Sault is an Ojibway Elder for the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. His people signed over twenty pre-Confederation treaties with the Crown, which covers most of the Golden Horseshoe. He is a veteran and served in the United States Navy. He resides on the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation with his wife of forty years and enjoys spending time with his grandchildren. Elder Garry Sault is also a Storyteller and has welcomed Chiefs, Premiers, environmentalists, and many more to the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

### ELDER TINA SAULT

Tina Sault is an Ojibway Elder and member of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (MCFN). Elder Tina is a fluent Ojibway language speaker. She taught language at the daycare at MCFN for 20 years. She retired from teaching four years ago but has continued to share the Ojibway language in translation work with clients like the University of Toronto and the City of Toronto.

### SMOKE ARCHITECTURE

Smoke Architecture is an Anishinaabeg-owned architecture firm. Providing complete architectural services since 2014, they focus on First Nations and Indigenous projects. Their clients, guided by Elders and community leaders, hold millennia of expertise on how and what to build in their traditional territories. Their design process is guided by and responsible to their clients. The path they take rediscovers Indigenous knowledge in contemporary contexts. This process of land-based learning applies to each project they undertake, using engagement tools, design techniques, and building systems crafted specifically for each community and each place.

### DONALD CHRÉTIEN

Donald Chrétien is a member of Nipissing First Nation. His distinctive style is influenced by the Woodland style of art. He has collaborated with Elder Basil Johnston on a few projects such as the Grey Roots Museum exhibit, Know Our Story Know Us, as well as illustrating Basil's last book, Walking in Balance. In 2016, several of his original works were purchased by the Archives of Ontario. He sculpted the Reconciliation Tree for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. Currently, he teaches in the Ontario Aboriginal Artist's school program, while also continuing his path painting in his studio.

# Table of Contents

Land Acknowledgement.....	<b>2</b>	2.3 George Street Revitalization.....	<b>28</b>
About the Contributors.....	<b>2</b>	2.4 Office Modernization.....	<b>29</b>
The Contributors.....	<b>3</b>	2.5 Shelter Infrastructure Safety Planning.....	<b>30</b>
Executive Summary.....	<b>6</b>	<b>3 Provide Resilient and Sustainable Infrastructure .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Purpose of the HSCIS.....	<b>8</b>	3.1 Continuity Plan.....	<b>32</b>
Development of the HSCIS.....	<b>10</b>	3.2 Net Zero and Climate Resiliency .....	<b>32</b>
Context of Homelessness in Canada.....	<b>11</b>	3.3 Fleet Plan.....	<b>33</b>
Context of Toronto's Shelter System.....	<b>13</b>	<b>4 Strengthen Communication and Community Relationships.....</b>	<b>34</b>
Foundational Goals.....	<b>17</b>	4.1 Improve Community Engagement.....	<b>35</b>
Commitment to Reconciliation.....	<b>18</b>	<b>5 Clarify Responsibilities, Authority, and Decision Making.....</b>	<b>36</b>
Confronting Anti-Black Racism.....	<b>20</b>	5.1 Emergency Shelter Development Process.....	<b>37</b>
<b>1 Plan Proactively and Prioritize Long-Term Infrastructure Needs .....</b>	<b>22</b>	5.2 Infrastructure Business Enhancement.....	<b>37</b>
1.1 Long-Term Budget Planning and Financial Reviews.....	<b>22</b>	<b>6 Strengthen the Collection, Management, and Analysis of Infrastructure Data.....</b>	<b>38</b>
1.2 Winter Planning .....	<b>23</b>	6.1 Data Collection, Monitoring, Evaluation and Sharing.....	<b>39</b>
1.3 Phased COVID-19 Transition Plan.....	<b>24</b>	6.2 Research and Learning from Other Jurisdictions.....	<b>39</b>
1.4 State of Good Repair (SOGR).....	<b>24</b>	6.3 Technological Solutions.....	<b>40</b>
1.5 Procurement Plan .....	<b>25</b>	Conclusion.....	<b>41</b>
<b>2 Create Infrastructure that Fosters Dignity and Wellbeing .....</b>	<b>26</b>		
2.1 Purpose Built Shelter .....	<b>27</b>		
2.2 Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines.....	<b>28</b>		

# Executive Summary

The City of Toronto's shelter system is currently full. Demand for shelter space continues to increase due to inflated costs of living, insufficient affordable housing supply, inadequate wage and income supports, and an increase in the number of refugee claimants arriving in Toronto. As of October 2023, the City is sheltering 10,700 people, with approximately 9,000 people in the shelter system and 1,700 people outside the shelter system in bridging hotels and programs supported by the Canadian Red Cross. Demand continues to increase, which presents significant challenges for the long-term sustainability of existing shelter infrastructure as the City's current long-term capital plan is insufficient to meet the needs of the system and the people who rely on it.

In order to meet shelter capacity demands, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) has become increasingly reliant on temporary short-term leases and contractual agreements. While solutions mobilized during the pandemic were necessary to support the health and safety of shelter clients, the current approach creates significant complications to shelter operations, and is also not financially sustainable. To improve shelter system stability and recovery, maximize resources, and be more responsive to the needs of people experiencing homelessness, a strategic capital plan for shelter infrastructure is needed.

To respond to this need, the City has developed the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS). Guided by Smoke Architecture, this Strategy was created by engaging with internal City divisions, homelessness service providers, and other community partners. This Strategy was also presented to the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB). From the development process, six (6) Foundational Goals emerged, which now form the framework for the strategy. Each Foundational Goal in the HSCIS will proactively inform the City's shelter-related capital spending decisions to meet division-wide priorities and maximize available resources.

The HSCIS will help transition the shelter system from the current reactive COVID-19 focused response to a long-term proactive approach that supports the recovery and stability of Toronto's homelessness sector. This includes moving from a system made up of primarily temporary spaces towards a system with more long-term-use and permanent purpose-built spaces that are designed to better meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The HSCIS is intended to be a living document, and the implementation workplan will be co-created with service providers and other affected parties. The HSCIS is a 10 year Strategy that will be reviewed every five (5) years to develop an updated iteration.

In addition to the Foundation Goals, the HSCIS also highlights the need to address the unique experiences of equity deserving groups during infrastructure planning and development. This includes strategically working together with Indigenous providers to co-develop Indigenous centred responses to improve access to safer shelter spaces and culturally appropriate services. The strategy also recommends engaging Black clients, staff, and service providers in infrastructure planning to ensure future processes and projects respond to the distinct needs of Black clients in the shelter system. An equity lens will be applied to all action items identified for each Foundational Goal.

