



Dignity Must Be Built In: Why Micro Homes Need Running Water and Washrooms

By Margaret Eskins
Executive Director DARS

Dedicated Advocacy Resource Support

At Dedicated Advocacy Resource Support (DARS), we strongly support innovative housing solutions that help people move out of homelessness and into safe, stable accommodation. Micro homes can be part of that solution but only when they provide

more than a place to sleep. Recently, some communities have endorsed a sleep-cabin model in which each unit has electricity, heating and air conditioning, while residents must leave their cabins and walk to a separate communal washroom. Although this model may be less expensive to construct, DARS believes that permanent or transitional micro homes should include running water and a private washroom whenever reasonably possible.

Housing should restore dignity, privacy and independence. It should not simply move people from sleeping outside into a structure that still requires them to leave their living space to meet their most basic needs.

A Washroom Is a Basic Necessity

Most people would not consider a house complete without a toilet, sink and access to running water. People transitioning out of homelessness should not be expected to accept a lower standard simply because they have fewer housing options. Imagine having to put on a coat and boots in the middle of a winter night to use the washroom. Imagine making that walk while sick, elderly, pregnant, living with a disability or managing medication that causes frequent urination. In Ontario, rain, snow, ice and extreme cold would the trip uncomfortable, undignified and possibly dangerous.

A private washroom also allows residents to attend to personal hygiene, menstruation, medical needs and continence issues without having to explain themselves or enter a shared space.

Privacy Supports Stability

People experiencing homelessness often spend months or years without meaningful privacy. Shelters, encampments and public spaces rarely allow individuals to control who enters their environment or who witnesses their most personal moments. When people are finally housed, privacy becomes an important part of rebuilding safety and stability. Having a private washroom provides more than convenience. It gives residents control over their daily routines and creates a sense that their home truly belongs to them.

A person should not have to carry toiletries across a property, wait in line or encounter other residents every time they need to use the washroom. These arrangements may also be particularly difficult for survivors of violence or trauma, people experiencing anxiety and those who feel unsafe in shared facilities.

Accessibility Must Be Considered From the Beginning

A central washroom may appear practical on a site plan, but it can create significant barriers for people with mobility challenges. Snow, ice, uneven ground, poor lighting and distance can make the route unsafe or inaccessible.

Even residents who arrive without mobility limitations may experience illness, injury or changes in their health. Housing should be designed to support people through those changes and not become unusable when circumstances change.

Accessible design is most effective when it is built into a project from the beginning. Retrofitting plumbing and washrooms later is often more difficult and expensive.

Public Health and Cleanliness Matter

Running water allows residents to wash their hands, clean their living space, prepare food safely and maintain personal hygiene. These everyday activities help prevent illness and support healthier living environments.

Communal washrooms can be maintained safely, but they require frequent cleaning, monitoring, repairs and a reliable supply of hygiene products. When several people depend on one facility, a plumbing failure, frozen pipe or maintenance issue can affect the entire community.

Individual washrooms reduce crowding and limit the number of people relying on a single facility. They also give residents greater responsibility for and control over the cleanliness of their own space.

Communal Facilities Can Create Avoidable Conflict

Shared washrooms may lead to lineups, disagreements about cleanliness, concerns about personal belongings and conflict over how long someone uses the facility. Staff may then be required to manage issues that could have been prevented through better design.

Residents should be supported in developing independence and not placed in an environment where they must rely on staff to unlock, monitor or maintain access to basic sanitation.

If a communal washroom closes temporarily, residents still need somewhere to go. A housing community should not be left without essential facilities because one shared building is unavailable.

Lower Construction Costs Can Create Higher Operating Costs

It is understandable that communities want to create housing quickly and stretch limited funding as far as possible. However, removing plumbing from individual units does not eliminate the cost of sanitation. It shifts that cost into a shared building and may add expenses related to cleaning, staffing, security, maintenance, snow removal and accessibility.

Decisions should be based on the full cost of operating the community not just the initial price of constructing each cabin. Building units properly at the beginning may cost more, but it can produce safer, more durable housing and reduce the need for expensive renovations later.

Emergency Shelter Should Not Become the Permanent Standard

DARS recognizes that heated and air-conditioned sleep cabins can provide immediate protection from extreme weather. In a genuine emergency, a basic cabin may be safer than a tent or an encampment. However, an emergency response should not quietly become a permanent housing standard.

