



TO: Budget Committee

DATE: Tuesday, January 17, 2023

RE: Public Presentations on the 2023 Capital and Operating Budgets City Hall (BV2.1)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to share TAEH's input into Toronto's 2023 budget. The TAEH is a network of over 100 partners reaching across the city, all united in the vision – a vision we share with the City - of making homelessness in Toronto rare, brief, and non-recurring. We also serve as your non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair the Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum with the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) and the Housing Secretariat.

It has been a particularly hard past few years, and the effects are felt evermore deeply on people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, today. Just yesterday, the Toronto Star noted the unprecedented rise in the use of foodbanks in our city, and as your own budget launch presentation made very clear, the demand on emergency shelters and deeply affordable housing, with or without supports, is also only rising.

The fall out of the pandemic also profoundly effects the City of Toronto's financial state of course, and it is encouraging to see that despite this your first 2023 budget priority is, in fact, to maintain front-line services including shelters. As is the prioritization of investing more in housing of a variety of types throughout both the budget language and in the proposed budgets of SSHA and the Housing Secretariat.

The Alliance urges this Committee to protect these proposals, and recommends some additional actions to further support preventing and ending homelessness. At the same time, we recognize that the City cannot do this alone, and that the governments of Ontario and Canada must contribute more to balance the financial burden on Toronto. Critically, this includes \$97 million in federal funding support for refugee response and provincial investment in the outstanding \$48 million for current supportive housing and additional funding for future supportive housing. As all governments have a role to play we also actively advocate to the Ontario and federal governments to fund their share of inter-governmental responsibilities.

Election Pledge to End Homelessness

During the election campaign last October, many Councillors signed the TAEH's Pledge to End Homelessness (appended below). This includes three Budget Committee members, the Chairs of both the Economic and Community Development and the Planning and Housing Committees, and Mayor Tory. We remind you of this today as the 2023 City Budget is a critical opportunity to act on your pledged commitment to increase City budget allocations to properly fund the City divisions and community agencies responsible for housing and homelessness services to deliver fully on existing and new strategies. And to ensure increased monthly housing outcomes as noted below.

TAEH Priorities for the 2023 City Budget

1 – Investments in housing and services that prevent and end homelessness. As noted above, the budget documents to date do show an increased commitment to the priority of both emergency and permanent solutions to homelessness. They must be properly resourced through this budget so that they are truly effective, and therefore the TAEH urges you to protect the recommended budgets of both SSHA and the Housing Secretariat. This includes the welcomed enhancements to the EPIC program, the increases in the TCHC operating budget, the funds required to implement the legalization of multitenant homes and the almost \$1 billion for housing initiatives in the Capital Plan.

In support of this priority the Alliance recommends the following:

- **Dedicate the new Vacant Housing Tax to deliver housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.**

It is positive that the Vacant Housing Tax is now in place and is noted as a key initiative in the 2023 budget. It is our strong recommendation that the funds raised through the Vacant Housing Tax be dedicated to enhancing the City's ability to increase housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. Using revenue from one of the causes of Toronto's housing affordability crisis to do so makes perfect sense. These funds can effectively be used to achieve the commitment in the TAEH pledge to reach a minimum of 500 permanent housing outcomes each month, for example. We encourage this Committee and Council to explore creating a new portable housing benefit with these funds as one way to do so.

- **Ensure enough funding to maintain current shelter system capacity.**

Although shelters, as a band-aid solution, will never end homelessness, the TAEH supports the items in the proposed budgets from SSHA and the Housing Secretariat to maintain an emergency shelter system that meets the incredible current demand. It is clear that we are in a critical moment with the number of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness only growing. In so doing, we also recommend that shelter investments further best practices in Housing First program models and built form.

We also strongly encourage the City to invest more deeply to support housing outcomes in the shelter-hotel programs. These hotels cannot close when there is no where else for people to go, and the 2023 budget must allocate enough funding to ensure that people move to appropriate housing before they do. This is especially critical for youth currently in the hotel program slated to close this April – a closure that risks leaving the youth sector with 131 beds less than even before COVID-19. This is an unacceptable decrease of approximately one-third of the dedicated youth beds in Toronto. Youth are amongst the most vulnerable of those experiencing homelessness and ensuring good housing outcomes for them is also the best thing we can do to reduce inflow into adult homelessness.