## THE FOUNDATIONAL GOALS ARE:

- 1 Plan Proactively and Prioritize Long-Term Infrastructure Needs:** A well-planned and clear long-term vision for infrastructure development and asset management will move the City's shelter system towards greater sustainability. This includes long-term financial planning, proactive winter responses, thoughtful COVID-19 transition planning, and standardized practices for procurement and State of Good Repair projects. Proactive planning will support the creation of a long-term winter strategy and a 10-year capital strategy to increase permanent and long-term-use spaces in the system.
- 2 Create Infrastructure that Fosters Dignity and Wellbeing:** Investing in purpose-built shelters (in alignment with the [Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines](#)) will support enhanced approaches to addressing safety, support program management, and help create spaces that meet the diverse needs of clients, staff, and communities. This includes establishing permanent spaces that respond to sector specific needs in the system and also serve as a proactive response to replace expected lost capacity due to temporary site closures.
- 3 Provide Resilient and Sustainable Infrastructure:** There is a recognized need to enhance both the sustainability and resiliency of capital assets across the City's shelter system. This includes facilitating the development and maintenance of climate resilient infrastructure, working towards achieving Net Zero in shelters, exploring environmentally sustainable fleet options, and ensuring contingency plans are in place to avoid service disruptions during emergencies.
- 4 Strengthen Communications and Community Relationships:** Thoughtful and well-planned communication and engagement approaches are vital to ensuring the success of new and existing shelter projects in communities across Toronto. This includes updating engagement processes to clarify roles and responsibilities, adapting existing engagement plans to address discrimination towards equity deserving groups and providing training opportunities to community members.
- 5 Clarify Responsibilities, Authority and Decision Making:** Creating a shared understanding of responsibility to manage infrastructure resources with service providers will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery across the City's shelter system. This includes strengthening the Emergency Shelter Development Process, clarifying authorities, and consolidating the management of capital assets to improve interdivisional alignment and project outcomes.
- 6 Strengthen the Collection, Management, and Analysis of Infrastructure Data** Fostering a data-driven culture and creating systems that support data collection, analysis, and governance will lead to a deeper understanding of priorities in the shelter system. Nuanced challenges in the homelessness sector can also be addressed by developing metrics to assess the impact of shelter design on clients, new technological solutions for infrastructure planning, and systems to track budgets and capital costs.

## Purpose of the HSCIS

The Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) will serve as the roadmap to transition the City's shelter infrastructure from primarily emergency-focused responses to a system rooted in proactive, long-term, and strategic capital planning and decision-making.

This HSCIS focuses on the physical spaces and places where homelessness services are delivered. The first of its kind, the HSCIS will help the City of Toronto ensure existing shelter infrastructure is well-designed, efficiently managed, resilient, and in a state of good repair. It will support recovery and stability in the shelter system by ensuring new spaces are proactively acquired and thoughtfully designed to enhance safety, dignity, and meet the needs of Toronto's diverse homeless population while being well-integrated into the surrounding community. The HSCIS tells a comprehensive story of how the City will need to meet short, medium, and long-term goals to transition from emergency focused COVID-19 responses to long-term, proactive approaches to capital planning.

As the City intentionally and strategically plans for the stability and future needs of the sector, the HSCIS recommends increasing the percentage of permanent and long-term-use spaces available to replace the short-term leased spaces across the system. Rapidly opening temporary emergency shelter sites was necessary during the pandemic to ensure physical distancing was provided throughout the shelter system. However, over half of shelter bed capacity is now held in temporary spaces, including many sites with short-term contractual agreements such as COVID-19 hotel programs. Short-term leases pose significant challenges for multi-year planning and fiscally responsible decision making. Capacity pressures across the shelter system are also exacerbated during temporary site closures through the Council-approved [COVID-19 Transition and Relocation Plan](#). This work is vital as the City continues to experience unprecedented demand for shelter space.

The HSCIS is a 10-year strategy (2024 - 2033) that will be reviewed again in five years. This is intended to be a living document that will evolve over time and include continued engagement with the homelessness sector. While the next five years will focus on short and medium-term actions, there are long-term actions that will require multi-year planning within the next five years to be achieved. Long-term actions detailed in the HSCIS indicate priorities that will significantly transform and transition the City's shelter system. A corresponding work plan will be developed to ensure the implementation of the actions in this Strategy. Shelter operators and affected parties will be consulted on the development and implementation of the HSCIS work plan, as well as in the development of future iterations of the HSCIS.

- **Short-Term** refers to actions with deliverables in **one to two years**
- **Medium-Term** refers to actions with deliverables in **three to four years**
- **Long-Term** refers to actions with deliverables in **five years or more**

Short- and medium-term actions will help lay the foundational work needed to reach the long-term actions and visions of the HSCIS.



While housing is the ultimate solution to homelessness, it is also critically important that adequate space is available to people who are experiencing homelessness today. The HSCIS is one part of the City's overall work to ensure those without housing have access to a full range of shelter and housing options. This was also identified as a priority in the [City's Corporate Strategic Plan](#). People experiencing homelessness often seek emergency shelters for access to indoor spaces and critical supports that help guide them along the housing spectrum towards permanent housing. This includes receiving housing help services that connect clients to permanent housing opportunities. The City's shelter system serves as a pivotal access point to transition into housing. While housing solutions are being developed, it is critical to ensure adequate space is available in the shelter system for those in immediate need.

The importance of investing in shelter infrastructure has also been recognized by other municipalities across North America. This includes New York City (investment of 809 million USD investment over 10 years) and Chicago (investment of up to 70 million USD over two years). These investments include increasing shelter system capacity, rehabilitating existing shelter sites, acquiring new sites, enhancing interior and exterior building stabilization, upgrading power and IT systems, and ensuring compliance with health, safety, and accessibility standards.

Investing in the shelter system ensures that a continued range of options are always available to those in need of emergency shelter services. A well-run shelter system also facilitates the pathway for individuals experiencing homelessness to access the supports needed to transition into housing.

## Context of Homelessness in Canada

During the pandemic, Toronto introduced over 3,000 new temporary shelter spaces into the system. Similar to other North American urban centres, investment in infrastructure and shelter assets in Toronto are necessary in order to maintain this increased shelter capacity and plan for the future of the City's shelter system.

While the City of Toronto works towards its goal of improving housing outcomes for Toronto residents (as identified in the [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#)), ensuring the availability of shelter spaces is essential to help fill the gap when people are in immediate housing need, and until an adequate supply of housing options are available. The creation of the HSCIS was also a key recommendation in the [Homelessness Solutions Service Plan](#) to help the City meet the goals of delivering high quality services for people experiencing homelessness. Well-maintained and robust shelter infrastructure is essential to ensuring that people experiencing homelessness in Toronto have access to safer shelter system. The HSCIS also ensures that infrastructure efforts are aligned with divisional, operational, and strategic policy efforts.

### Development of the HSCIS

**The Strategy was developed through an extensive engagement and consultation process across City of Toronto divisions and with partners in the homelessness sector.**

Smoke Architecture, an Anishinaabeg owned and operated consultant firm, guided the process to create the Strategy by gathering insights from diverse knowledge carriers. This was then woven into a framework to steer the future development and planning of the City's shelter system.

A HSCIS Steering Committee was established and included representation across several City of Toronto divisions, including: Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM), CreateTO, and the City Manager's Office.

Eighteen virtual engagement sessions were held from January to August 2022. Participants from other City divisions included: CREM, CreateTO, Economic Development and Culture (EDC), Fleet Services, Housing Secretariat, Senior Services and Long-Term Care, and Social Development Finance and Administration (SDFA).

Engagement sessions were also held with service providers across the city, and the Toronto Police Service. The CIS was also presented to the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB), and SSHA's Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) Steering Committee for feedback.

