



October 14, 2015

Dear Community Development and Recreation Committee Members,

Re: CD7.3 2015 Hostels Allocations to Relieve Occupancy Pressures (Ward 14, 15, 19, 21, 27, 28, 35)

I am writing to you today to request that you amend CD7.3 to incorporate feedback from both SSHA staff and Ward 19 residents regarding the proposed 30 bed emergency men's shelter at Bloor and Ossington. In late August staff confirmed their selection of the Christie Ossington Community Centre (CONC) as a service provider for a 30 bed men's shelter at their 850-854 Bloor Street West location. My office immediately booked space and worked with Shelters staff to set up an Information Meeting for residents, which was held on Monday October 5, 2015.

CONC operates a shelter on Lansdowne in Ward 18 Davenport. In Ward 19 CONC currently runs a drop-in and food access program that provides free access to healthy meals, phone, internet, skills-based workshops, health and wellness support and more for hundreds of vulnerable residents daily. CONC also runs LOFT (Life Opportunities Food and Technology) Kitchen at 850 Bloor Street West, which is a youth-led social enterprise for marginalized youth including newcomer, immigrant youth, out-of-school youth, street-involved youth, and youth with a previous criminal history, to develop employment skills while supporting their development as community citizens. The LOFT Kitchen is a café on Bloor Street that serves healthy food and drinks to the community. It is a place where youth are trained in food preparation, customer service, marketing and event planning to help those youth facing employment barriers gain valuable skills.

CONC successfully bid on the provision of a 30 bed men's shelter at 850-854 Bloor Street West. This shelter places the users in an agency that can provide many supports in addition to a warm bed at night. The services listed above will help the men in the shelter receive the health, training, employment, skills, and housing supports they need to improve their quality of life.

Each year dozens of homeless die on our streets. The numbers are not really tracked but the Homeless Memorial Project, which collects a list of street-involved people who have died, estimate that 740 people have died on our streets since 1985.ⁱ This winter alone there were an alarming number of reports of homeless freezing to death.ⁱⁱ The death of one person on our streets is too many, let alone more than a dozen a year.

Our existing shelter system is unfortunately not meeting the needs of our homeless population. It is stretched and well over capacity. Our goal of no more than 90% occupancy in our shelters is not being met, which means the homeless could be turned away from full emergency shelters. Our city must act now to ensure we can provide all people who need it a warm, dry place to sleep and programs to help them out of poverty. We can help, we know how, but we need to take action. The report before you today is one step in that direction.

As you know, opening new shelters in any community is never easy and it is rare that a neighbourhood welcomes a shelter with open arms. In 2011 I was exceptionally proud to represent Ward 19, when the local community fought back against the proposed closure of a women's shelter in the ward (and won!). I firmly believe that if any community can make a shelter program work, it is mine. However, I understand that neighbours have serious concerns about the impact of a shelter on their local parks and businesses. The process for locating a shelter is not up to residents because it is based on the needs of an often hidden and vulnerable population. The location of shelters is based first on our collective need for shelters both demographically and geographically, second the specific needs and potentially co-located supports for those who would be accessing the services, and finally the interests of local communities. It is only after city staff have evaluated proposals and concluded on specific service providers that the local councillor and neighbours are informed.

City staff are required to notify the community regarding their plans to develop an emergency shelter in their neighbourhood and host an *information meeting* to hear concerns and work with residents on potential solutions, as well as establish an ongoing dialogue through the establishment of bodies such as a Community Liaison Committee.

The meeting Shelters Support and Housing hosted in my ward with me on Monday October 5 was by no means an easy meeting. Without question however, almost all in attendance understood and were sympathetic to the needs of a very vulnerable homeless population in Toronto. But, many concerns were raised about local impacts of the additional services of a shelter at the CONC site on Bloor as well oversight of the shelter itself by the service provider – CONC.

I have heard concerns from some members of the community and I have heard from neighbours in support the proposal. Everyone agrees, our community along Bloor Street West has changed over the past decade and we want to ensure it continues to thrive. I couldn't agree more. Together we can continue to make our neighbourhood great, for everyone.

Following the public meeting, I worked with Shelter's staff on the following motion to amend CD7.3 to recognize a number of concerns raised by the community. I am confident these conditions will ensure accountability and allow us to address issues as they arise.

I am therefore asking the Committee to amend CD7.3 Recommendation 1, so that it now reads:

- 1) a) City Council approve the location of a new 30 bed men's emergency shelter to be operated by Christie Ossington Neighbourhood Centre at 850/854 Bloor Street West in Ward 19 in accordance with the requirement of the Municipal Shelter By-law 138-2003.
- b) City Council direct the General Manager, SSHA to include the following conditions in the operating agreement with the service provider:
 - i) That the service provider will hire a local community liaison worker who will be responsible for attending the meetings of existing community and business organizations; facilitating a community liaison committee; responding to local concerns and suggestions; and other duties city staff and the service provider determine are required.
 - ii) That the service provider submit a Community Response Plan that outlines the agency's standards for responding to neighbours' concerns, to the satisfaction of the General Manager, SSHA.



- iii) That the service provider ensure the men using the shelter have access to the employment, housing, health, skills workshops, and other services provided at their facilities and that local outreach is done to ensure that a local population in need is served by this shelter
 - iv) That no access be granted from the rear alleyway and no rear yard amenity space be granted without community consultation and approval.
- c) SSHA staff attend the service provider's board meetings for no less than the first year of the shelter's operations, conduct regular site visits and review the service provider's audited financial statements.
- d) SSHA establish a Community Liaison Committee that includes interested residents, relevant city staff, the service provider agency, and a representative from the local Councillor's office and that this committee meets regularly and is publicly accessible.
- e) The appropriate City staff ensure a community safety audit of the neighbouring park is conducted and recommendations are made for any changes required to maintain and improve the park

There are a number of emergency shelters in my ward and based on my only positive experiences within those neighbourhoods, I am confident that our community will be made stronger and more resilient through the opening of this shelter. I am committed to working with my neighbours on this change to help resolve any issues as they arise. I will be hosting another public meeting on October 26 in the ward and look forward to the establishment of a Community Liaison Committee to continue this work.

My family and I live on Pendrith Street, only a few hundred metres away from this proposed shelter. This makes me all the more confident we can make this shelter work. I am proud to live in a caring and compassionate community that looks out for others. Thank you for considering my motion today.

In community,

Mike Layton
City Councillor
Ward 19, Trinity-Spadina

ⁱ <https://nowtoronto.com/news/740-homeless-people-have-died-on-toronto-streets-since-1985/>

ⁱⁱ http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2015/01/06/second_homeless_man_dead_as_bitter_cold_envelops_city.html