- **Enhance investments in supportive housing.**

As noted above, the current budget proposal does prioritize supportive housing, which is encouraging and will reduce, overtime, expenditures needed for shelter and related services.

The TAEH's *Toronto Supportive Housing Growth Plan*, developed by supportive housing providers in Toronto, lays out a strategic plan for all orders of government to do their part. In our work to achieve the goals of this Plan, including supporting the City's own target of 20,000 new supportive housing units as part of the 2020-2030 Housing TO Action Plan, we continue to advocate to the province for the outstanding \$48 million needed to maintain supports in the 2000+ supportive housing units already built by Toronto, for increased, predictable funding and, most importantly, for enough funding to ensure everyone in Toronto who needs it has the supports they need.

At the same time, we also need Toronto to do everything it can, and strongly urge this Committee to look for ways in the 2023 Budget to increase its own role in creating more supportive housing. This mean investing more in options including shelter conversions, additional modular buildings, capital grants for regular construction, identifying vacant city properties for retrofitting, and considering requiring all development projects receiving City incentives to include a set minimum of units for supportive housing. We also reiterate our recommendation for a new City fund for rent supplements and/or housing benefits to increase the ability of people experiencing homelessness to access the rental market where they can then receive support in their own homes.

- **Continue to allocate 20% of all funding for housing and homelessness programs to For Indigenous, By Indigenous housing projects and homelessness initiatives.**

This is an important practice that the Alliance commends the City in introducing and maintaining. Indigenous peoples are well over-represented in Toronto's homelessness population and allocating a certain percentage of all funding to For Indigenous, By Indigenous housing is absolutely necessary in righting this wrong. We also encourage the City to continue to work with the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board to increase this allocation to 30% to properly reflect the percentage of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness and to continue efforts in reconciliation.

- **Ensure the Housing Secretariat is adequately funded to do its job.**

As one of the largest municipalities in North America, delivering the second largest social housing program, it is essential that the Housing Secretariat has the staff and resources it needs to meet the demands of Toronto. This is also an important investment in moving towards realizing the right to housing in our city.

- **Protect the increase in funding for Toronto's Shelter Management Information System (SMIS).**

The TAEH has long been a champion of SSHA's increased data capacity in developing and delivering the Coordinated Access System to Housing and Supports. This is supported by SMIS, and it is essential that it continues to be enhanced to support evidence-based decision making for both individual and systems level progress in making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

2 – Invest in the community-based service providers.

We are pleased to see the additional \$7 million proposed in the SSHA budget for the purchase of service shelter operators to address funding disparities between them and City operated shelters as part of a longer-term plan to address funding differences.

Community-based shelter and housing providers struggle with unfilled positions, staff turnover and with rising numbers of clients to support are finding it challenging to attract and retain qualified staff. We

also encourage you to support future increases as supported by SSHA's longer-term plan to achieve salary parity and equalizing funding allocations across all community-based providers so that they can all be effectively resourced to deliver client and housing focused services.

3 – Increase the City's ability to serve people with Developmental Disabilities.

With up to one-third of people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, in Toronto having a developmental disability, it is time for Toronto to define its commitment to this population as well. This means working with the Developmental Services (DS) housing and service providers more closely on strategies and developing a budget target for dedicated funding to increase access to appropriate housing units and housing benefits.

TAEH is currently leading an engagement project with the DS sector and the non-DS housing and shelter providers in Toronto to work more closely and effectively together to meet mutual goals in preventing and ending homelessness, and we will continue to include SSHA and the Housing Secretariat in opportunities to support increased outcomes for people with developmental disabilities. One possible recommendation we are exploring is future budget allocations of a minimum of 5% for housing and services in this area.

Conclusion

We simply have to end chronic homelessness, thereby reaching the goal of homelessness being rare, brief, and non-recurring in Toronto.

Another commitment in the Pledge to End Homelessness noted above is to provide the public with a plan that shows how it will be done within a specific timeline. TAEH partners are ready to work hand-in-hand with you to develop and implement such a plan.

We believe all levels of government have a part to play, but people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, cannot wait while governments point fingers – nor can the rest of us wait for the benefits we would all reap from living in a city that has met its obligations to its residents to ensure they are adequately, healthily, and affordably housed.