### Overview of Homelessness in Canada

The total number of individuals who experience homelessness across Canada is at least 250,000 people annually. Results from a [2020-2022 Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness](#) in 59 communities across Canada found that over 32,000 people experience homelessness each night nation-wide. While the majority of respondents use emergency shelters (63%), one quarter of all respondents (25%) reported staying in unsheltered settings. In comparison to the 2018 Point-in-Time Count, the number of people in unsheltered settings has doubled. Unsheltered settings include sleeping outdoors and in encampments, which have been on the rise across Canada since the start of the pandemic.

Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in experiences of homelessness across Canada. While only 5% of the population across Canada identify as Indigenous, 35% of people experiencing homelessness across Canada identify as Indigenous.

2SLGBTQ+ youth are also overrepresented in experiences of homelessness across Canada. 24% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as 2SLGBTQ+.

Even though Black individuals only represent 3% of Canada's population, they account for a disproportionate percentage of people experiencing homelessness. In Toronto alone, 31% of people who responded to the City of Toronto's 2021 Street Needs Assessment identified as Black.

## Context of Toronto's Shelter System

### Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy

[Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy](#) is aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness across Canada and supports the goals of [Canada's National Housing Strategy](#). Reaching Home provides funding to urban, Indigenous, rural, and remote communities to help address local homelessness needs. In 2019 through Reaching Home, the Federal Government committed to investing \$2.2 billion over a ten-year period to support initiatives across Canada. It is estimated that homelessness has an impact of approximately \$7 billion annually to the Canadian economy. This includes emergency shelters and community support, as well as the increased costs of healthcare, the criminal justice system, and emergency services.

### Refugee Claimants and Experiences of Homelessness

Canada is a world leader in the resettlement of refugees. As the largest urban centre in Canada and one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, Toronto serves as a hub for many newcomers to Canada, including refugee claimants. Toronto receives a high number of refugee claimants requesting access to shelter and social supports each year. Refugee claimants in Canada are at risk of homelessness due to various factors including poverty, discrimination, unrecognized foreign employment and educational credentials, delays in work permits, and mental health challenges. As a result, more and more refugee claimants need emergency shelter services, drop-in programs, and other housing supports.

Since the reopening of Canadian borders in September 2021, the number of refugee claimants in Toronto's shelter system has increased from approximately 530 people per night in September 2021, to over 3,500 people per night in August 2023.

As of September 2023, refugee claimants represent approximately 40% of clients using Toronto's emergency shelter system. Of the 3,500 refugee claimants in the shelter system, over 1,500 are sheltered in programs that are not resourced to provide the specific services and supports that refugee claimants require.

To ensure refugee claimants have access to shelter spaces and appropriate resources, ongoing intergovernmental coordination and continued support from all levels of government will be essential. The City continues to work with the federal and provincial governments to establish solutions to support refugee claimants arriving in Toronto.

Over the last three years, the City's shelter system has undergone significant transformation to respond to the unprecedented needs of COVID-19. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the shelter system had a total capacity of approximately 5,670 (as of March 15, 2020). Since 2021, the capacity of the shelter system has increased by 30%, serving approximately 3,000 more people each night than in previous years. The vast majority of these spaces were acquired through short term contracts and agreements. The City shelters over 10,700 people each night, including approximately 9,000 people accessing overnight emergency shelters. This includes providing shelter to over 5,000 people experiencing chronic homelessness.<sup>i</sup>

Despite the large number of clients supported through the shelter system, the need for additional emergency shelter beds has increased significantly. Currently, Toronto's shelter system is full and demand for shelter services is at an all-time high. This spike in demand is due to many factors including: insufficient affordable housing supply, increased costs of living, inadequate wage and income supports, and an increase in refugee claimants arriving in Toronto.

- In the 2021 Street Needs Assessment, inadequate income was identified as the top reason for housing loss.
- In the past 10 years, the average market rent for a one-bedroom unit has increased by 57%, while the Ontario Works shelter allowance has only increased by 4%.

Shelter demand continues to grow at unprecedented rates. In September 2023, there was an average of 278 callers to the City's Central Intake call centre who could not be matched to a shelter space, and an average of 386 families on the family placement wait list, awaiting access to family shelter services. Data demonstrates that the current inflow of new individuals into shelters is significantly greater than the number of people who leave the system for housing. This is also observed through the visible increase in encampments, people living outdoors, and on the City's transit system. The inability to respond by relocating individuals to shelter space has resulted in significant impacts to residents, neighbourhoods, and businesses.

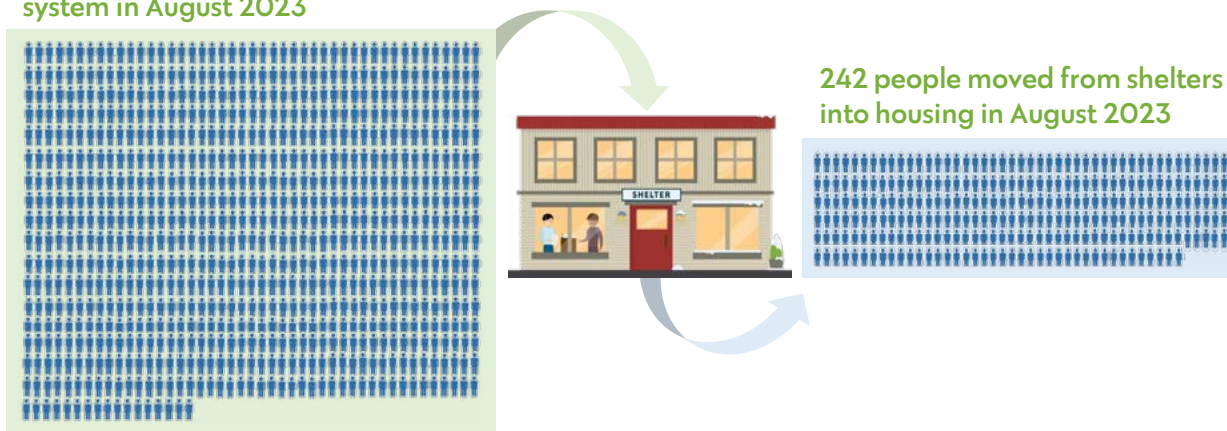
<sup>i</sup> Definition: Chronic homelessness refers to people who have experienced homelessness for at least six (6) months over the past year or have cumulative experiences of homelessness over the past three years totalling at least 18 months.

## From Shelter to Housing: Inflow vs Outflow

As the City continues to mobilize solutions to address capacity demands, significant work is also being done to transition people from shelters into permanent housing opportunities. In 2021 and 2022, the City created 3,600 new permanent affordable and supportive housing opportunities. From January 2022 to August 2023, the City moved over 8,000 people from emergency shelters into permanent housing. While thousands of people experiencing homelessness have been connected to housing opportunities, the inflow into shelters significantly outpaces the outflow from the shelters into housing. In August 2023, while 246 people moved from shelters into permanent housing opportunities, 782 people entered the City's shelter system.

**The number of people entering the shelter system continues to substantially outpace the number of people moving out of the shelter system into housing opportunities.**

782 people entered the City's system in August 2023



## Short-Term Leases and Contracts

The City has become reliant on temporary short-term leases and contracts to address demand for shelter space. Nearly half (48%) of the shelter system is held in sites that have agreements and leases that end by December 2024. Many of these agreements were introduced during the pandemic when innovative solutions and quick mobilization was needed to ensure adequate space was available for clients while adhering to safe distancing standards. The majority of these contractual agreements are now approaching their end date, and there will be significant impacts to shelter system capacity if more strategic and long-term solutions are not implemented. Increasingly, hotel operators are interested in returning to the hotel and tourism industry, and the cost of leasing temporary sites has risen significantly due to inflation and other factors.

