

2. TORONTO DISASTER RELIEF COMMITTEE - REQUEST TO DECLARE HOMELESSNESS A NATIONAL DISASTER

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AS AMENDED

That Council approve the following:

WHEREAS Canada has signed the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing everyone's right to "an adequate standard of living...including adequate food, clothing and housing"; and

WHEREAS the cancellation of new public housing programs and the lack of space at crisis shelters due to their being filled to over-capacity have added to the number of homeless people; and,

WHEREAS homeless people have no decent standard of living; and,

WHEREAS the Provincial Task Force of Homelessness documents the withdrawal of the federal and provincial governments from efforts to improve the stock of affordable accommodation; and,

WHEREAS an adequate supply of affordable housing is essential to any long-term strategy dealing with homelessness and appropriate shelter for all Canadians;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton request that the federal government declare homelessness to be a National Disaster which requires immediate short and long-term relief, and that the federal, provincial and municipal governments cooperate to develop and implement a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy.

DOCUMENTATION

1. Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee report dated 20 October 1998 is immediately attached.
2. Extract of Draft Minute, Community Services Committee 29 Oct 98 immediately follows the report and includes a record of the vote.

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf. 03-07-98-0127
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 20 October 1998

TO/DEST. Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Committee Co-ordinator

SUBJECT/OBJET **TORONTO DISASTER RELIEF COMMITTEE - REQUEST TO
DECLARE HOMELESSNESS A NATIONAL DISASTER**

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Community Services Committee receive a presentation from the Street Health Coalition.

BACKGROUND

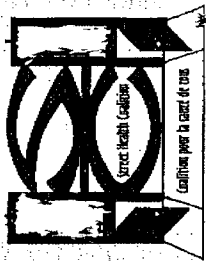
Representatives from the Street Health Coalition have requested that the Committee receive a presentation on the above-noted matter.

Relevant documentation is attached and provided for reference.

This report is respectfully submitted.

Approved by
M. J. Beauregard

Attach: (1)



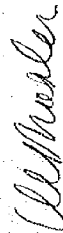
September 24, 1998

Alex Munier
Regional Councillor
Regional Municipality of
Ottawa Carleton

Dear Alex:

I am writing to request that you add an item to the agenda of the upcoming Community Services Committee agenda regarding the request to Regional Government from the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee to declare homelessness a state of emergency. Background information about this request was forwarded previously to you by the Street Health Coalition. Maureen Mungall and myself as Co-Chairs of the Street Health Coalition are intending to be on hand next week to provide an additional information which might be required. Thank you for your kind attention to this issue.

Sincerely yours,


Wendy Muckle
Co-Chairperson, Street Health Coalition

**Toronto Disaster Relief Committee
c/o 168 Bathurst St.
Toronto, ON
M5V 2R4**

September, 98

Dear Friends,

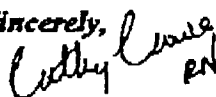
The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee is asking you to endorse our call to have all levels of government declare homelessness a NATIONAL DISASTER, which requires immediate, emergency, humanitarian relief.

We are a group made up of housing experts, academics, business people, health care workers, social workers, anti-poverty activists, and the faith community. We have worked with homeless people, studied homelessness, and have watched the homeless crisis worsen daily. We have bandaged the injuries caused by being homeless and have attended the funerals of many homeless people.

We have asked ourselves these questions: Why is this crisis not dealt with like the ice storm in Eastern Canada, or like the flooding in Manitoba? Why are governments not responding to the hundreds of homeless people's deaths? Why are they ignoring the threat of diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and hepatitis which are related to people's homelessness? Why is it that common sense doesn't dictate that this is one of the largest and most serious national disasters that Canada has ever faced?

Our answer has been to come together and to draw up a call for Disaster Relief. The most basic human rights of a section of our community are being violated. We cannot sit idly by and let this misery and death continue – the time now is to act. We need massive and immediate government intervention.

We appeal to you to endorse our call for action, join our committee, and/or to set up your own committee and send out a similar call. Attached is a form we are asking you to sign. Please send it back to us as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
 RN

Cathy Crowe, on behalf of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee

Note: Members of the committee are listed at the end of the two page State of Emergency Declaration

State of Emergency Declaration

Homelessness: A National Disaster

We call on all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster requiring emergency humanitarian relief. We urge that they immediately develop and implement a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy using disaster relief funds both to provide the homeless with immediate health protection and housing and to prevent further homelessness.

Canada has signed the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing everyone's right to "an adequate standard of living... including adequate food, clothing and housing." Homeless people have no decent standard of living, our governments are violating this agreement by neglecting them.

