



NATIONAL ADVOCACY
COMMUNITY ACTION.



July 15, 2025

Re: PH23.3 - Advancing Six Sites for the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) - City-Initiated Official Plan Amendment and Six Zoning By-law Amendments - Decision Report - Approval

Dear Chair Perks and Members of the Planning and Housing Committee,

On behalf of YWCA Toronto, I am writing to express our support for the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) and the associated zoning and official plan applications that will enable the development of new, purpose-built shelter sites across the city.

As Toronto's largest multi-service organization supporting women, girls, and gender-diverse people, YWCA Toronto brings over 150 years of experience providing emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing. We currently operate four emergency shelters – two of which are for those fleeing gender-based violence – over 820 permanent, supportive housing units, and a range of wraparound support programs focused on trauma recovery, harm reduction, and economic empowerment.

Every day, we see firsthand how shelters serve as a first and essential step toward safety, stability, and healing. For the women, gender diverse individuals and children we serve, a shelter bed can be a lifeline. It offers safety, access to support systems, and the opportunity to rebuild.

Yet the current shelter system is overwhelmed. Across our programs, we are seeing a sharp rise in women, girls and gender diverse individuals being pushed into homelessness and deep poverty. Due to capacity, far too many people are being turned away from shelter, left to sleep in unsafe conditions, or forced to return to dangerous environments. The status quo is unsustainable and unacceptable.

As access to housing declines and homelessness continues to rise, ensuring the availability of adequate shelter is critical. While emergency shelters are not a suitable substitute for permanent, affordable housing, the city must act in the best interest of all of its residents and offer safe and immediate refuge wherever possible. Housing is a human right, but it is also a catalyst for change. It is where recovery can begin. It is where families reunite, dreams are shared, and futures are rebuilt. As indicated in the Street Needs Assessment, over 15,000 people in Toronto are reportedly experiencing homelessness. While many are affected, this crisis disproportionately impacts Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+ and refugee communities. The urgency of this situation calls for bold, tangible and immediate solutions.

It is in this spirit that YWCA Toronto expresses our support for the proposed zoning and official plan amendments associated with new shelter sites. These are vital projects that will bring urgently needed support to neighbourhoods across Toronto. It is important to note that shelter use is already permitted on all six sites. This use is also consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, which supports a full range of housing options in every community. Each of these proposed sites is critical to advancing the goals of the

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Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) and the proposed 1,600 new long-term and permanent shelter spaces. We urge you to support the prioritization of purpose-built shelters, designed with safety, dignity, and sustainability in mind.

These shelters will not only provide safe and stable environments but also enable the delivery of wraparound services, including harm reduction, mental health care, income supports, and trauma-informed case management. They will also generate long-term operational and capital cost savings for the city, while enhancing the overall effectiveness of the unhoused service system.

Notably, these projects offer an opportunity to embed equity into the shelter system by ensuring that services are more evenly distributed across wards, rather than being concentrated in only a few communities. This is essential for fostering city-wide transformation and building public trust.

We urge City Council and Planning staff to:

- Approve the rezoning and official plan applications without delay;
- Prioritize the development of smaller, community-integrated, purpose-built shelters;
- Align HSCIS with the broader goals of the HousingTO 2020–2030 Action Plan;
- Ensure multi-year operational funding and sector-wide parity to maintain service quality;
- Remain open to interim, creative and bold solutions as the shelter crisis deepens; and,
- Ensure meaningful engagement with people with lived and living shelter experience in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these new shelter sites.

In summary, the proposed planning changes to advance six shelter sites would support a critical need and shift us closer towards our shared goal of building a healthier, safer, and more equitable Toronto.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to building a city where no one is left behind.

Sincerely,

Sami Pritchard
Director of Advocacy and Communications
YWCA Toronto