

**Executive Committee - Matthew House submission for 2012.EX15.1 on January 24, 2012
Executive Committee**

From: Anne Woolger <anne_woolger@sympatico.ca>
To: <exc@toronto.ca>
Date: 1/20/2012 9:19 AM
Subject: Matthew House submission for 2012.EX15.1 on January 24, 2012 Executive Committee
CC: <kclulow@trebnet.com>, "Ken_Macdonald" <ken.macdonald@rogers.com>
Attachments: Matthew House - Request to CityCouncil re 981 Dundas St. W. Jan 20, 2012 (F).pdf

EX16.3.20

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To the City Clerk:

Please find attached a **letter** from **Matthew House Toronto**, the organization I represent **which I wish to be circulated to ALL city councillors** related to the agenda item for the January 24, 2012 Executive Committee meeting on item 2012.EX15.1, Securing Funding to Repair Toronto Community Housing's Multi-Residential Portfolio: Sale of Toronto Community Housing Stand-Alone Units.

I have already requested that Matthew House Toronto be given opportunity to give a deputation. In my earlier request I did not give the specific name of the speaker but for your info, it will be Mr. Ken Macdonald.

If you have any questions for further clarification, it happens that I am leaving for vacation later today and so I would request that you correspond with either our Board Chair Kathy Clulow: kclulow@trebnet.com PH (416-994-6143) OR Mr. Ken Macdonald (ken.macdonald@rogers.com)

(I understand that my comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.)

Thank you.

Anne

Anne Woolger

Founder and Executive Director

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City of Toronto
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 Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

January 20, 2012

Dear Toronto City Councilors:

I am writing on behalf of **Matthew House Refugee Reception Services, Toronto** (Matthew House) with respect to the Toronto Community Housing Company's (TCH) proposed sale of one of their "stand alone" homes located at 981 Dundas St. West.

This property is currently rented by Matthew House – a privately funded organization which I founded and presently direct. Matthew House provides a warm welcome and practical assistance to newly arrived refugee claimants who would otherwise be homeless in our city. Since opening in August 1998 at the 981 Dundas St. location, we have welcomed over **1000 refugee claimants** from **84** different nations. They have come from all walks of life (doctors, lawyers, engineers and illiterates) but the one thing they share in common is a fear of persecution in their homeland. In light of the fact that we are privately funded, **we have actually saved** the City of Toronto **over \$3 million** in homeless shelter costs (as they would otherwise have had to stay at city run shelters). We have also paid **over \$230,000** in rent to TCHC since our inception and financed **over \$50,000** of maintenance on the property at 981 Dundas St. West to keep it in a condition reflective of our core values. Matthew House represents an excellent example of a privately funded and operated organization not only successfully providing important value-added public services to the City at no additional cost to its taxpaying citizens, but also saving the city considerable financial expense and contributing positively to the community at large in the process.

The purpose of this note is to respectfully encourage the appropriate parties at the City of Toronto to consider a course of action for the property at 981 Dundas St. W. commensurate with the material financial and general community benefits that Matthew House has provided to the City since its inception. Specifically, our organization is requesting that the City of Toronto support the removal of this property from the list of properties to be sold by the TCH at market value rates and, more favourably, support negotiations of a sale by TCH directly with Matthew House for a price that reflects the "value added" which our home and services have provided to the community for many years, and continues to provide today.

While in principal we support the retention of *all* the *stand alone* homes by TCH, we know that if our unit were acquired by our organization, it would continue to be used as a viable solution to Toronto's affordable housing needs. And in fact, for a number of years Matthew House has been meeting with representatives of TCH requesting that special consideration be given to our organization with respect to the sale of this home given the value of the services we provide for the City and our long term goals. Most recently we made a deputation at a public hearing held by the TCH board regarding the proposed housing sales in October 2011. We believe our plea was well received by the TCH Board and also note that our current city counselor, Mike Layton, is very supportive of our work and shares our desire that this house not "slip from us" as part of TCH's property sale process without appropriate foresight by TCH and the City regarding the overall community and cost implications for the city.

I also respectfully note that during our conversations over the past few years with various city officials (TCH staff members, the former city treasurer Shelley Carroll, TCH lawyer John Fox, and others), all of them have essentially agreed that a purchase by Matthew House of the subject

property for substantially less than market value would be very reasonable and justifiable given the tangible and measurable value added that our organization provides to the City.

We are aware that under certain circumstances, various TCH owned homes have been recommended for sale by the City to resident agencies at a price equivalent to the cost to pay out the remaining balance of the property mortgage. As we understand it, the idea behind these transactions is such that the community based agencies in question would have the first opportunity to purchase the houses at below market value for the purpose of carrying out their services *in line with the City's housing objectives and the betterment of the community at large.*

We believe that the above example illustrates both the authority and willingness on behalf of the City to negotiate and execute special transactions in exceptional circumstances that are *in the best interests of the City, its taxpaying residents and the community at large.* Furthermore, it is our view that the information provided below substantiates the many ways in which Matthew House has, and continues to add value to the City, and why our request to purchase the property at 981 Dundas Street should be considered on this basis.

