



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Proposal for Emergency Men's Shelter at 731 Runnymede Road

Date:	June 14, 2016
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
Wards:	Wards 11 and 13
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report seeks City Council approval to open an emergency men's shelter to be operated by the City at 731 Runnymede Road in Ward 11. Additional emergency shelter beds are needed for single men to meet City Council's direction of achieving a 90% occupancy rate in each sector of the system. New shelters are also required to create replacement bed capacity for men as beds at Seaton House are closed in preparation for redevelopment at that location.

The property meets the requirements of the Municipal Shelter By-law 138-2003. It is more than 250 metres from another shelter, it is located on a minor arterial road and a community information sharing process is currently underway.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council approve the location of a new emergency shelter with a phased-in occupancy of up to 100 men to be operated by the City at 731 Runnymede Road in Ward 11 in accordance with the requirement of the Municipal Shelter By-law 138-2003; and
2. City Council direct the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to establish a Community Liaison Committee that includes interested residents, City staff, local service providers, and representatives from

the local Councillor's office in Ward 11 and to seek input from the Community Liaison Committee on the shelter program model and the gradual phasing in of beds at the site.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact associated with the recommendations in this report beyond the funding for shelter services provided in the 2016 Approved Operating and Capital Budgets for SSHA. Any future operating impacts arising from this new shelter location will be subject to approval in the 2017 Operating Budget.

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, Aboriginal peoples, people who identify as LGBTQ2S 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 and contributes to the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on November 3, 2015, City Council adopted EX9.6, "*George Street Revitalization – Recommended Scope and Approach.*" The report describes in detail plans to redevelop 339 George St. including the closure and transition plan for Seaton House, Toronto's largest men's shelter.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX9.6>

At its meeting of April 20, 2015, the Community Development and Recreation Committee received for information, CD3.10, "*Strategies to Improve Location and Relocating Emergency Shelters*" which set out the challenges of locating properties for use as emergency shelter and community engagement best practices when opening emergency shelters.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD3.10>

At its meeting on March 31, April 1 and 2, 2015, City Council adopted CD2.2 "*Infrastructure and Service Improvement Plan for the Emergency Shelter System*" which sets out an infrastructure and service improvement plan to guide the transformation of the emergency shelter system and requested staff to identify sites for up to 15 emergency shelters over the next five years.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD2.2>

At its meeting of December 16, 17, and 18, 2013 City Council unanimously adopted CD25.10, *2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework* (HSSPF). The HSSPF includes strategic directions to maintain a strong emergency shelter system as well as to create housing opportunities for vulnerable households in Toronto.

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

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>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

SSHA has been directed by City Council to meet a 90% occupancy target in all sectors of the emergency shelter system. On June 8, 2016 the men's sector was running at 97%. Additional beds are badly needed to ensure that every Torontonians in need of emergency shelter has access to this basic human need. Any additional beds brought online will assist SSHA in moving towards the 90% target.

Additional pressure on the emergency shelter system will result from the George Street Revitalization (GSR) endorsed by City Council in November 2015 which requires the implementation of a comprehensive transition plan for more than 600 men currently residing at Seaton House. Two temporary emergency shelters and two permanent shelters will be required to meet the needs of men who experience homelessness during this transformation.

A report on the GSR project and transition plan will be considered at the Executive Committee on June 28, 2016 and at City Council on July 12, 2016. Regardless of whether the GSR project is approved, the status quo at Seaton House, Toronto's largest men's shelter is not sustainable. In the November 2015 staff report referenced above, it was noted Seaton House, with its aging physical plant and environment does not meet the needs of vulnerable men and is in critical need of redevelopment. The first step in any redevelopment on George St. is to start housing the men using the Seaton House program and then closing some beds within it.

The property at 731 Runnymede Road was first identified by Real Estate Services as a potential site for an emergency shelter in January 2016. Since then, SSHA and Real Estate Services have completed their due diligence of the property and are recommending it be leased as a City-operated shelter for homeless men. If approved, it is estimated the location could be open for service in the second quarter of 2017.

