



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Update on the Relocation of Cornerstone Place Shelter

Date:	July 30, 2014
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
Wards:	15, 21
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

Cornerstone Place is a 50-bed men's purchase of service shelter that has been located at 833 St. Clair Avenue West in Ward 21 since 2001. It has had to suspend its operations by July 31, 2014 as the organization's lease was up. The property was sold to a developer in July 2012 who is now commencing work on the site. A proposed new location has been identified at 616 Vaughan Road in Ward 15, which requires Council approval in order to proceed.

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) is working in cooperation with the local ward councillor to conduct community outreach and consultation with area residents. An open community meeting was held on July 28, 2014 to discuss the planned shelter location, answer residents' questions, and listen to their concerns.

In order to ensure service continuity for Cornerstone's residents, SSHA and Cornerstone developed in partnership a transition plan for them. The residents have been provided with housing supports or have been placed in available beds within the rest of the men's shelter system. SSHA has also been developing a plan in partnership with the agency to support Cornerstone Place Shelter staff until the shelter is able to re-open at the proposed new location.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, recommends that:

1. City Council approve the permanent relocation of Cornerstone Place Shelter at 616 Vaughan Road in accordance with the requirement of the Municipal Shelter By-law 138-2003, subject to Cornerstone Place providing a business case that demonstrates the viability of the shelter's operations at the new location, to the satisfaction of the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration; and
2. City Council request the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to convene a community working group including local residents, agency staff, and City staff to work with the community agency and the City on the shelter's transition to the proposed location and to refine the shelter service model.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report have no impact on the 2014 Approved Operating Budget for SSHA. Funding in the amount of \$766,500.00 for the ongoing operation of Cornerstone Place Shelter was approved by Council as part of the 2014 SSHA Operating Budget process. Any additional operating costs resulting from the relocation of Cornerstone Place will be considered in the overall funding envelope for Hostel Services as part of the 2015 Operating Budget process.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

Equity Impact

The emergency shelter system in Toronto serves equity-seeking groups such as seniors, people with disabilities, individuals with mental health issues, the working poor, and other vulnerable groups. Effective operation of the shelter system is important in ensuring that temporary accommodation is available to a variety of equity-seeking groups.

DECISION HISTORY

The City of Toronto is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for housing and homelessness services, as designated by the provincial *Housing Services Act, 2011*. In this capacity, the City provides program funding to community agencies for shelter services.

Part of the City's responsibility in this role is to ensure suitable levels of service for homeless individuals and to maintain an accessible shelter system through the monitoring of occupancy levels and ensuring the existence of an adequate number of shelter beds.

At a Special Meeting on February 7, 10, and 11, 2003, City Council adopted the Municipal Shelter By-law (By-law No. 138-2003) recognizing the continued need for emergency shelter accommodation across the City. The by-law allows municipal shelters as a permitted use in all zones and districts of the City provided among other things that the lot for the proposed shelter is located on a major or minor arterial road and that the shelter location is approved by City Council.

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/bylaws/2003/law0138.pdf>

At its meeting on December 16, 17, 18, 2013, City Council unanimously adopted the *2014-2019 Housing Stability Services Planning Framework*, which includes strategic directions that SSHA will implement over the next five years. A number of these strategic actions relate to provision of shelter including the development of a ten year capital management and infrastructure plan for shelter assets and maintaining a 90 percent occupancy rate.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.10>

The 2014 funding allocations for all purchase of service shelters, including bed capacities and maximum contract values, were approved by City Council on April 1, 2014. The report can be found at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.CD27.1>

On July 8, 9, 10 and 11, 2014, City Council referred the report "Relocation of Cornerstone Place Shelter" back to staff and requested that the General Manager undertake outreach and community consultation in accordance with the Municipal Shelter By-Law and report back to the August 14, 2014 Community Development and Recreation Committee on the outcome a community meeting and the actions taken to accommodate the 50 displaced persons.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.CD30.11>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Cornerstone Place Shelter has operated a 50-bed emergency shelter program serving single men at 833 St. Clair Avenue West in Ward 21 for more than a dozen years. It was a former Out of the Cold site that was converted to a permanent shelter in 2001 and operated as an overnight program between the hours of 5:30 PM and 7:30 AM. Cornerstone Place Shelter's clients are generally older and accessing shelter services due to economic difficulties. Approximately one fifth are engaged in employment activities but struggle to make ends meet. Cornerstone Place is an important component of the overall men's shelter system.

The agency's Executive Director informed SSHA in July 2012 that the building had been sold to a developer with a closing date in late September of that year. The building was owned by Cornerstone Baptist Tabernacle and was home to the church on the first floor and the Cornerstone Place Shelter on the second floor. Cornerstone Baptist Tabernacle has since purchased a new church site and has vacated the building on St. Clair Avenue West.