What follows is a compilation of facts supporting the strength, viability, sustainability and benefit (financial and otherwise) of Matthew House to the City of Toronto and the continued operation of our organization at 981 Dundas St. West. These facts are presented in support of our above stated request to purchase the subject property from the City for a nominal sum and continue to use the property as the primary location for our services (and to ultimately expand our services at the same location).

- The current average per diem rate for a bed in a refugee shelter in Toronto is \$56.35. Matthew House provides residence for, on average, 12 people at a time at our Dundas St. location, and is open 24 x 7, for 365 days a year. At that rate **we have therefore saved the City of Toronto over \$3 million** to date as the equivalent per diem costs would be roughly \$250,000 per year and our organization has been open for more than 13 years.

In addition to our primary emergency shelter offered at 981 Dundas St. West, Matthew House also owns and operates 2 other transitional homes for newly arrived refugees. If the cost/ benefit of our other transitional housing programs were factored into the equation, they would also represent very significant value added to the city. The going rate for "transitional housing" is \$32.20 per diem. Therefore, the 16 beds in our transitional homes **save the city** an additional **\$188,000** per year. In 10 years we will have saved the city another near \$2 million by providing these services in our privately owned and operated properties.

- Matthew House has **paid TCH approximately \$230,000 in rent over the past 13 and a half years**, in addition to funding our own utilities payments
- Matthew House has **officially spent over \$50,000 on maintenance and upgrades**, not including a home renovation makeover (by the popular television program "Divine Design") of the living/dining area valued at **over \$40,000.**
- **Matthew House has proven itself to be a capable and responsible steward – both physically and financially – of multiple properties in the city.** We currently own and independently operate 2 other homes in Toronto (with a combined value of over \$1 million) in addition to renting our original TCH owned property on Dundas St. West. This further demonstrates our contribution to the city and our sense of ownership for the community where we operate.

Our houses are all located within close proximity to one another (3.5 km radius) which allows us to maintain a high degree of efficiency and control our cost of administration. Central to this strategy is our primary operation at 981 Dundas St. West.

- **We possess a track record of responsible and transparent fiscal management.** Our annual operating revenue has averaged roughly \$370,000 over the last 5 fiscal years, and we have managed a balanced budget during that time frame as a whole, even through the recent severe economic crisis. This also demonstrates the depth and sustainability of our donor support network.
- Matthew House does not sponsor refugees. All of the refugees that we serve have already arrived in Canada and are simply numbered among the homeless. Therefore, **each refugee we serve reduces the number of homeless people in Toronto, and/or directly reduces the city and public resources required to otherwise provide shelter and care for these individuals in our community.**
- While we are not a city funded shelter, we receive referrals from city agencies such as **Central Intake (the City homeless referral agency) and Red Cross First Contact program as well as other City funded homeless shelters and agencies** including Children's Aid. Matthew House carries significantly more than its own weight in light of the fact that we are funded primarily from private sources (individuals, churches, foundations) and receives no direct government funding.
- In addition to providing for the immediate physical needs of our refugee residents, **the level of individual care provided by Matthew House is second to none.** It includes orientation to life in Canada, individual counseling and referrals, help with finding and furnishing apartments and ongoing support through friendships and a monthly "drop in". This holistic quality of "welcome" has profound long term effects on the healthy integration of residents into the community which enables them to become healthier more productive citizens and consequently reduces further strain on the city's social service support networks which may have happened if they were inadequately received in a city shelter not geared to assisting with refugee needs. In other words, **the social and economic benefit that Matthew house provides the city has a much larger impact than the initial shelter alone.**
- **Hundreds of volunteers have served at Matthew House since our inception 13 years ago.** We provide a vehicle for local volunteer development, which ultimately strengthens the community and increases the ownership Torontonians have for their city – yet another very real benefit to Toronto. These volunteers come from a broad spectrum of society and have included medical doctors, CEOs, nurses, teachers, architects, accountants, bankers, housewives and former residents, to name a few. In addition Matthew House has received **students** in a wide range of capacities. Some have come with their class from local high schools to learn about refugees, others have done volunteer work while others from local college and universities, have completed **field placements** in the social service field through Matthew House.
- **We have a vital relationship with local service providers** such as a physician on College St. who provides stellar care for our most seriously traumatized residents. This is a very significant benefit and to lose the proximity of his office would be a real blow to our program.
- In addition to the important connections we have made with various community services, **our credibility is also bolstered by the reputable organizations who have supported us and/or partnered with us in various capacities over the years,** including: World Vision Canada, Second Harvest, W. Network (Divine Design), the Grocery Foundation, Sue Cox Community Action Fund, Toronto Real Estate Board: Realtor's Care Foundation, The Meeting House, CBM, Scotiabank (featured charity 2011), the Daily Bread Food Bank (where we are a registered agency) and Becoming Neighbours program.
- Matthew House's work has been featured in **National Film Board of Canada** documentaries shown on the CBC news world program "The Lens" (**Everybody's Children**) as well as CBC news, the Toronto Star and various other publications.

