

## Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service System Planning Forum January 11, 2023

**Date and time:** January 11, 2023; 10:00am – 12:00pm

**Zoom:** <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81861085583>

### 1. Introduction and Housekeeping

### 2. Land Recognition (Savhanna Joy, TAEH)

### 3. SSHA Items and Updates – Update from Trish Lenz on shelter system flow data (SSHA)

- See slide deck / presentation

- **Q:** Is there any data about what systems people were utilizing that supported outflow of shelter system? Was it through units directly offered? Rent Café? Coordinated Access?
- **A (Trish):** I should be able to come back with that. We should pull from SMIS data. It is a big database of population level data. We can look at coordinated access program and other places. There are many ways people move through to permanent housing. Some is through the city and others are through people's own resiliency.

### 4. Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan Update 2023 – Update from Tarik Bacchus

See slide deck / presentation

- **Q:** I note that in the budget documents 25% of money (\$3 million) is missing from the shelter budget. The City is assuming funds will come from province or feds. How much of transition plan is impacted by that? Quite a few of us have experienced staff loss to the City due to the George Street Revitalization (GSR) program. The City has a shortfall in the budget for opening its own sites which is more expensive than a community organization shelter. Seaton House is 2-3x cost per person.
- **A (Tarik):** The questions are a bit beyond the scope of what I can speak to. I can speak to the decommissioning plan – what we have to make sure it balances. Submitted budgets do balance; however, we can do better with more. To operate the site, there is a cost. To exit a site, there is a cost. Settling the restoration amounts back with hotel operators where they left off. That is a piece of it. Working with our Corporate Real Estate Management colleagues may not allow us to continue. We may get restoration costs to the point of staff loss and operating POS rather than DOS; I can't speak directly to that. I know that there is a commitment that Gord has made to work with providers towards parity between wages and benefits and supports for DOS and POS. This will be a multi-year process. There are budget pressures but money is set aside to work towards that.

- **Q:** From your experience with hotels that have closed, I heard that it is not enough. Is there any consideration from city to revise that time period / notice period? If you haven't received a notice by now, will the hotel be open to next year? For people going through this process, what is most challenging when closing the hotels? What has been the worst experience? I want to prepare psychologically for when our team needs to close a site.
- **A (Tarik):** There is acknowledgement that as much notice as possible is what is required. Given that we are before council to confirm authorities, you are as safe as you could possibly be regarding closures. I don't have any indication from landlords it won't continue. If that changes, it has operational, sector impacts. One of the big pieces we learned through a politicized closing is to keep work separate from the politics/media. From what we have heard from providers, there are usually only a few residents that are challenging. For the majority of residents, they collaborate with staff and try to have good outcomes. When other folks join the conversation, they may have good intentions but perhaps not the best information. They leverage other things that can be very dangerous for clients and staff in terms of these closures.
- **A (Patricia):** I just feel that the thing that you need to be prepared for is the activists taking on a campaign that the city or operator is closing the site down. But, it is the hotel closing it. We had one demonstration that was a riot where activists invaded the hotel lobby and frightened clients and staff. This was at the downtown location on the Esplanade. Homes First received a lot of hate mail and hate twitter that is very upsetting to the people who are the victims of it. I have had to clean out my voicemail 2-3 different times. Activists left derogatory messages. They were demanding the firing of staff and demanding certain actions. We have done other closures with no repercussions. I suggest develop a plan for sites where activists would venture into extreme measures with harassment and criminal actions. Media was supporting activists; disappointed in the media. Be prepared for misinformation to be out there. Some of the outliers in your residents may be the individuals who are easy to house and may even have housing. There was a column of people that melted away; there were family reunifications. There were drug dealers who claimed to be homeless to access a market within their reach. It is important to figure out a plan for that. Those are things for people to be aware of. Don't be afraid to call someone who has gone through it
- **A (Tarik):** There are some sites where there is zero media and almost zero social engagement. It is really dependent on circumstances of site.
- **Comment:** From the shelter operator community engagement perspective, it would be helpful to have intentional and increased conversations with SSHA around approaches to activist engagement. A more collaborative approach. We used to have more coordinated engagement meetings with SSHA. If we were to start having those meetings again so that we could have some key messages and coordinated approaches so that the operator doesn't feel that they hold the burden or the abuse. We can ideally channel some of the energy that activists have. We all want housing for folks. How do we channel that?
- **Comment:** All that being said, there are things to learn about engaging with residents and good communication. People who are asserting their rights in the process are not

'outliers'. They are trying to benefit their own position and their position in the sites. They express concerns, worries, etc. and do some monitoring of individual outcomes while site closures are happening. People want to take care of each other instead of vilifying it.