The shelter entered into a lease with the purchaser of the St. Clair Avenue West property and continued shelter operations as a tenant of the new owner since redevelopment of the site was not immediate. Since that time, the agency has been searching for available properties for lease or purchase and SSHA has been assisting the agency in screening suitable properties based on the requirements of the Municipal Shelter By-law and the space requirements as outlined in the Toronto Shelter Standards.

In May 2014, it came to the attention of SSHA that Cornerstone Place Shelter would be required to move imminently from their current site. The developer was issued demolition permits for the property and was on a tight timeline to ensure key development activities proceeded in advance of the winter season. The shelter had to suspend operations by the end of July 2014. Staff have been working with the agency to transition the shelter residents to housing or other available space in the shelter system.

At the time of writing, the agency has an offer to purchase a property at 616 Vaughan Road in Ward 15. City staff are working with the local ward councillor to conduct community outreach and consultation as required by the Municipal Shelter By-law 138-2003.

COMMENTS

Proposed New Site

The proposed site for the new Cornerstone Place Shelter at 616 Vaughan Road is a 6,500 square foot building with a vacant bar on the main floor and apartments on the second floor. The entire building is currently vacant. SSHA has assessed the proposed site and staff believe it has potential for use as a shelter, with some minor renovations. The apartments on the second floor also offer a number of opportunities for improved service to shelter residents including smaller, more private accommodations.

In order to establish a shelter at this location in compliance with the Municipal Shelter By-law, Council approval is required for the new site. The agency has a conditional offer in place that expires August 29 to purchase the property but cannot proceed with certainty until City approval is received. SSHA staff are working with the local ward councillor and conducted a community meeting on July 28, 2014. If Council approves the site, the relocation would be in compliance with all the requirements of the by-law.

Community Outreach and Consultation

SSHA staff have undertaken community outreach and consultation activities as part of the shelter's proposed relocation process. Several community stakeholders have been engaged directly by SSHA staff in one-on-one interviews. Those consulted in this fashion include local business people, residents, church leaders, and community service providers, including officers from Toronto Police Service. Additionally, a local resident

took SSHA staff on a walking tour of the neighbourhood to identify and look at areas of concern.

An open community meeting with local residents was held from 6:30 pm until after 10:30 pm on July 28, 2014. The intent of the community meeting was to provide local residents and business owners with information about the shelter, answer any questions, listen to concerns, and provide reassurances to the community that Cornerstone Place is a well established and experienced emergency shelter operator. Approximately 335 individuals attended and approximately 40 people took the opportunity to ask questions or comment. The local councillor stated that it was the largest community meeting he had attended in that neighbourhood.

Through the engagement activities, it has been found that very few residents and businesses spoke in favour of locating the shelter at the proposed location of 616 Vaughan Road. The opposition was in some cases quite vociferous but consistent with the opposition encountered in the past around new shelter sites. The key themes to emerge from the consultation and outreach activities are as follows.

Timing of Consultation Process

Many residents, including the Oakwood Village Community Association, expressed concern that the consultation process was too rushed and did not provide adequate time to properly engage with the local community, particularly during the summer when many people and families are on holidays. Several residents also expressed frustration around the lack of communication regarding the proposed new use for the site and the July 28 community meeting.

The building at 616 Vaughan Road came to the attention of Cornerstone only in late June 2014 after a long and difficult search for a new site. As the site met the requirements of the Municipal Shelter By-law, the agency placed a conditional offer on it to secure the potential location and required Council approval to proceed. Due to the lack of Council meetings after August 2014 and the need to seek Council approval before the close date, it was not possible to conduct extensive consultation prior to seeking approval.

If the proposed site is approved as is recommended in this report, SSHA and Cornerstone Place Shelter are committed to working with the local community to support the shelter's successful transition to the neighbourhood.

Compatibility of the Proposed Shelter Location and Neighbourhood Improvements

Many residents at the community meeting said the proposed new location for the shelter would threaten recent neighbourhood improvements, create a disincentive for new businesses to establish themselves in the community, and negatively impact property values. They described the neighbourhood as one that had been in decline for several years, and that was just starting to revitalize. This revival was said to be due to an increase in the number of young families in the area and to cooperation among the local

residents, councillor's office, and the Toronto Police Service. That cooperation has helped reduce some of the illegal activities in the neighbourhood, such as drug trafficking and prostitution. The collaboration has also been credited with the closure of a bar/night club that had been causing serious problems for years. The building that used to house this bar is the building that Cornerstone proposes to purchase, renovate, and re-open as an emergency shelter for 50 men.