Despite Canada's reputation for providing relief to people made temporarily homeless by natural disasters, our governments are unwilling to help the scores of thousands of people in Canada condemned to homelessness. Morally, economically, socially, and legally, we cannot allow homelessness to become "normal" in Canadian life. Inaction betrays many thousands of us to a miserable existence and harms our society for years to come.

WHY DECLARE EMERGENCY?

Disaster Now

- ❑ Crisis facilities are already overcrowded. People are ending up in the streets, parks, and alleyways
- ❑ Youth and families with children are the fastest growing population in shelters
- ❑ Major cities search far beyond their boundaries for temporary housing for homeless families
- ❑ Homeless people face poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and increased risk of violence, communicable diseases and compulsive drug use
- ❑ Homelessness causes psychological and emotional pain that can exacerbate or precipitate agonizing deterioration of mental health
- ❑ Prolonged homelessness permanently harms people; ultimately, it can kill them by exposure, illness, violence or suicide
- ❑ Homelessness prevents people from maintaining their health, finding and keeping work, attending school and exercising their rights as citizens
- ❑ Conservative estimates concur that about 200,000 Canadians are homeless

Worse To Come

- ❑ Shelters and other temporary measures provide at best a stopgap. Crowding, insecurity and the risk of disease or violence means prolonged stays harm people
- ❑ Homelessness is contributing to a developing toxic brew of disease including HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis, hepatitis, sexually transmitted diseases, and other communicable infections
- ❑ Prolonged homelessness for children harms them for life

- Twenty years of research has shown a continual rise in homelessness, linked to unemployment, reductions to social assistance, cuts to public housing and inadequate tenant protection
- Repeated government task forces, other studies, inquests and recommendations have produced little action, though documenting that the situation worsens yearly

Declaring an Emergency

We urge all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster now, as a first step in implementing a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy, both short- and long-term.

Immediate Short Term Measures

- Governments should reopen and maintain services for the homeless
- All governments should immediately reinstate or establish adequate social assistance benefits
- All governments should make suitable public buildings available as emergency shelters or hostels.
- Even parks can serve as temporary refuges with mobile homes, tents, bath houses and toilets
- Governments should concertededly provide emergency medical relief, including clinics, outreach, infirmaries, screening and immunization, and public nutrition and hygiene programs
- Health strategies should especially treat the relationship between homelessness and severe infectious or communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and hepatitis
- Governments should grant immediate emergency funding to non-governmental organizations (churches, charities, non-profit groups, etc.)

Long-term Measures to be Implemented Now

- Governments should implement a "1 per cent solution": All levels of government now spend an average 1 per cent of their total budgets on housing. Adding another 1 per cent, and henceforth devoting the total 2% to long-term housing, would take the single largest step towards eliminating homelessness.
- Governments should maintain and fund social benefits and services on a stable, long-term basis
- Crisis shelters and aid agencies should receive stable, long-term funding until the homeless are housed

Clearly, the homeless situation is worsening daily at an alarming rate, as the factors creating it remain unchecked. Any delay in firmly and massively responding will only contribute to converting the present crisis of suffering and death which is already an epidemic which no civilized society can tolerate.

This call for Disaster Relief is made by the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee. Membership includes: David Hulchanski-Professor of Housing U of T, Trevor Gray AIDS ACTION NOW, Brent Patterson-AIDS activist, Beric German-Street Health AIDS outreach, Maurice Adongo&Paula Dolczal-Street Health mental health outreach, Peter Rosenthal-lawyer for YCAH in 1996 freezing deaths Inquest, John Andras-co-founder Project Warmth-Vice-President Research Capital Corp, Cathy Crowe, RN-Queen West CHC street outreach nurse, Rev. Don (Dan) Heap (Anglican)-former MP Trinity Spadina, Jeannie Loughrey-Anglican priest Diocese of Toronto, Frank Showler-Member of Board of St. Claire's Inter-faith Housing, David Walsh-President Realco Property Ltd, Sherrie Golden-OCAP, Sue Osborne-Housing Support Worker Cornerstone Women's Residence

Extract of Draft Minute
Community Services Committee
29 October 1998

TORONTO DISASTER RELIEF COMMITTEE - REQUEST TO DECLARE
HOMELESSNESS A NATIONAL DISASTER

- Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee report dated 20 October 1998

The following delegations were heard:

Wendy Muckle, Co-Chair, Street Health Coalition

Ms. Muckle introduced Connie Woloschuk, Executive Director, Salvation Army Booth Centre, President of the Ontario Association of Hostels and Co-Chair of the Alliance to End Homelessness, a grass-roots initiative comprised of individuals, organizations and consumers committed to ending homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton.