- **Q:** Some of the activists are people who have been or who are currently clients.

## 5. **Housing Secretariat Items and Updates** (Valesa Faria, Director, Housing Policy & Strategy, Housing Secretariat)

- Representatives from Housing Secretariat at the meeting also included Andalee Adamali (Management Consultant), Matt Hilder (Manager of Program Management) and Sarah Blackstock (Project Director Director)
- Refer to slide deck presentation delivered by Matt Hilder
- **Q:** You mentioned work done by HS around choice-based. I was wondering about work done to increase uptake for at-risk communities. Chronic homelessness and people with intersecting challenges are having challenges and this is being downloaded to community organizations. Second question of city wide zoning by-law pieces which is around rooming house as new zoning is put in and some landlords decide they aren't able to meet requirements. What are the City's plans to support closure?
- **A (Matt):** In the Mayor's action plan, it includes permitting multi-tenant homes throughout the city. It talks about what can go up in areas and increasing the options around a variety of housing stock in majorly single detached home neighbourhoods. It is a very good point regarding multi-tenant homes. One key action item for HS is to develop a program to help landlords around affordability and supply as we work to protect safety. This is a priority for us. We are already starting work to start program to protect stock.

On the access piece, it would be good to have the appropriate HS team come and deliver a presentation on that. There are a lot of things around access to housing and pathways to housing. I do know that there have been changes about how people are prioritized through CB. There is an effort to improve pathways for those that are most vulnerable and other equity deserving groups.

- **Q:** Very interested in hearing about the plan. I didn't hear anything about the impacts of Bill 123. I am assuming that there is further analysis. There are also changes at CMHC. It has changed some thinking because co investment isn't viable. Curious about acronym HART. Few folks that are getting referred through the program that are struggling through the housing. They may be evicted because of problems. I am wondering about what to do. If they are struggling so fundamentally about being housed independently, what do we do about individuals like that? Will this new team / table be helpful?
- **A (Valesa):** There is a devastating impact of Bill 123 - \$130 million to shelter and housing programs. In November, the City was vocal about the impacts of Bill 123 and that if we aren't made whole, we wouldn't be able to deliver programs bringing new supply. The

Minister responded to say that they would do the audit and depending on audit, the city will be made whole. We are hopeful that those commitments will come to fruition and we will be reimbursed for the \$130 million in loss revenues. With respect to the national housing strategy and co investment caps, this is a big concern. CMHC has capped the co-investment fund to build new housing to \$25,000 per door when the actual cost is around \$150,000 per door. We have continued to meet with senior staff at CMHC. There has been political advocacy as well highlighting that if these caps aren't addressed and other areas across the country where it is expensive to build. There have been a few meetings with the Minister to highlight these concerns. We are currently in a sit back and wait scenario. Changes to CMHC programs will be announced shortly. We are getting ready to put in a request to the province and feds and that will be a big request to amend programs to ensure the level of funding is adequate to deliver housing needed. Third question about there being a triaging table. We have worked with SDFA and SPIDER and they continue to deal with vulnerable residents with respect to hoarding and bed bugs. We will be looking to see if SPIDER will be part of HART or some parts will be. If someone is experiencing evictions, etc. we will be looking for advice around this table. The expectations will be high for this table with limited access of funding. HART will work with the EPIC program in terms of providing grants. Working with legal clinic. Improve service delivery as it relates to tenants and helping us work closely with providers to deal with those issues.