## Options for New Shelter Development

As the City plans for recovery and stability of the shelter system, various options to address shelter capacity and infrastructure needs have been explored. Options to address shelter capacity and infrastructure needs include:

- i. Renovating an existing building into a shelter, or
- ii. Developing a new purpose-built shelter

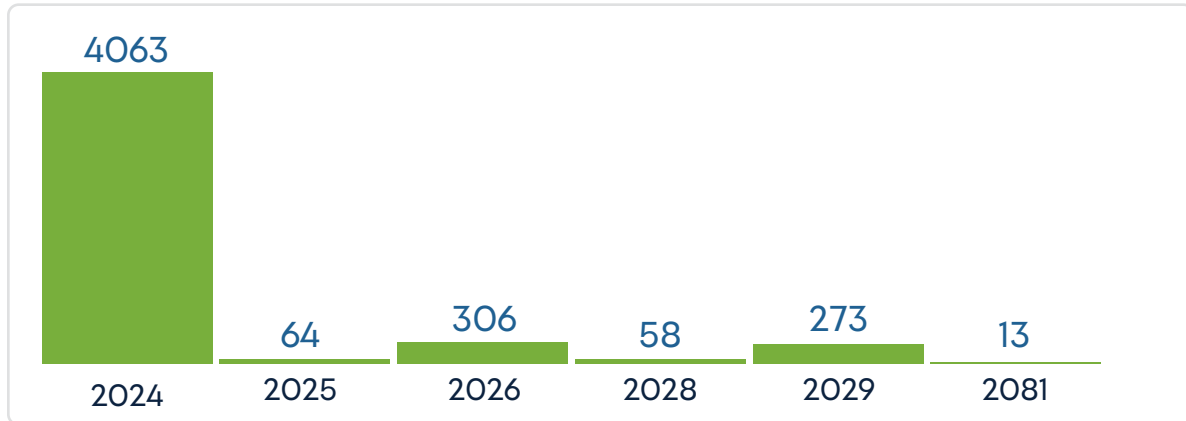
Accessibility, designing for client needs, and cost efficiencies are all critical factors that help determine the best choice. Based on 2023 cost estimates for a shelter site with 80 beds and approximately 25,000 square feet:

- Renovating an existing building into a shelter: The cost to renovate an existing building into a shelter site is approximately \$17 million. This does not include the cost of property acquisition but does include the cost of design and fit-up. Renovations can incur additional costs that stem from existing site conditions and constraints, as well as costs to appropriately renovate the space to meet shelter standards and operational needs.
- Developing a new purpose-built shelter: The cost for a new purpose-built shelter is approximately \$22.5 million. This includes a commercial kitchen, basement, office spaces, meeting rooms, single and multi-person washrooms, and 20% of the shelter spaces being accessible. A new purpose-built site provides the greatest opportunity to design and build a shelter that meets the needs of clients with diverse needs and can more easily be converted into housing in the future once demand for shelter space has stabilized. Due to the ongoing demand pressures in the shelter system, development of City-owned or community-owned shelters is more cost effective than continuing to lease properties in the long run.

Property acquisition costs can vary significantly depending on the area in Toronto (i.e., downtown core versus inner suburbs). 2023 estimates project land acquisition costs anywhere from \$8 million to \$22 million. There would be no acquisition cost for City-owned properties. While the upfront cost for new shelter development is greater than leasing properties for shelter use, significant cost-savings will be realized over the long-term. Purpose-built spaces are significantly cheaper to maintain and operate than continuously leasing temporary sites for shelter-use.



### CONTRACT END DATES FOR TEMPORARY SITES IN THE SHELTER SYSTEM



Solutions mobilized during the pandemic are no longer viable or fiscally responsible options for the long-term sustainability of the City's shelter system. There is a significant cost difference to operate a temporary hotel site versus the cost to operate a permanent new shelter. Hotel-based programs are considerably more expensive to deliver. On average, the current per diem cost at shelters operated using the [New Shelter Service Model](#) approach is \$126 per person (per night), while the cost to operate a COVID-19 hotel is \$253 per person (per night). For a site with 80 clients, this translates to a cost difference of \$3.7 million per site. Over a 10-year period, the cost difference of renting a temporary hotel (\$37 million) can exceed the cost of developing a permanent new shelter. The cost-savings achieved through purchased and long-term-use sites will support the sustainability of the shelter system and facilitate additional opportunities to support more people experiencing homelessness in the long-term.

Type of Site (80 Bed)	Per Diem	1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	10 Years	20 Years
Shelter using New Shelter Service Model	\$126	\$3.7 Million	\$11 Million	\$18.4 Million	\$36.8 Million	\$73.6 Million
COVID-19 Hotel	\$253	\$7.4 Million	\$22 Million	\$36.9 Million	\$73.9 Million	\$147.8 Million
Cost Difference	\$127	\$3.7 Million	\$11 Million	\$18.5 Million	\$37 Million	\$74.2 Million

While the needs of the pandemic highlighted the benefits of having access to temporary spaces, multi-year contractual agreements maximize resources and provide much more stability as opposed to short-term leases and contracts. Moving forward, alternative solutions to short-term leases and contracts must be implemented.

## Foundational Goals

Six Foundational Goals emerged from the feedback and insight provided through the Strategy development process. The Foundational Goals form the framework of the HSCIS, with specific short, medium, and longer term recommendations within each Goal.

- 1 **Plan Proactively and Prioritize Long-Term Infrastructure Needs**
- 2 **Create Infrastructure that Fosters Dignity and Wellbeing**
- 3 **Provide Resilient and Sustainable Infrastructure**
- 4 **Strengthen Communications and Community Relationships**
- 5 **Clarify Responsibilities, Authority, and Decision Making**
- 6 **Strengthen the Collection, Management, and Analysis of Infrastructure Data**

## Commitment to Reconciliation

Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in homelessness due to the ongoing effects of colonialism, intergenerational trauma, and racism. The [2021 Street Needs Assessment](#) found that Indigenous peoples make up 2.5% of the Toronto population, yet make up 15% of people experiencing homelessness. This is even more significant for Indigenous peoples staying outdoors (23%). In addition, 2SLGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in homelessness, but underrepresented among those accessing shelters due to hidden homelessness, stigma, discrimination, and safety concerns within traditional shelter spaces and programs.

Advancing reconciliation across the homelessness service sector will require meaningful and proactive engagement and collaboration with Indigenous service providers. This work will build on the [City of Toronto Reconciliation Action Plan 2022 - 2032](#), and [Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan](#).

Meeting in the Middle was co-created to foster better relationships between SSHA and Indigenous organizations and meaningfully address Indigenous homelessness. This work includes challenging current systems that need to be more responsive to the needs of Indigenous communities. Meeting in the Middle guides the path to reconciliation for SSHA.

The City must uphold Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in its engagement with, and support of Indigenous partners and service providers. This includes resource allocation to Indigenous service providers for the development of capital infrastructure that meets the needs of Indigenous community members, as Indigenous providers are best equipped to lead this work and provide these services.