Ms. Muckle said the purpose of the presentation is to ask the RMOC to join a campaign to declare homelessness a National Disaster, and to demand that the provincial and federal governments join it in providing immediate humanitarian relief to address this problem. Across the nation, a significant proportion of citizens don't have homes and lack adequate food and shelter: if these conditions had been caused by war or by a natural disaster, they would be eligible for immediate humanitarian relief, and homes would be found for them. The homeless should receive the same treatment.

Ms. Muckle continued by saying that homelessness in Canada is a national disgrace. In every major city thousands of people are homeless. More distressing is the fact that, as a society, Canadians are no longer shocked that in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, a growing number of citizens are forced to live in unsafe, unhealthy and inhumane conditions. She put forward the view the people of Ottawa-Carleton would not tolerate stray dogs roaming the streets, but seem willing to tolerate thousands of people wandering the streets. Thirty to forty percent of homeless persons are people with serious, unrelenting mental problems. They are being neglected by not being given the minimum of medical care and resources to manage their illnesses.

Ms. Muckle posited that extreme situations require immediate action. The Region has a demonstrated concern about the plight of the homeless and this is one of the reasons the numbers have not spiraled out of control in Ottawa-Carleton. Current government policies and limited resources in the health, social assistance and criminal justice systems conspire to create homelessness as opposed to preventing it.

Ms. Muckle indicated that, despite the community's best efforts, the number of homeless in the Region continues to grow and basic needs for food, shelter and support are still unmet. There is an immediate crisis in meeting the needs of homeless women and families. In 1997, the women's shelter turned away 1000 clients it could not shelter and the figures for 1998 indicate that number will be higher.

From January to September 1998, the family shelter provided homes to 720 children, an average of 90 children per month, compared with an average of 75 per month in 1997. Statistics for the men's shelters show the numbers are up by 10% in 1998, in spite of the fact all men's shelters shared part time housing support workers to help clients move out and retain their housing.

Ms. Connie Woloschuk, indicated that the community has become good at managing homelessness, and she challenged all parties to engage in a broader initiative. Regardless of whether the terms used are disaster, state of emergency or crisis, the only response that will work is governed by the principles of emergency relief. These are:

- a declared recognition of the situation, an acknowledgment of the situation to be the emergency it is and prompt action beyond normal procedures to limit damage to persons or property;
- the inclusion of problem solvers and recipients. The Provincial Task Force on Homelessness provides a certain flexibility to the RMOC, as well as an opportunity to get the provincial and federal governments involved;
- a resource inventory of personnel, of funding, facilities and expertise and bring these to bear on the situation;
- looking beyond the immediacy of the situation and identifying immediate, short and long-term goals.

Ms. Muckle concluded the presentation by saying the answer is not to build more shelters. The existing facilities would be sufficient if supportive housing were available. She circulated and highlighted eight recommendations for an emergency relief strategy for homelessness.¹

Councillor D. Beamish asked whether the delegation could provide an estimate of the cost of their Recommendations 4 through 8. Ms. Muckle said she was unable to answer this question, however she pointed out that the Mayor's Task Force report shows that hostel or shelter housing is the third most expensive form of shelter housing, surpassed only by costs of incarceration and hospitalization. It is less expensive to provide supportive housing and to pay for those supports.

Ed McGibbon, a citizen of Ottawa-Carleton, spoke about his personal experience as a 15-year resident of "skid row" in both Metro Toronto and Ottawa. Mr. McGibbon said the most difficult thing he had to do was to realize what he wanted and where he wanted to go: he got there with hard work and with the support of the Salvation Army and other agencies. He posited that many people are on the street by their own choice and they have to come to a point where they have to make a choice. Mr. McGibbon suggested the

¹ On file with the Committee Co-ordinator

money received can best be used by putting it into an education program to help street people get off the street and to develop more affordable housing.

Sue Clark, a social activist, said she has spoken about homelessness being a national disaster at the local, provincial and federal levels. She pointed out that the federal government spends 1% of its budget on housing and this is not enough, and everybody knows what the Province is doing in this regard. Ms. Clark asked whether there will need to be more deaths before the size and seriousness of the problem are realized.

Ms. Linda Lalonde spoke in support of declaring homelessness a National Disaster. She made reference to the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights, calling it a statement that needs to be reinserted into all these discussions.