- Matthew House staff are members of the **Canadian Council for Refugees** and the Coalition of Refugee Service Providers of southern Ontario and other networks that provide ongoing professional updates and advocacy regarding the plight of refugees.
- **Residents who pass through Matthew House experience a profound sense of "belonging"**. This is a factor that many studies on newcomer adaptation would affirm is vital for an immigrant's ultimate successful establishment in Canada. Even after our residents leave our shelter, we run a monthly drop in at a central church downtown (Yorkminster Park Baptist at Yonge and St. Clair) where former residents come and meet with others, share a meal, hear a special speaker and simply keep "connected". It is connections like this that help to preserve the psycho social well-being of refugees which consequently results in less of a strain on city support services in the long run.
- **In 2011 Matthew House was a Featured Charity in the Scotiabank Waterfront Marathon**. Our team consisted of more than 100 members from all walks of life: doctors, lawyers, CEOs, businessmen, students, housewives and former residents of Matthew House, one of whom, (Josiane Aboungono) is the Canada Running Series 3 time Female Champion. In short, Matthew House is an incredible reflection of what is great about our city.
- **The house and location at 981 Dundas St. West has been ideal in many ways and we desire to remain there**. It is very central, on a major thoroughfare and even backs onto a lovely park which provides wonderful respite for many a weary traveler from the refugee highway. Over the years we have established very good relations with all of our neighbours who sometimes join in our community events like our anniversary parties. We have maintained our tenancy at 981 Dundas since our inception in 1998. This demonstrates our commitment to the city – we are not a transient organization.
- **Our long term goal is to expand our services at the 981 Dundas St. location** by purchasing the adjoining semi-detached house (#979) from the private owner in order to expand our services and work space so that we can even more effectively carry out our work of welcoming and assisting homeless refugees and educating the public about their plight. If an agreement could be made whereby we purchase the 981 Dundas St. W. home at a price reflective of the value added we have provided the city, then Matthew House could use this good will/partnership gesture as great leverage for securing private capital funds from donors to purchase the other side of the house from the private owner.

In closing, I trust this information has illustrated the substantial and measurable value that Matthew House provides to the City of Toronto and in doing so, supports our request for *special consideration* with respect to the potential sale of the property at 981 Dundas St. West. I and/or the members of our Board of Directors would be pleased to discuss this matter further with the relevant parties at the City of Toronto.

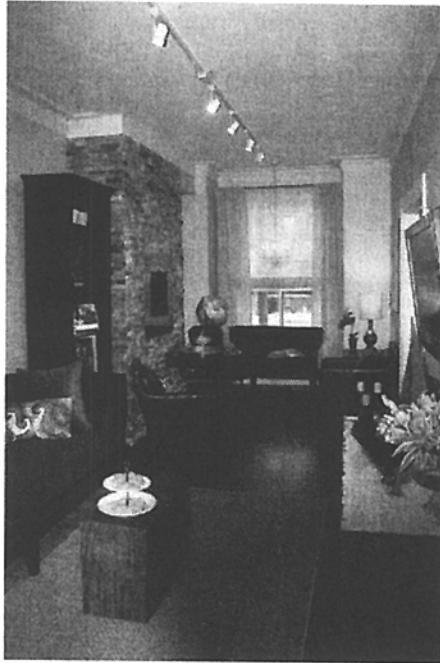
I thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Anne Woolger
Matthew House Founder and Executive Director

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Matthew House Reception Services, Toronto

PS: Please note I will be out of the country at the time of the deputation on the 24th of January. Any immediate inquiries can be addressed to our Board Chair: Kathy Clulow by phone at 416-994-6143 or Email: kclulow@trebnet.com



Photos of Matthew House Toronto's TCH owned location at 981 Dundas St. West.

Above - photos showing the newly renovated living and dining space completed by the TV make-over program Divine Design with Candace Olsen (includes gas fireplace insert in newly bricked wall, new flooring and crystal chandeliers).



At left - Matthew House staff members at front door of 981 Dundas St. West home ready to welcome newcomers.

Below - contented former residents at MH Christmas party, December 2011.

