

'A good budget would.....'

Housing Action Now & The Wellesley Institute

***Municipal Housing Budget Forum – Cathy Crowe panel remarks
February 6, 2009***

Last week I visited a shelter and was very affected by the conditions I witnessed. I went home that night and decided to rent a movie to take my mind off things. I picked, what I thought would be a light children's movie. I rented ***Kit Kittredge***, but it turned out to be a story of a little girl during the depression, and the story of people losing their homes....times like today. Let me read you a quote from the film: ***"When times are tough people like to blame someone and hobos are an easy target I guess."*** A reminder of how homeless singles today are being targeted in our city.

A good City budget for homeless and underhoused people would ensure:

- That, at minimum, the United Nations Standards for Refugee Camps are met in all homeless shelters including overnight shelters and day shelters which we know as drop-in centres. In addition that they should apply to the 20+year old volunteer and faith-based Out of the Cold program.
- That the City meet its own Shelter Standards. This is currently not the case. They also should apply to the Out of the Cold program.
- That the needs of the vulnerable are met, especially their health and safety needs, their need for protection during inclement weather (heat/cold), power outages, etc.
- That when the community identifies widespread concerns that they be acknowledged, responded to and reflected in the budget. Such as: bedbug infestations, hunger, shelter overcrowding, the negative impact of inclement weather on people who are homeless, etc., community crisis which include massive de-housing and job loss.

A good City budget for homeless and underhoused people would include monies for:

Shelter

- An independent ***Shelter Inspection Process*** that would examine conditions in both city-funded Shelters and the Out of the Cold program including, but not limited, to capacity and crowding, spacing between beds, quality of beds and bedding, staffing ratios, availability of lockers, number of working toilets and showers, fire safety, food safety. Note - in 2003 the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee conducted its own Shelter Inspection with a team which included nurses, doctors, a formerly homeless woman and a former United Nations worker. One of their

recommendations in 2003 to the City was that they assemble a team to do this. The TDRC report is available at:

<http://tdrc.net/resources/public/ShelterBooklet.pdf>

- An additional 300 shelter beds to replace lost beds due to closure and conversion of adult shelter beds in the last 5 years.
- The opening of a 24 hour warming centre with a harm reduction approach, real sleeping spaces, meals and adequate staffing. In summer this same facility should be converted and utilized as a cooling centre – both to specifically target and welcome homeless people who are not able to access existing shelters and who face serious health challenges even to the point of requiring palliative care.
- City funding to outreach agencies include funding for survival supplies: food, sleeping bags, protective clothing.

The recession's impact

Let me read a passage from public health nurse Eunice Dyke's biography and let it serve as a reminder of our responsibility as a City.

“The general economic depression that followed the war years came to a head in the autumn of 1920. In Toronto, with an estimated 25,000 out of work, distress and suffering were widespread. As winter approached the air of desperation that pervaded the city was exacerbated by the frustration and resentment of returned soldiers unable to find jobs.(it goes on to say:)...City Council held a public meeting to consider the growing problems of unemployment in Toronto, andvoted a sum of \$50,000 for **emergency relief** to be administered by the Medical Officer of Health....”

- A City Recession Relief Fund that would include funding for food vouchers, clothing vouchers, transit passes etc.
- A community based emergency relief fund to boost the capacity of agencies to respond to increased needs during the recession.
- Expanded rent bank to prevent evictions.
- A reception centre to provide social assistance/EI and crisis triage for singles and families newly homeless and/or jobless as a result of the recession.
- An additional shelter facility to respond to family shelter needs and in particular the anticipated swelling in numbers of homeless families related to job loss, housing loss, EI and welfare barriers during this recession.

Health conditions

- Development of a protocol that ensures all shelters provide FREE laundry facilities. This is one of the most important efforts to minimize and aid bedbug reduction.
- Replacement of all wood beds with metal beds to reduce bedbug infestations.
- Improvements to the community start-up allowance (both amount and frequency), to assist for mattress replacement and the costs associated with combating a bedbug infestation.
- agencies who wish to purchase industrial steamers for pest management in their facility.
- Expansion of the heat pilot project currently underway with PARC.

Having outlined this wish list I should close by saying most of the budgetary wins we have accomplished have not come from deputations and budget presentations but by widespread popular demand: the opening of Doctor's Hospital for shelter, the opening of the old Princess Margaret for shelter, Fort York Armoury – the same, Moss Park armoury – the same, a massive public health response to tuberculosis outbreaks, the Tent City pilot housing win! I could go on and on. Thanks to many of you in the room that helped make that happen.

Check with delivery

Cathy