Learnings from pandemic responses further highlighted challenges that arise when Indigenous providers are not actively part of the planning process, including impacting the ability to provide culturally appropriate support to Indigenous peoples in shelters. Moving forward, it will be vital to strategically work together with Indigenous providers and to co-develop Indigenous-centred responses to improve access to culturally appropriate services. Eliminating Indigenous homelessness requires Indigenous-led solutions.

### LONG TERM

1. Co-develop processes for meaningful engagement related to infrastructure planning with Indigenous communities.

### MEDIUM TERM

2. In partnership with the Indigenous community and TICAB, ensure that 20% of future infrastructure funding for new shelter development will be allocated for Indigenous shelter services.

### SHORT TERM

3. Co-develop Indigenous focused approaches to core elements of the [COVID-19 Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan](#) with TICAB and Indigenous service providers.
4. Consult TICAB and the Indigenous community to co-develop and implement the HSCIS work plan, and future iterations of the HSCIS. This includes engagement to identify priorities to advance reconciliation in shelter development and planning.

## Confronting Anti-Black Racism

Historical and ongoing anti-Black racism in Toronto continues to leave a legacy of marginalization for Black residents, leading to poor health and mental health outcomes, higher rates of poverty, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice, mental health, and child welfare systems. Black individuals are also overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Findings from the [2021 Street Needs Assessment](#) showed that 31% of respondents experiencing homelessness identified as Black despite making up only 9% of the general population. Hidden homelessness, stigma, discrimination, and safety concerns often prevent 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including Black queer and trans youth, from accessing shelter spaces when experiencing homelessness.

In December 2017, City Council approved the [Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism](#) to help address the systemic barriers faced by Black people in Toronto and ensure more equitable policies, programs and services. Recommendation 10 of the Action Plan relates specially to improving shelter conditions to better support Black Torontonians, with an emphasis on creating safer physical spaces within shelters for queer and trans Black youth and Black women.

Both clients and staff have highlighted ongoing experiences of anti-Black racism within the shelter system, and the significant safety concerns that arise as a result. It is essential to create safer shelter spaces for Black people experiencing homelessness. The [2022 Review of the City's Community Engagement Work](#) found that dialogue during engagement sessions can include discriminatory comments and language towards Black people experiencing homelessness. The distinct needs and experiences of Black clients must be considered during shelter infrastructure planning, including in the closures of temporary COVID-19 sites and development of new shelter spaces.

### LONG TERM

1. Create youth shelters with safer physical spaces designed for Black queer and trans youth, and create safer physical spaces within women's and family shelters designed for Black women.
2. Co-develop a process for meaningful engagement related to infrastructure planning projects with Black clients and shelter service providers.

### MEDIUM TERM

3. Engage Black staff, operators, and clients in developing future iterations of the HSCIS.
4. Apply an anti-Black racism analysis when updating Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines.

### SHORT TERM

5. Work with Black staff and Black communities to ensure plans to increase shelter capacity align with the needs of Black clients, including Black queer and trans youth.
6. Create opportunities for Black clients to provide feedback and inform the COVID-19 shelter transition process.
7. Explore opportunities to collect and analyze disaggregated race based data to understand current client needs and support future planning related to relocations and shelter and space development.
8. Explore the opportunity to create a Black-led shelter space that provides culturally appropriate services for Black people experiencing homelessness.

# 1 Plan Proactively and Prioritize Long-Term Infrastructure Needs

The City must prioritize long-term and proactive planning approaches to capital and asset development, preventative maintenance, and funding to support recovery and stability in the shelter system. The goal is to weave longer-term thinking into processes and move away from reactive, short-term decision making. This will help ensure the City moves forward as good stewards of shelter assets and resources in order to best serve people experiencing homelessness.

The City took extraordinary steps during the COVID-19 pandemic by rapidly opening temporary emergency shelter sites to ensure physical distancing was provided throughout the shelter system. While this has undoubtedly saved lives, many resources have been exhausted and many lessons have been learned from challenges that arose due to inadequate long-term planning. The City now needs to invest in shelter and supportive housing infrastructure.

Though shelter and housing construction is urgent and site repairs are often required immediately, the long-term costs of low-quality repairs and retrofits significantly outweigh front-end costs of investing in high quality with adequate timelines. Moving forward, there is a need to transition from short-term and reactive decision making to long-term and proactive planning, including during the winter months.

## 1.1 Long-Term Budget Planning and Financial Reviews

A clear vision for a 10-year budget is required that includes a funding model outlining how the shelter system will achieve stability and move toward having 60% of the shelter system in permanent and long-term-use sites. Current funding is inadequate to meet the increased demand for shelter services. This plan should focus on maximizing resources over the long-term and support the business case for additional funding from other levels of government. Capital projects have been postponed due to COVID-19 impacts on City expenses and revenue sources. Further delays can result in increased project costs and reliance on costly interim solutions to meet demand.

### MEDIUM TERM

1. Conduct annual reviews of all capital infrastructure funding and budgets, including allocations for building maintenance and repairs. This review should be undertaken with the City's Financial Planning Division, Housing Secretariat, CREM, and CreateTO.

### SHORT TERM

2. Develop a new multi-tiered 10-year capital strategy that includes 60% of the shelter system in permanent and long-term-use spaces. Explore accessing funding from other levels of government and alternative funding sources such as social bonds.

## 1.2 Winter Planning

Additional homelessness service responses are activated during the winter season (November 15 to April 15) in order to provide warm and welcoming places for people experiencing homelessness who are vulnerable to illness and injury as a result of exposure to cold temperatures. This has involved opening additional temporary winter shelters and housing through partnership and coordination across City divisions, and between the City, community service providers and volunteer and faith-based organizations. However, identifying suitable infrastructure for winter spaces is challenging and the required number of winter spaces has not always been secured by the time the winter season begins.

### SHORT TERM

1. Work with CREM and CreateTO to create a long-term strategy for winter services and annual Winter Capital Plans that include a minimum of four (4) Warming Centres and one (1) 24-hour respite site.
2. Explore the use of City-owned sites, community partner sites and private market spaces. Seek multi-year licenses and agreements, negating the need to find new sites each year.
3. Engage TICAB in winter planning discussions to ensure the distinct needs of the Indigenous community during the winter season are considered and met.

### 1.3 Phased COVID-19 Transition Plan

The Council approved [COVID-19 Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan](#) recommended a phased, gradual transition from temporary shelter sites to ensure that the transition does not impose undue stresses on the shelter system or the individuals who rely on it. The City has started developing temporary site closure plans in anticipation of lease terms coming to an end. This includes working with service providers to develop individualized plans to transition clients to housing or other appropriate shelter locations. Through the COVID-19 Transition and Relocation Plan, Request for Proposal (RFP) and Non-Competitive Procurement (NCP) contractual agreements should also be extended or renewed as less costly medium-term leases to ensure adequate temporary space is maintained.

#### SHORT TERM

1. Continue to work through the Council approved COVID-19 Transition and Relocation Plan to transition out of temporary hotel sites with a focus on permanent housing and shelters. Report back through the Annual Shelter Infrastructure Report to City Council.
2. Update and extend leases, Non-Competitive Procurement (NCP) and Request for Proposal (RFP) contracts for remaining sites to ensure adequate temporary space is available through the Transition. Plan until more permanent space is available through the HSCIS.
3. Design and implement a monitoring and evaluation tool for the Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan to develop metrics, track progress, and inform future planning.