- **Q:** One of the things we have noticed is that some of the staffing turnover in shelters is around affordability of housing. Staff leave jobs and Toronto because they can't afford housing. \$1400 for one bedroom is not realistic. Affordable housing and not just supportive housing are needed. The average market rent has changed so dramatically. We may have affordable housing apply to folks earning up to \$80,000.
- **A (Valesa):** The City adopted a new affordable housing definition which is 80% of average market rent. From a regulatory perspective, we need to figure out what we can do as the City. There is still work to be done there. As you know provincial legislation trumps the city. We may need to follow the province but may need to enhance affordability through housing benefits.
- **Q:** You mention land opportunities with school boards. Is there any work being done to expand to universities and colleges because they often have large chunks of land? When looking at available properties, are you exploring integrating housing into schools? There are condo developments in Chicago, New York and Houston that offer developments of CHCs, fire and paramedics. There could be non-profits; there are a certain amount of floors that are not useful for residential but could be for a not-for-profit daycare. Are we looking at that in a broader sense? Are there any studies about availability of office spaces that could be converted to housing? We know that there is a lot of office space that isn't being used. A lot of private companies will continue with that. Has the city thought of seeing if it is viable or how it would work?
- **A (Valesa):** We are working with school boards and post-secondary education institutions and will see the post-secondary education working group. The intent is to look at how we get the housing for students and faculty. We could ask if they could include affordable housing as part of their master plans. With respect to optimizing

density on sites, there is a fire station with housing on top. There was Council direction on that. With Housing TO, we look at building along with a range of services and commercial uses. It is about building complete communities and optimizing the land. In terms of office conversions, the City is looking at that. We find that floor plates in Toronto are not conducive to cost effective conversions. It is part of the work we are looking at. However, we haven't found opportunities that are quick or cost effective.

- **Q:** Question around work for housing. The Board of Trade 2018 report may be good to revisit and talk about updating it with the social supportive housing world.
- **A (Valesa):** Great suggestion and probe at future meetings.

#### **Comments from chat box:**

- The other change is that nfs's cannot use their land as a value in the budget. Would some type of worker housing be an area of investigation for the HS?
- I would support working on worker housing. It's an area we are interested in working in partnership with other providers on.
- **Matt Hilder:** We have some material from our Housing Now initiative and as part of the updated definition of affordable housing work that looks at how these rent levels relate to specific professions/workers and incomes. We can share around
- Would be interesting to do a review at other sectors/areas which facilitate housing for their workforce.

Matt Hilder has provided some existing material:

- [The City website on the proposed new definition of affordable housing](#) has information under the 'Defining Affordability' tab, as well as in the presentation materials under 'Meetings & Events'
- The workforce housing research report by Toronto Region Board of Trade which David Reycraft mentioned can be found here: <https://workforcehousing.trbot.ca/>
- Office space conversion is happening in Calgary.

#### **6. Toronto Public Library – Rahma Hashi**

- See slide presentation
- **Q:** In terms of booking a librarian, would access to housing be something librarians could help with?
- **A:** The access to housing has happened. But we aren't able to help them fill out information due to confidential information. We can direct them to the site and do some tech troubleshooting sometimes. But there isn't capacity to book a librarian to do the particular form.

#### **7. TAEH updates**

- After notes from SSHA on the forum, Savhanna will send follow up email and survey link. The survey will ask for a little bit of feedback and how often you attend the forum, topics you would like to see, whether your agency would be interested in presenting and anything else you would like to share. There are 30-40 minutes scheduled for the sector to provide updates and offer amplification of concerns and collaborate on successes you may want to share. The opportunities are broad and wide. The Housing Secretariat will also be starting a co-chairing role. The most important aspect is for the sector to engage with those bodies of leadership at the City and to get direct responses from them and for the City to hear about the great community work happening. I will be sending some survey reminders. Also, please let me have something to celebrate or amplify through TAEH. Email [savhanna@taeh.ca](mailto:savhanna@taeh.ca).
- We have been launching a working group around system barriers that exist for folks. Topics include system change priorities, policy and advocacy, supportive housing growth and housing development. If you are interested in learning about that work or want to join the work group or get updates on information and priorities developed, email [savhanna@taeh.ca](mailto:savhanna@taeh.ca)

8. Other business / close

**Next meeting: Feb 8, 10:00-12:00**