

## Toronto homeless advocates say city's plans not enough to address shelter crisis

Coun. Kristyn Wong-Tam working on new motion to add more funding

By John Rieti, [CBC News](#) Posted: Feb 06, 2018 12:55 PM ET Last Updated: Feb 06, 2018 12:55 PM ET

Homeless advocates are once again blasting city hall's commitment to solving the shelter crisis, arguing its response lacks the funding and speed to really help Toronto's most vulnerable.

At Tuesday's executive committee meeting, city staff confirmed the 2018 budget — set to be approved next week — has the capital and operational funding to open 361 new shelter beds, replace 170 and keep 700 respite sites open for the rest of this year.

- [Health-care workers concerned about conditions inside Toronto respite centres](#)

Mayor John Tory calls that a "significant" improvement.

"I'm confident that the measures we have included in the budget ... is something that is going to make a substantial difference," he told reporters.

But it's far short of the 1,500 new beds that activists and some councillors say are needed.

"We need 1,000 beds now," said Teya Greenberg. She works at Sistering, a Bloor West drop-in centre for women that's been full all winter.



**John Rieti**  
@johnrieti

Harm reduction worker at Sistering compares being in a shelter to riding an overstuffed subway car. #TOpoli

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City staff have pointed out it's difficult to open new shelter beds, in part because it's hard to acquire appropriate buildings in a hot real estate market. But Greenberg and several other speakers attacked the notion that 361 new beds is all the city can do right now.

"If the mayor wants to do it, he can," Greenberg said.

Yogi Acharya, who's with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, accused the administration of harbouring a "ruthless disregard for the poor" and questioned whether or not the claim that the city can't do more in 2018 is credible, given its rapidly-changing response to this winter's shelter crisis.

Coun. Kristyn Wong-Tam says she's working on a motion to present at city council's final debate on the budget next week that would open 1,000 beds, although she says she's still working on figuring out how much that will cost and where the money will come from.

"If we don't set that objective we'll never get there," she said.

## Persuading council may be challenging

But Coun. James Pasternak, who chairs the community development and recreation committee, says he believes the budget "gets it right."

Deputy Mayor Denzil Minnan-Wong says he would support a motion, but only if it has "some level of sensitivity to the financial constraints that we're in."

Others, like Coun. Paul Ainslie, appear more on the fence.

"I know we put beds forward in this budget, but [homelessness] is still a huge challenge," he said at the executive committee meeting.

Tory, meanwhile, appears in favour of keeping the budget as is. During his closing remarks at the executive committee, he likened the city's financial plans to *Goldilocks and The Three Bears*, saying while councillors on both sides of the political spectrum have concerns, he finds it "just right."

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