### 1.4 State of Good Repair (SOGR)

The City has been conducting Building Condition Assessments (BCAs) across its shelter portfolio to better understand the current condition of existing shelter infrastructure, and prioritize State of Good Repair (SOGR) work and capital requirements moving forward. There is repair work required across the shelter system. Some sites, such as Eva's Satellite, a shelter with 33 beds for youth, had to close due to a poor state of repair, reducing needed shelter capacity while demand for space grows. It is essential that SOGR work be addressed as soon as possible to reduce service disruptions and help ensure required work doesn't become more urgent and expensive by being deferred. Some major capital repairs will require temporarily relocating shelter residents, which will impact shelter capacity. Due to lease and maintenance agreements differing significantly across shelter locations, there is also a need for increased clarity of responsibilities related to asset management across shelter sites.

#### LONG TERM

1. Work with other levels of government to secure the required funding for SOGR repairs. Support agency partners in the funding application process for partner-owned sites.

#### MEDIUM TERM

2. Develop a new process to identify how SOGR projects are prioritized and funding is allocated.
3. Establish a standardized maintenance process and responsibilities matrix for all lease, operating and license agreements to share with site operators. These should include timelines, accountabilities, and a clear breakdown of roles and responsibilities between the operator and the City.

#### SHORT TERM

4. Complete all BCAs for a full snapshot of all SOGR work required across the system.
5. Proactively coordinate and schedule repairs to minimize service disruptions and address required SOGR work. SOGR projects should coordinate with AODA and Net Zero initiatives to ensure the work is concurrently completed.

### 1.5 Procurement Plan

Through the pandemic, procurement was essential to ensuring the continuity of available shelter spaces that supported the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness. Current processes for purchasing, however, are not strategically aligned and organized, leading to inconsistencies and delays in the procurement of necessary capital goods. Effective procurement is vital to ensure repairs and upgrades are performed, emergency responses can be activated, and maintenance support is available when needed. Procurement planning is also essential for accurate budgeting and spending.

#### SHORT TERM

1. Review existing procurement protocols and develop an updated Procurement Plan that aligns with annual budget submissions and includes standardized processes and communications across divisions, updated process timelines, and the creation of standardized contract templates.



## 2 Create Infrastructure that Fosters Dignity and Wellbeing

Creating safe shelters is critical for people experiencing homelessness and the staff who work there. The City's [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#) provides a blueprint for action across the housing spectrum to improve shelter diversion and to provide more housing. Having adequate shelter space remains critical to providing a pathway towards housing for people experiencing homelessness and ensures those in immediate need of shelter can access shelter space.

While the City's shelter system has transformed to respond to the unprecedented needs of the pandemic, learnings from leasing temporary sites highlighted complications with shelter planning, operational continuity, emergency preparedness, and financial implications when negotiating lease extensions. Reliance on short term leases also makes the shelter system vulnerable to private market factors and reduces flexibility to address demand challenges in the shelter system. By investing in purpose-built shelter spaces with updated guidelines, safety features, and program management spaces, the City can work towards recovery and stability in the shelter system while ensuring shelter infrastructure meets the diverse needs and wellbeing of clients, staff, and the community.

### 2.1 Purpose-Built Shelter

The City should transition away from short-term leased properties towards permanent and long-term purpose built shelters. This is more cost effective long-term, helps provide stability in the system, reduces the risk of losing critical shelter capacity, and is more responsive to the needs of shelter clients. With intentional design, purpose-built sites can also provide transitional shelter and housing programs that support and prepare people for independent living. Purpose built shelters can also be transitioned into permanent housing options when needed. In order to increase the stability of the shelter system, a shift to increase permanent and purpose-built spaces is needed.

Currently, 59% (approximately 5,000 spaces) of the City's shelter system is held in short-term leases and contract agreements, with only 41% (approximately 3,500 spaces) of the shelter system in permanent sites. Over the long-term, the City's system should move from 41% of permanent and purpose-built spaces towards a goal of 60%.

#### LONG TERM

1. Open the required amount of new permanent purpose-built shelter sites to ensure 60% of spaces in the system are permanent to improve system stability and quality. This requires funding from all orders of government to support the development of these spaces.

#### MEDIUM TERM

2. Create a plan to maximize the use of City-owned real estate, including redeveloping existing shelters that are no longer able to serve client needs, divesting from inefficiently used shelters to free-up funding for purpose-built shelters, and co-locating shelter services with other municipal services such as housing and libraries (in-line with the City-Wide Real Estate Portfolio Strategy).
3. Create a multi-divisional approach to co-locate and integrate more services into shelters. Ensure physical spaces for harm reduction and mental health supports are built into shelters. This approach can also include opportunities for transitional shelter and transitional housing options.

#### SHORT TERM

4. Establish new permanent shelter spaces as a proactive response to expected loss in shelter spaces due to hotel shelter closures, and open more permanent spaces. Sites should address programming gaps (youth, Indigenous peoples, families) identified by feedback and data.
5. Establish one new permanent flex site to help facilitate required State of Good Repair (SOGR) work and other potential future emergencies that necessitate client relocation.

## 2.2 Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines

New shelter spaces should be developed in alignment with the [Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines](#) with a focus on being smaller in scale, open 24-hours, accessible, pet friendly, and with programs that meet the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness. These standards will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they are creating and maintaining well-designed shelter spaces that lead to positive outcomes for clients.

### LONG TERM

1. Continually review and update the Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines, including regular engagement with interested and affected parties such as shelter clients and equity-deserving groups. Ensure revisions are done through the lens of reconciliation and confronting anti-Black racism.

### MEDIUM TERM

2. Ensure at least 20% of beds in shelters are fully accessible in alignment with Toronto Accessibility Design Guidelines and the Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines.
3. Review and update Shelter and Technical Design Guidelines by 2026.

### SHORT TERM

4. Ensure new shelters have a capacity of 80 beds or less, with a small number of beds per room, depending on site constraints. Smaller shelters are more welcoming, support client wellbeing, can cater to specific populations, and provide greater safety.
5. Integrate more harm reduction principles in shelter spaces, and ensure physical spaces for harm reduction supports are available to clients.

## 2.3 George Street Revitalization

The George Street Revitalization (GSR) project will replace the existing Seaton House shelter with a new facility that will consist of emergency and transitional shelter programs, a long-term care home, and a community hub. GSR's strategic partnerships support strong built form and design, inter-governmental coordination, and social service investments into future projects while providing opportunities for the co-location of shelters, housing and other social services.

### LONG TERM

1. Use knowledge and experience from GSR to create a portfolio management team that will manage all shelter infrastructure, co-location, and inter-divisional projects.

### MEDIUM TERM

2. Evaluate the procurement, administration and partnerships of the GSR model that co-locates emergency and transitional shelter, a community hub, and long-term care programs. Use lessons learned to help prepare for future site decommissions and plan for the co-location of City programs and services in prospective new sites.

### SHORT TERM

3. Work with Infrastructure Ontario and relevant City divisions to award the contract for the new facility on George Street.
4. Develop the required transition site for the Managed Alcohol Program (MAP) currently at Seaton House.
5. Complete the transition plan, and close Seaton House and School House shelter site.