Shelters are currently located in wards and neighbourhoods across the city, many of which are undergoing gentrification. It has been SSHA's experience that many of these shelters become integrated into their communities, even when community opposition has been strong to begin with. Many become catalysts for the opening of additional services that benefit the entire community. SSHA is committed to ensuring that residents can access housing services across the city as set out in the *2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework*. Cornerstone Place Shelter is also committed to working with local residents to support neighbourhood improvements and revitalization.

Availability of Other Services in the Neighbourhood

Several residents expressed support for people experiencing homelessness but questioned if 616 Vaughan Road was the best site for a new shelter due to the lack of other support services in the immediate vicinity. The new proposed site is approximately 2 km from the present location on St. Clair Avenue West. There is concern that it will be difficult for clients to access those same services once the shelter moves and around the availability of services for clients to access if they are not able to access the shelter. Many felt this would result in shelter residents loitering on the local streets, on private residential property, and in front of buildings.

Approximately a fifth of the Cornerstone residents are engaged in employment activities and leave first thing in the morning to go to work. As the proposed shelter location is also in the same general vicinity as the current site and well serviced by the TTC, it is felt that shelter residents will be able to access many of the same services. Additionally, Cornerstone through partnerships would work to bring additional services for their residents to the new site and to connect the shelter residents to other supports in the community. SSHA is also committed to seeking opportunities with other City and community partners to bring more resources to this location.

Shelter Size

Some residents expressed concern over the size of the shelter on the proposed site and felt a smaller shelter would be more appropriate.

Cornerstone is currently funded to provide service to 50 men and the proposed site meets the space requirements as set out in the Toronto Shelter Standards. Due to ongoing occupancy pressures in the overall shelter system, it is important those 50 beds be maintained in the system. SSHA is committed to working with the community and Cornerstone Place on the proposed shelter's service model.

Safety of Community and Shelter Residents

A number of local residents expressed concern regarding issues related to community safety as well as the safety of the shelter residents should it relocate to the proposed site. Many felt that the increased presence of vulnerable individuals may increase the likelihood of illegal activities such as drug dealing and after hours drinking in the area. Others recognized that the area still had some challenges and felt that it might not be the best location for already vulnerable individuals.

To date, SSHA has had no complaints from the community surrounding the current shelter regarding it or its residents. TPS 13 Division receives approximately 50 calls a year to Cornerstone's current location. Approximately one third of those are due to distress calls while the remaining two thirds are general disorder calls. Many of the men staying at Cornerstone are over the age of 55 and approximately one fifth are engaged in employment activities. They chose to stay at Cornerstone due to the fact it is outside the downtown core and relatively quiet. Cornerstone's client profile is not expected to change as a result of its relocation.

Transition Plan for Existing Residents of Cornerstone Place Shelter

Cornerstone Place Shelter was required to vacate their old location and suspend operations on July 31, 2014. If Council approves the new location, there will be a time lag of a few months until the new location is ready for occupancy. In an effort to ensure that the residents of Cornerstone are all provided with an opportunity to be housed and/or referred to an appropriate shelter program, SSHA worked with the agency on a resident transition plan.

City staff met with the residents on July 21, 2014 to discuss the imminent suspension of service at the old Cornerstone site. During the meeting, staff made available relocation options including referrals to other shelter sites, some which are temporarily holding beds for residents of Cornerstone, as well as housing search supports. SSHA has been able to secure an additional 16 beds through two existing men's shelter providers that were in underutilized space or space recently made available through organizational changes. This reduces some of the pressure resulting from the relocation on existing shelter resources.

SSHA staff have been on site at Cornerstone Place every day since then to meet with the agency staff and the residents individually to assess their needs, build on their existing housing plans, identify specific programs in the community and at other shelter sites that are a good fit, and help them find the most suitable relocation option. Staff have also provided accompaniment supports to help the men access other housing or shelter options.

At time of writing, 34 of the men had been discharged from Cornerstone Place Shelter. Twenty four had been admitted to other shelters including Fort York Residence,

Birchmount Residence, Native Men's Residence, and Salvation Army Maxwell Meighen and ten had made their own plans. Of the 15 men still admitted at Cornerstone, five were very close to securing housing, eight had engaged with staff but had yet to make commitments regarding a transition plan, and two were not engaging with staff. Streets to Homes were due to be onsite on July 31 to support any residents still at Cornerstone when the operation was being suspended.

Next Steps

If the proposed site is approved, SSHA will continue to engage with the local community during the shelter relocation process and beyond. Staff are recommending that a community working group be formed to work with the shelter and help it transition successfully to the new location. This is consistent with key actions in the *2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework* to strengthening partnerships, enhance engagement opportunities, and service coordination.

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