If senior levels of government will not step up, Toronto has the obligation to do so. And the TAEH will cheer you on and stand beside you as you send them the bill for the revenue increases necessary to get this done.

Thank you, Kira Heineck - Executive Director - kira@taeh.ca

TAEH Steering Committee

Canadian Mental Health Association -Toronto ● John Howard Society – Toronto ● Community Living Toronto
Loft Community Services ● COTA ● Madison Community Services ● Covenant House Toronto ● The Access
Point ● Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services ● Toronto Developmental Services Alliance ● Fife House ●
United Way of Greater Toronto ● Fred Victor Centre ● Wellesley Institute ● Homes First Society ●
WoodGreen Community Services ● Houselink & Mainstay Community Housing

Appendix

TAEH Pledge To End Homelessness

During the October 2023 Municipal Election, The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness asked all candidates to commit to:

1. Making ending homelessness through housing solutions a top City priority in the coming term.

2. A minimum housing access target for people experiencing homelessness.

In order to start reducing homelessness, more people have to obtain housing each month than the number of people becoming homeless. Therefore, this target must reflect the current Shelter Flow Data, and can be met with a combination of tools including housing allowances (also known as rent supplements) and creating new deeply affordable and supportive housing through acquisitions, conversions and building new homes.

Since January 2020 940 people have entered Toronto's shelter system, on average, every month. And only 299 people, on average, moved into permanent housing.

To ensure that we start to create more outflow than inflow into homelessness, we need an initial minimum target of 500 people securing housing each month while also increasing resources allocated towards prevention and diversion that would reduce the number of people becoming homeless.

3. Increase financial resources to making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring through the establishment of a dedicated fund.

Our new Council must demonstrate its commitment to ending homelessness by accelerating the current Council direction to invest intentionally in sustainable, affordable, and supportive housing solutions.

Establishing a dedicated fund focusses City investments meant to address homelessness, and more effectively measure investments to outcomes. Revenue for this fund could come from increased City budget allocations or from a new revenue stream dedicated to creating more housing access for people experiencing homelessness. Options include allocating Toronto's Vacant Home Tax or a portion of development fees exclusively to this goal or adding a new 1% levy to property taxes to end homelessness.

Fulfilling this commitment also includes increasing City budget allocations to properly fund the City divisions and community agencies responsible for housing and homelessness services to deliver fully on existing and new strategies.

4. Ensure that 30% of all targets and resources are allocated to For Indigenous, By Indigenous housing strategies.

Indigenous people are over-represented in the homelessness population in Toronto as a result of ongoing colonization, cultural genocide, intergenerational trauma, and institutional and structural racism. Policies and practices implemented by colonial governments continue fall short in addressing

and mitigating the disproportionate impact of poverty and homelessness on Indigenous communities, and ending Indigenous homelessness requires solutions that are led by, and created for, Indigenous people.

Toronto's new Council must uphold the inherent right to self-determination outlined in the [Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan](#), and commit to resourcing strategies to end Indigenous homelessness that are rooted in Indigenous holistic worldviews that include the 12 Dimensions of Indigenous Homelessness articulated in [Reframing the Discussion: An Indigenous Definition of Homelessness](#) by Jesse Thistle (2017).

An effective strategy for ending Indigenous homelessness must include setting tangible goals for reducing Indigenous homelessness by following, and reporting to, Indigenous leadership to increase the availability of multi-year funding opportunities dedicated to culturally safe support services and Indigenous service providers. This includes guaranteeing 30% of capital funding allocation of the federal Rapid Housing Initiative is dedicated to supporting the creation of affordable homes by Indigenous organizations and ensuring that 20% of grant funding is provided to Indigenous organizations.

5. Create a new Advisory Committee on ending homelessness.

Council Advisory Bodies may be established by City Council at any time to provide advice to City Council and assist its decision-making. This creates a more focused and accountable forum for problem-solving and monitoring progress, bringing community sector experts together with City Councillors. Chaired by a Councillor and reporting to a Council Committee, this advisory committee can assist in developing recommendation to Council.

6. Developing a Toronto Ending Homelessness Plan.

A dedicated plan to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring is needed and will create additional accountability to meet established targets and timelines. This must be done in partnership with community experts, and people with lived experience and the process established and funded by early 2023.