## 2.4 Office Modernization

Work spaces are being updated through [ModernTO](#), a new approach to the way the City designs and modernizes City-owned office spaces and strategically uses City real estate assets.

### MEDIUM TERM

1. Create a standardized process to include spaces for wellness, spiritual reflection and Indigenous practices within the designs of ModernTO, with a commitment to work with Indigenous and other communities of inclusion on any changes.

### SHORT TERM

2. Modernize all SSHA offices to meet ModernTO guidelines. Increase digital connectivity and plan for efficient use of City spaces that enable hybrid work.

## 2.5 Shelter Infrastructure Safety Planning

The system has observed significant changes related to the increased concentration of shelters, and heightened complexities related to mental health and substance use. The safety of clients, staff, and community members must be prioritized through robust safety planning to ensure supports are available to address complex safety needs.

### MEDIUM TERM

1. Implement a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) review across all sites as recommended through the Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines.

### SHORT TERM

2. Create a Shelter Infrastructure Safety Plan that provides a comprehensive lens of safety and security programs within shelters. This includes Community Safety Teams (CSTs) and security guards, safety infrastructure and equipment such as Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), and physical spaces for harm reduction, health supports and a safe way to secure personal belongings. Development of the Shelter Infrastructure Safety Plan should include listening to clients and people with lived experience on how to improve safety and security.
3. Develop a standardized process for the administration, tracking and monitoring of safety supports, and align safety initiatives within the larger framework of SafeTO, Toronto's 10-Year Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.
4. Expand mandatory trainings for CSTs, security guards and key vendors to include: Indigenous awareness, anti-Black racism, and working with diverse mental health and psychosocial needs.

## 3

### Provide Resilient and Sustainable Infrastructure

There is a recognized need to deliver on the principles of both resilient and green infrastructure throughout the City's shelter system. Extreme weather events can be particularly harmful to people experiencing homelessness and can cost the City millions of dollars in repair and damages. In addition, buildings, including shelters sites, are particularly high contributors to climate change, accounting for 58% of Toronto's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Although different areas of work, ensuring buildings are able to withstand extreme weather events while also being environmentally sustainable is essential for meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness during all weather scenarios and reducing impacts to climate change.

SSHA needs to facilitate the design, development, and maintenance of resilient, adaptable, energy efficient and environmentally sustainable homelessness infrastructure. This includes effective use of funding and efficient maintenance to ensure facilities are kept in a state of good repair to meet client needs, reduce long term costs, and prevent service disruptions. The City must plan to ensure the longevity and efficiency of capital resources and services to promote sustainability and stability within the shelter system.



### 3.1 Continuity Plan

Service disruptions are inevitable in any organization, but are particularly harmful in the shelter system. Planning for stability and service continuity in collaboration with shelter providers ensures operations can continue amidst future emergencies.

#### LONG TERM

1. Prepare a capital reserve fund for urgent repairs that can be used towards SOGR improvements each year to ensure state of good repair is actively maintained.

#### MEDIUM TERM

2. Create contingency plans for shelters and review feasibility for redundancies to help ensure key equipment can always run.

#### SHORT TERM

3. Develop an Asset Management Continuity Plan for shelters that specifically outlines operational roles and expectations of service providers. The process to handover site operations to a site operator should be mapped out and included in this plan.
4. Ensure the required amount of interim sites are available to support the relocation of clients while SOGR work is being completed.

### 3.2 Net Zero and Climate Resiliency

In 2021, City Council adopted the [TransformTO Net Zero Strategy](#) to achieve Net Zero GHG emissions by 2050. City Council also voted unanimously to accelerate these efforts, adopting a stronger emissions reduction target of Net Zero by 2040. To reduce the impact to climate change, the City must ensure shelter infrastructure is energy efficient and environmentally sustainable. Shelter infrastructure also needs to be resilient to reduce the impacts brought on by climate change. Efforts to ensure buildings are environmentally friendly while also being able to withstand extreme weather events should be proactively coordinated to minimize service disruptions. While there are upfront costs to pursue capital projects as zero-carbon from the planning stage, there are significant savings and benefits in the long term.

#### LONG TERM

1. Ensure SSHA meets the Net Zero requirement across the shelter system by 2040 and meets all associated target milestones.

#### MEDIUM TERM

2. Develop a Sustainability Practice for all shelter sites that includes a monitoring system to track Net Zero progress, and integrate Net Zero analyses into Building Condition Assessments (BCAs).
3. Work with the Environment and Climate Division to conduct a forecast to identify potential climate scenarios that Toronto can experience in the next 10 years to help plan for capital expenses and contingencies. A climate lens should be applied to the analysis to include a GHG impact assessment and climate risk assessment.

#### SHORT TERM

4. Ensure the required funding is available to ensure future projects can be pursued as zero-carbon from the planning stage.

### 3.3 Fleet Plan

Fleet vehicles have been used to support street outreach as well as the movement of clients and resources such as IT equipment between sites to maximize the safety and well-being of shelter residents, staff and visitors. While using fleet vehicles to transport shelter residents came to a halt during COVID-19, similar support may be required in the future for programs.

#### MEDIUM TERM

1. Work with Fleet Services to develop a Fleet Plan specific to shelter sites. The Fleet Plan should detail the costing and contracting of electric vehicles, the transition process to move to electric vehicles, strategic locations and geographic needs across Toronto, and multi-year maintenance plans for new vehicles.



## 4 Strengthen Communication and Community Relationships

Strong communication paves the path for successful relationship building and cultivates an atmosphere for meaningful engagement in order to support infrastructure projects. As the City's shelter system continues to shift in response to emerging needs, there is also a need to update engagement practices related to shelter infrastructure. When planned and executed effectively, the City's communication and engagement activities can bring diverse communities together, and help shift multiple viewpoints towards ensuring the continued success of shelter services. This will also facilitate the smooth introduction of new services into communities.

COVID-19 restrictions limited the City's ability to foster strong relationships and provide deep engagement with community members and partners. However, these limitations also created space to explore innovative methods to connect with people and increase the accessibility of information through virtual and online platforms. Community engagement practices should be reviewed and renewed to provide solution-focused mechanisms that promote community cohesion and also respond to the needs of shelter clients, staff, partners, and community members.

### 4.1 Improve Community Engagement

The City follows a [Council-approved, site-specific engagement process](#) for new shelters with local residents, businesses and Councillors, which shifts engagement from discussions focused on location to how communities can provide feedback and improve the successful integration of the new service into the community. This process emphasizes clearly communicating project information and encouraging solution-focused discussions. Engaging local community members on shelter decommissions, relocations, and openings helps achieve stability and support for shelter spaces in the community. Engagement processes should be updated to respond to the current needs of the shelter system. The [2022 Community Engagement Review](#) contained a number of recommendations, including improving how staff address discriminatory and prejudiced language towards people experiencing homelessness, including Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities, as well as other equity deserving groups who face added layers of discrimination.

#### MEDIUM TERM

1. Adapt existing engagement plans to address discrimination towards equity deserving groups. This includes specific plans to address anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism. Use Meeting in the Middle, the Reconciliation Action Plan, and the CABR Action Plan as a guide.
2. Provide learning and training opportunities for community members and businesses on de-escalation, homelessness and harm reduction.
3. Deepen partnerships with existing community and inter-governmental partners, and identify opportunities for new partnerships.

