

TO: **Planning and Housing Committee**

DATE: Thursday, November 25, 2021

RE: **HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan – 2021 Annual Progress Update (Item PH29.6)**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today to share our support for the Progress Update before you today and the priorities it, and the full *HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan: 2020-2021 Progress Update* attached to it, identifies for next steps.

My name is Kira Heineck, and I am the Executive Director of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH.) The TAEH is a collective impact initiative made up of Community Partners focussed on systems changes and housing and support solutions to make homelessness in Toronto rare, brief, and non-recurring.

We are also pleased today for the chance to acknowledge the quite remarkable progress made in the last year towards the goals of HousingTO. I say remarkable as these gains came despite the unique challenges that the pandemic created for the City of Toronto in general, and for delivering housing and homelessness services in particular.

During what is National Housing Week, it is worth noting – and encouraging to all of us – that today’s staff report reminds us that almost 1,500 new supportive homes for people experiencing homelessness will be created by the end of 2022. We sincerely congratulate staff at all the divisions that made this possible, all of you for your leadership through this committee, the ECDC and Mayor Tory and City Council as a whole.

The TAEH also welcomes the new delivery framework to oversee the implementation of the HousingTO Plan referenced in the report. This is a strategic shift in how the City plans and delivers housing and homelessness services, reinforcing the focus on housing solutions and will support enhanced outcomes. It can not be overstated how important it was that City Council directed the pivot towards housing and support responses to homelessness in Toronto last year and we will continue to support you and your fellow Councillors in staying the course.

Today’s report also rightly states that, of course, there is much more to be done. The results of the 2021 Street Needs Assessment tell us that homelessness continues to be a crisis. Encampments of people experiencing homelessness, even with the progress made in recent months in reducing these through intensified Housing First services led by Streets to Homes and community partners, continue to keep people at risk. People from equity-deserving groups are unacceptably overrepresented amongst those experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. And we are all waiting for the other shoe to drop as the economic impact, including evictions, of COVID-19 manifests itself, and asylum and refugee claimants are again – rightly – welcomed across our borders.

One thing that should have been done already, and after significant and deep work by the City and community stakeholders that the Alliance was disappointed did not is the approval of the *New Regulatory Framework for Multi-tenant Houses*, recommend by this committee to Council earlier this fall. This is a missed opportunity, and we will continue to advocate for, and work with the City, to make this long overdue improvement happen in 2022.

Looking forward, we offer the following comments and recommendations regarding the priorities for HousingTO in 2022:

1 - Increasing the supply of people-focused supportive housing is absolutely the right thing to do. This committee understands all the evidence-based reasons why and we need your leadership to continue to promote and invest in this approach in Toronto, and with other orders of government.

The TAEH will continue to advocate along side the City to our provincial and federal governments on the necessary increase of their funding roles, and on the inter-governmental changes needed to the distribution of tax revenues and jurisdictional powers that allow the City of Toronto and other municipalities in Ontario to allocate funds to local priorities.

At the same time, we strongly believe that the City has to develop and a new role for itself in the creation and delivery of more supportive housing. This includes:

- **Investing more deeply in an enhanced, person-focused Housing First model** that delivers the unique set of services and income-supports that each person needs. Recent success in such an enhanced approach to working with people in encampments to directly move into permanent housing shows that it works.
- **Creating and funding a Toronto supportive housing operating model.** The TAEH has had some success in bringing our provincially funded supportive housing partners to the table to ensure the creation of supportive housing in the new modular buildings as this report notes. But this is not a sustainable approach and cannot fill the gap that a real “made-in-Toronto” operating program can. In addition, many TAEH partners have the expertise to deliver support services alongside housing but are not in receipt of provincial funding to do so. With a City funded operating model they could. To that end, the Alliance remains committed to our work with the Housing Secretariat to help develop proposals for such a model.
- **Investing in more income-side supports.** We simply must find a way to create more housing allowances and rent supplements, including with additional City funds. The new 2021 Street Needs Assessment data show that 80% of respondents report the most important services to help them find housing were those related to increasing housing affordability and income. We also know from shelter use data that over two-thirds of people that use the shelter system every year are there due to income issues and often access housing again with income-side assistance to cover their rent.

There is no way to avoid this much longer, and we urge you and your fellow Councillors to seriously consider this role for Toronto. We are aware of the important inter-governmental context and implications of the City stepping up to do more in creating supportive housing with its own resources. We pledge to work with you to support City leadership with its own modest investments in enhanced Housing First services, a supportive housing operating model, and additional, City-funded housing allowances, and to, at the same time develop and advocate for policy and funding changes with the other orders of government. Our role with the Toronto Supportive Housing Growth Plan, with its identification of actions for all orders of government, is one significant asset in this area.

2 – Scaling up the supply of purpose-build affordable rental home is also critical. The new Vacant Home Tax will help as will leveraging the work outlined in this report to further enhance the capacity of the non-profit sector to develop affordable rental homes through the Open Door and Housing Now programs. Monitoring the impact of the new income-based definition of affordable housing is also important.

3 - Developing the City’s first Housing Data Strategy is essential. The Alliance is glad to see this noted as a priority and will do our part to make it a reality. The experience and results to date of the Coordinated Access data work and the real-time Shelter Flow Data Dashboard with SSHA underscores how important good data is to better deliver services and outcomes and having a strategy for housing data will only enhance both areas. Doing so will also allow for better progress on the other priorities identified in today’s report, and which the TAEH

whole-heartedly endorses: supporting equity-deserving groups and climate resilience; and continuing to help renters. The Supportive Housing Growth Plan also identifies data strategies as key to our collective success and we will continue to support the City's work through its implementation as well.

4 - Intentionally leveraging assets in the shelter system to create more supportive housing must also be included in the priorities for the coming years. The *2022 Shelter Infrastructure Plan* approved by Council earlier this month includes actions in this area that we urge the HousingTO action plan to prioritize. It is worth noting that the Toronto Shelter Network and the Homes First Society released just yesterday options to do so through their *Shelter Conversion Project*.

5 - Immediately set up the City's Housing Commissioner and requisite office and resources so that this long overdue, and essential, part of realizing the right to housing embedded in HousingTO and committed to by Council in 2019 is finally underway.

On a personal note, I am glad to have this opportunity to express my appreciation of the progress of HousingTO to date. I am a member of the Action Plan's Advisory Committee and as such was part of developing the overall plan. It meant a lot when the City adopted HousingTO, including its commitment to housing as a human right and supportive housing, and its vision of homelessness being rare, brief, and non-recurring in Toronto. And I am honoured to be able to continue, through the TAEH and as a citizen of our city, to work on its success.

CONCLUSION

The Alliance agrees with today's report's statement that:

As all orders of government move towards a post-pandemic recovery, accelerated and enhanced investments in housing will not only help to address long-standing systemic and structural inequities which have impacted the housing, health and socio-economic outcomes of equity-deserving groups, they will also help increase the resilience of health, housing and homelessness systems. In addition, these investments will create employment opportunities to boost our economic recovery and support climate resilience efforts helping us to 'build back better'.

The time to act is now. There is no doubt that increasing investments, staying the course on housing solutions to homelessness and establishing the Housing Commissioner will leverage exponential results from the significant funding commitments and policy changes made over the last 20 months and bring us closer to our shared vision of a good home for every Torontonians.

The TAEH recognizes this committee's and Council's actions in all areas of HousingTO and values our partnerships with the Housing Secretariat, SSHA and other City divisions and looks forward to continuing to work together.

Thank you,

Kira Heineck, Executive Lead

416-529-7521

kira.heineck@taeh.ca