Ms. Catherine Boucher, is National President of Raising the Roof, a charity whose mission is to eliminate homelessness in Canada. Ms. Boucher posited part of the solution is to have all parties at the discussion table and more specifically to have the federal and provincial governments come back to the table. She encouraged Committee members to support declaring homelessness a National Disaster. She said she agreed with comments from Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson about Motions and Resolutions not being able to solve "the root problems homeless people have", however she pointed out part of the root problem is that housing as an issue has dropped off the public agenda in the last five years. The declaration will call attention to the issue and bring housing back on the public agenda. It will continue to pressure governments into looking at the issue. Homelessness is the visible sign of the lack of government interest in housing and public education and media interest are part of the solution.

Councillor D. Holmes spoke in support of declaring homelessness a National Disaster. She made reference to the Mayor of Toronto's Homelessness Action Task Force report which defines the problem and makes recommendations, requesting staff be directed prepare a similar report on homelessness in this Region. Councillor Holmes posited it would be difficult to tell the federal and provincial governments they have to get back into the housing business without documenting the problem as thoroughly as Toronto has done. Municipalities can do some things, but they cannot build more affordable housing. The Councillor spoke about the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Housing Authority wanting to convert some seniors' units for the single population, but not being able to do this without the proper support services being in place to protect both populations. There are many needs in the community and the senior levels of government have to help municipalities meet those needs.

Speaking in reference to her Motion, Councillor W. Byrne said the senior levels of government continue to download their responsibilities while tying the hands of municipalities when they do so. The Toronto report indicates there is a definite connection between the lack of public housing and the increase in homelessness. Homelessness means more than just people being without homes: it creates a host of other problems and exacerbates special needs. Ottawa-Carleton Housing has struck a task force with community partners to look at the problem because it is recognized there are no supports to help address the problem. Councillor Byrne said municipalities have to start expecting the federal and provincial government to help resolve problems they have in many cases created.

Councillor A. Loney expressed concern about the request to declare homelessness a National Disaster, saying this concentrates too much on homelessness and takes away from the notion that a permanent solution through permanent housing is part of the answer. The Councillor expressed concern the public and governments would interpret this as meaning another shelter is needed when this is not the case. He added that, at the risk of offending some of those present, he did not feel there is the same homelessness problem in Ottawa-Carleton as in other areas, and neither did he disagree with the presenter who said there was an element of personal choice involved. Dealing with homelessness of that nature is different than saying there is not adequate shelter at adequate cost for those who need it. The federal and provincial governments have to be brought back into the program; they have to develop programs that encourage private contractors to build housing that will be affordable to the end user. Councillor Loney said he was not sure this message is clearly enunciated in Councillor Byrne's Motion.

Councillor Beamish said he was not convinced the term "National Disaster" would achieve anything and he said he would not support this approach. He agreed that hyperbole is sometimes a useful tool, but it can also have a negative effect. The Councillor thought a better approach might be to set out a plan of activities municipalities can accomplish and that the senior levels can support.

Chair Munter said Councillor Byrne's Motion is symbolic but it makes a statement about and expresses outrage at the homelessness situation. He spoke about a number of initiatives undertaken in Ottawa-Carleton over the past three to four years to address this situation:

- stepping in to assist day programs when they lost 80% of their provincial funding;
- increasing per diem rates to men's shelters;
- building a women's shelter and a youth shelter;
- increasing funding for emergency food programs.

Extract of Draft Minute
Community Services Committee
29 October 1998

Chair Munter said these actions illustrate that the RMOC is going as far as it can to assist. Clearly, it is beyond the Region's scope to resolve the homelessness situation alone. He expressed the view that hyperbole is entirely in order. It gets the attention of the senior levels of government who have cut these programs and it tells them it is unreasonable to expect municipalities to resolve the problems by themselves.

Moved by W. Byrne

WHEREAS Canada has signed the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guaranteeing everyone's right to "an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing"; and

WHEREAS the cancellation of new public housing programs and the lack of space at crisis shelters due to their being filled to over-capacity have added to the number of homeless people; and,

WHEREAS homeless people have no decent standard of living; and,

WHEREAS the Provincial Task Force of Homelessness documents the withdrawal of the federal and provincial governments from efforts to improve the stock of affordable accommodation; and,

WHEREAS an adequate supply of affordable housing is essential to any long-term strategy dealing with homelessness and appropriate shelter for all Canadians;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton request that the federal government declare homelessness to be a National Disaster which requires immediate short and long-term relief, and that the federal, provincial and municipal governments cooperate to develop and implement a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy.

CARRIED, as amended
(D. Beamish dissented)