#### SHORT TERM

4. Clarify roles and responsibilities in community engagement processes for new shelter projects with all interested and affected parties and partners, including clearly defining where community members can provide input and participate in solution-focused discussions.
5. Establish and operationalize a Community Liaison Worker (CLW) community of practice to support networking, learning and sharing between CLWs, and support shelter operators with communication and engagement work.

# 5

## Clarify Responsibilities, Authority, and Decision Making

Currently, the homelessness service sector in Toronto exists as a mosaic of many teams, service providers, and interested and affected parties across the city providing a range of shelter and housing services. Given the extensiveness of the sector, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the roles and expectations between the City, community partners and other levels of government. It is important to coordinate with other key divisions such as the Housing Secretariat, CREM and CreateTO to ensure adequate space is available to those who currently need it.

As outlined in the [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#), while housing is the ultimate solution for homelessness, shelters are necessary for people who are in immediate need of shelter. Funding from the provincial and federal levels of government is critical to ensure both these objectives can be met.

### 5.1 Emergency Shelter Development Process

In December 2017, City Council approved a new [Emergency Shelter Development Process \(ESDP\)](#). The ESDP was aimed at updating the shelter development process to be nimbler and more efficient, and to strengthen the City's ability to quickly secure properties in Toronto's competitive real estate market. While this process has been effective in the acquisition of permanent new shelters pre-pandemic, it has been challenging to apply during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet the rapid increase in demand for shelter space.

#### MEDIUM TERM

1. Revisit the ESDP and identify ways to update and strengthen the process to ensure the City is able to meet the pressure to quickly acquire and develop shelters sites.
2. Work with shelter operators to develop a consistent and transparent process for selecting operators for new sites.

### 5.2 Infrastructure Business Enhancement

The City is undertaking a business enhancement initiative to bring the management of assets and properties within the shelter portfolio together to create better interdivisional alignment and outcomes. The objective is to create greater effectiveness and efficiency while clearly defining key roles and responsibilities. The City will work with Indigenous partners in a distinct way that builds capacity and supports the Indigenous community to ensure they are well resourced to manage their assets.

#### MEDIUM TERM

1. Review and ensure that the Asset Management Strategy is aligned with the [City of Toronto Corporate Asset Management Policy](#).

#### SHORT TERM

2. Clarify authorities and responsibilities for asset management with all staff and partner organizations, in alignment with recommendations from the Auditor General. Develop a responsibilities matrix for asset management that is included in operating agreements.
3. Develop consistent leases and licenses for the maintenance of City-owned properties by purchase of service (POS) operators.
4. Work with Indigenous partners to develop a distinct process for the management of assets, and support their ability to conduct BCAs and SOGR work.
5. Work with other levels of government to maximize SOGR funding for POS-owned sites.



## 6 Strengthen the Collection, Management, and Analysis of Infrastructure Data

Creating and fostering an environment of collecting, analyzing, validating, and regularly sharing shelter data and information is critical to understanding and responding to the needs of people experiencing homelessness. This includes working toward ensuring fidelity to culturally sensitive and appropriate research methods and models.

Currently, a significant amount of data is collected on the City's shelter system, but the framework and tools to connect this data and tell a complete story of the work is needed. In particular, infrastructure data needs to be better linked to other research and data analysis within SSHA to help achieve recovery and stability in the shelter system. In addition to the City's own shelter-related data, reviewing other jurisdictional approaches to shelter infrastructure development will help the City learn about and implement best practices. This is especially important following the COVID-19 pandemic and assessing the effectiveness of emergency responses to shelter infrastructure.

### 6.1 Data Collection, Monitoring, Evaluation and Sharing

The City is working to increase and improve the collection of data to monitor and analyze shelter infrastructure performance and needs. This includes the recent implementation of the Asset Planner software to better understand the physical conditions of the City's assets and make more informed decisions on capital and maintenance needs. The City should work to enhance data related to shelter development, closures, and engagement, and align with the Divisional Data Strategy.

#### LONG TERM

1. Integrate documentation and data from Asset Planner into divisional datasets to ensure infrastructure-related data is used for planning and decision-making.

#### MEDIUM TERM

2. Track budgets and per diem rates to bring clarity to SOGR work and associated costs. Budgets must accommodate the increased complexity of shelter design and construction processes.
3. Develop metrics to assess the impact of shelter design on shelter clients that aligns with the Divisional Data Strategy. This includes developing metrics in areas including dignity, privacy, and shelter resident satisfaction.

#### SHORT TERM

4. Review current data collection and develop a framework to improve data collection and analysis. Include a process to regularly report infrastructure data to help make evidence-informed decisions and the development of future iterations of the HSCIS.

### 6.2 Research and Learning from Other Jurisdictions

The COVID-19 pandemic and response was unprecedented, both within the City of Toronto and in other municipalities around the world. This situation has now led to an opportunity to evaluate measures taken and review the approaches of other jurisdictions to better understand what worked well and what can be improved. This will help the City determine the best way to support recovery and stability in the shelter system, and to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic.

## SHORT TERM

1. Continue to conduct jurisdictional scans to identify learnings of COVID-19 responses and other shelter infrastructure strategies from major North American municipalities.
2. Use learnings from other jurisdictions to evaluate, compare, and improve the approach to shelter development and asset management after the pandemic.

## 6.3 Technological Solutions

New and innovative technology will help the City collect and analyze shelter-related data to better understand the shelter system and the needs of people experiencing homelessness, while also improving efficiency in its management of capital infrastructure and related assets.

## MEDIUM TERM

1. Investigate and implement technological solutions for project management for all aspects of shelter life cycles, including site closures.
2. Invest in new or upgrade existing technology that improves data collection, including the Shelter Management Information System (SMIS).

## SHORT TERM

3. Review opportunities to consolidate and optimize software approaches, including sharing interdivisional information on capital and asset management projects.
4. Technological solutions for data collection, record keeping, architectural and infrastructure planning, and automated dashboards should be reviewed and upgraded to improve the efficiency of capital infrastructure operations.

## Conclusion

The City of Toronto's shelter system provides vital spaces and services to people experiencing homelessness. Having adequate shelter space remains critical to providing a pathway for people experiencing homelessness to access housing. In order to ensure homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring, there is great need to invest in the shelter system now to be able to fill the gap for people who are in immediate need of housing while new housing opportunities are being developed.

The focus of this Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy is on transitioning from an emergency COVID-19 response, to a long-term proactive approach to homelessness that supports the recovery and stability of the shelter system. This includes the transition from a system with primarily temporary shelter spaces, towards a system with permanent purpose-built spaces that can respond to the evolving needs of Toronto's homelessness sector. Guided by six Foundational Goals, the City aims to do this work in a way that prioritizes infrastructure needs, builds resilience, strengthens relationships, defines roles, and continues to gather information and learn in order to foster the dignity and well-being of shelter residents, staff and the broader community. This includes the City's commitment to doing this work through the lens of reconciliation and confronting anti-Black racism.

The City of Toronto is profoundly thankful to the many people that contributed to this Strategy. It will be reviewed again in 2027 with the next iteration released in 2028. Moving forward, it will be critical for the City to continue to work with community partners and other levels of government to ensure all those without housing have access to indoor emergency shelter spaces and shelter services that support them along their journey.



