



November 22, 2022

To Mayor Nuttall and the new Barrie City Council,

Congratulations on being sworn in as Barrie's 2022-2026 City Council. At last week's inauguration, you referenced the challenges our community faces, the need to approach them with compassion, and a reminder that human rights must always be upheld.

It is in this spirit of compassion and bringing a rights-based lens to our work that we are reaching out today. First, to welcome you to this role. Second, to ask for your help in addressing the inadequacy of County-funded winter planning in Barrie.

The [Barrie Housing and Homelessness Justice Network \(BHHJN\)](#) is a multidisciplinary network advocating for the right to housing and the elimination of chronic homelessness in Barrie. Formed this summer, we are seeking immediate action to address the predictable yet premature and preventable deaths resulting from the inadequacies and injustices in the shelter and housing sectors. Earlier this fall, we circulated a list of eight actions needed. It did not get traction with the previous council in the final days before adjourning for the campaign period. We were told we were not asking politely enough. We're asking you not to look away now.

While there are many issues to be addressed, our primary concern at the moment is the under-resourced plan for this winter.

As you are aware, social services in the City of Barrie are funded through the County of Simcoe. This can make accountability difficult. Five overnight shelters are funded in Barrie with a total of 152 beds. If or when the facility on Rose Street opens, it will accommodate an additional 50 overnight. County representatives report to the public that there are beds available and that the shelter system has space. Yet shelter representatives tell us they were forced to stretch beyond their capacity to accommodate the closing of the hotel-model shelter, and they are now stretched beyond even that. People are sleeping on couches in these shelters when the beds are full, and there are reportedly over one hundred people still sleeping outside. Just last week, a group of people who had built a small tenting community for survival had it dismantled by Barrie Police. This is demoralizing and dangerous for all staying there as well as the agency staff who have been supporting them.

Of course, the number of people moving into the shelter system greatly outweighs the number of people who can move out of the system and into housing due to the lack of affordable housing options. Today, November 22, is National Housing Day, so we must also acknowledge that housing is a human right, and our policies and budgets at all levels of government must be moving us toward the realization of that human right. Shelter beds are not housing.

County representatives have also recently announced in the media that their hard work has led to the establishment of warming centres across the county. To be clear, the County declined a proposal to fund daytime warming in Barrie, declaring it is not warranted. They also refused to fund a warming centre that runs every night, despite additional funds contributed from the City of Barrie in lieu of opening the bus terminal as a warming shelter this year. They have instead elected to fund an overnight warming centre that runs only on nights when the temperature will reach -15C or lower, budgeting for 45 nights from November to April. This means that this past week, while the promised Rose St facility remains non-existent, with three days of snow and people shivering in negative temperatures, we have no warming option for people who cannot be accommodated within our overwhelmed shelter system. This does not even take into account the pressure on the contracted organization to try to staff overnight positions for a job that is weather dependent and only budgeted for 45 nights spread across six months.

And lest you may be thinking that, luckily, the County is currently undertaking a review of their homeless system to see how it can work better, so all of this will be dealt with shortly, please know that none of the issues listed here fall within the scope of the current review, which is focused on the Coordinated Access System rollout.

Overcrowded shelters. Inadequate overnight warming options. Zero funded daytime warming options. People in tents, or wandering the streets and risking life-altering frostbite or worse. And it is only November. To put it bluntly, this is not the winter planning of a city that takes care of each other. That honours the human right to housing and treats our unhoused neighbours with compassion. Please join us in holding the County accountable for providing the resources needed by our dedicated social service and housing sectors.

Thank you,

BHHJN