If sleep cabins are introduced as a temporary measure, there should be a clear plan, timeline and funding pathway to upgrade them or help residents move into complete housing.

Temporary solutions must remain temporary.

People Deserve Homes, Not Just Beds

Micro homes can be small without sacrificing dignity. Thoughtful design can include a compact washroom, a sink, running water, proper ventilation and safe wastewater connections while still keeping the overall footprint modest. The goal should not be to construct the smallest or least expensive structure a person can survive in. The goal should be to create a home that supports health, dignity, independence and a successful transition out of homelessness.

At DARS, we believe people experiencing homelessness deserve the same basic considerations that the rest of us expect in our own homes. Electricity, heating and air conditioning are important but so are running water, sanitation and privacy.

A door that locks provides safety. A bed provides rest. But a private washroom and running water help turn a cabin into a home.

If we are serious about ending homelessness, dignity cannot be treated as an optional upgrade. It must be built in from the beginning.



Casino Revenue Is an Advantage Not a Guarantee

By John Meloche

Pickering has something many municipalities would love to have: a significant source of revenue that does not come directly from property taxes.

During the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation's 2025–2026 fiscal year, Pickering received more than \$16.3 million in gaming revenue from hosting Pickering Casino Resort. Since the casino opened in July 2021, nearly \$76 million had flowed to the City by May 2026. That is an extraordinary financial advantage.

The question is what we do with it. Casino revenue has already helped fund recreation facilities, parks, municipal infrastructure, library improvements, fire services and other capital projects. These are legitimate investments, and Pickering should absolutely benefit from having the casino in our community.

But there is an important difference between benefiting from extraordinary revenue and becoming dependent on it.

Pickering's long-term capital forecast anticipates drawing significantly on casino reserves in the years ahead. Approximately \$96.7 million in casino-reserve-supported capital financing is currently forecast between 2027 and 2035.

That deserves our attention. The reason is simple: we control how casino revenue is spent, but we do not control how much casino revenue arrives

We are seeing a timely example right now. Workers at Pickering Casino Resort and Casino Ajax began strike action on July 31. The Pickering casino remains open, but some services and operations have been disrupted.

Why should taxpayers care?

Because Pickering does not receive a guaranteed annual cheque. OLG host-municipality payments are calculated using a formula based on gaming revenue generated at the casino.

That means circumstances outside City Hall can affect what we receive.

Today it may be a labour dispute. Tomorrow it could be an economic downturn, growing competition, changing consumer habits, further expansion of online gambling and sports betting, regulatory changes, or business decisions made by the casino operator.

None of those things are under municipal control.

That is why I believe extraordinary revenues should be used primarily to make a municipality financially stronger.

If a business suddenly received a substantial new revenue stream that could not be guaranteed indefinitely, the prudent response would not be to immediately build permanent spending around it.

You would strengthen the balance sheet.

Municipal government should think similarly.

Use windfall revenue to repair aging infrastructure before it becomes an emergency. Reduce expensive debt. Strengthen reserves. Make one-time capital investments that provide lasting public value. Fund projects that reduce future operating costs. Wherever possible, use those dollars to prevent future costs from landing on the property-tax bill.

What we should be cautious about is creating permanent obligations that eventually have to be transferred to taxpayers if the extraordinary revenue declines.

Because once spending becomes permanent, the bill does not disappear when the revenue does. Someone still has to pay it.

This does not mean Pickering should stop investing. Quite the opposite.

Casino revenue represents an opportunity to leave the city substantially stronger than it would otherwise have been.

Ten or fifteen years from now, residents should be able to look around Pickering and clearly see what this extraordinary period of revenue accomplished: infrastructure renewed, debt reduced, reserves strengthened, facilities properly maintained and future tax increases avoided. We should also continue pursuing other responsible non-property-tax revenues — grants, sponsorships, naming rights, film revenues, tourism opportunities and better use of municipal assets. The goal should always be the same.

Alternative revenue should reduce taxpayer vulnerability, not simply give government permission to spend more. Pickering Casino Resort has given our city a tremendous financial advantage. Let's make sure we use that advantage to build resilience for the future.

Casino revenue is an opportunity.

We should never allow it to become an entitlement.

VOTE

HENRY

FOR MAYOR

OF OSHAWA

(289) 913-6331

henryforoshawa.ca