COMMENTS

The site consists of a vacant 18,500 sq. ft. retail store zoned commercial/residential. The building has been vacant since Goodwill ceased operations in the city earlier in 2016. With some renovations the building could accommodate up to 100 men. Adjacent neighbours to the north, west and south are commercial businesses including several automotive repair shops and a large retail plaza with a Walmart. A side street, Ryder Ave., is residential and leads to Runnymede Park and George Bell Arena. The site meets the requirements of the Municipal Shelter By-law No. 183-2003 as it is on a minor arterial road and is located more than 250 meters from another shelter facility.

The community in the south portion of Ward 11 is well suited to accommodate a new shelter program. The location is well served by TTC and a short bus ride south to the Bloor Subway and east to the St. Clair streetcar. There are a number of services located nearby which could be utilized by men staying at 731 Runnymede Road. These include a drop-in program, community health centre and a local Toronto Employment and Social Services office. Ward 11 includes more than one Neighbourhood Improvement Area. SSHA will work closely with Social Development and Finance Administration on coordinating the enhancement of shelter services with other neighbourhood initiatives in the broader community.

Street Outreach in the local neighbourhood has served several clients over the years and the City's Streets to Homes program is actively working with three clients living outdoors nearby and has housed 6 people directly from the street in the last 18 months. The City has received several calls from retail businesses in the area who have reported people sleeping on their property and in parking lots. Although data from the 2013 Street Needs Assessment does not provide detailed information about the housing status of people from the local area, those who enter Toronto's emergency shelter system come from all communities across the city. Currently, Ward 11 has no emergency shelter beds and there are no emergency shelters for single men west of Caledonia Road in Toronto.

Program Model and George Street Revitalization

If approved, the shelter proposed for 731 Runnymede Road will serve adult single men experiencing homelessness. Referrals to the shelter will come primarily from the City's Central Intake phone service or from the Assessment and Referral Centre at 129 Peter St. The program will be operated by the City of Toronto, be operational 24 hours a day, and have skilled staff on site at all times. There will be no line ups outside the shelter for service or loitering in front or around the building. The property provides ample space to create a private fenced outside patio where clients could get fresh air or smoke.

The proposed shelter model for 731 Runnymede Road will serve up to 100 single adult men. As part of the emergency system, men using the service will stay for an average of 90 days and be supported to find permanent housing. Counselling and support staff will assist residents access identification, income supports and assist with life skills needed to

maintain housing. When necessary staff will also assist linking clients with appropriate health care services.

SSHA is transforming the way it delivers shelter services to people who experience homelessness, using a Housing First approach. The central assumption of the Housing First model is that having a home provides a solid emotional and social foundation which makes it possible to work on other life goals. In the simplest terms Housing First case management means that finding, securing and maintaining housing with clients is the primary focus of work being conducted by shelter staff.

The foundation of this transformation is to move away from the sole provision of emergency services and to create an integrated housing and support service system which increases the housing stability for all Torontonians. SSHA has a dual mission: to house more people in permanent housing with supports, and to stabilize and improve the existing shelter infrastructure.

The George Street Revitalization project proposes to close Seaton House, Toronto's largest shelter for men, and rebuild a smaller shelter, specialized transitional housing and a long-term care home in its place. SSHA will not intentionally replicate the large institutionalized setting of current Seaton House. The new sites will be smaller (125 beds maximum) in order to offer clients increased privacy and dignity with a decrease in the number of individuals assigned to each room/dormitory, and to allow for improved staff-client interactions.

To undertake this revitalization, transition space is required for men experiencing homelessness and additional beds will be required in the system. If the GSR project does not proceed or is delayed, Seaton House is still in critical need of redevelopment.

Community Information Meetings

Pursuant to the requirements of the Municipal Shelter By-law, a community information meeting was held with local residents on May 31, 2016. The location of 731 Runnymede Road is within Ward 11 but is immediately adjacent to Ward 13. In advance of the community meeting, SSHA reached out to both Ward Councillors to gather input on key stakeholders in the neighbourhood. It was established there is no active Business Improvement Association or Resident's Association. Invitations were hand delivered to local residents within 250 metres of the proposed shelter consistent with best practices outlined in SSHA's April 2015 staff report, *Strategies to Improve Locating and Relocating Emergency Shelters*.

The community meeting was in the form of a town hall and hosted at the David Appleton Community Centre, which is close to the proposed shelter location. Sign in sheets document the attendance of 111 members from Ward 11 and 119 from Ward 13 at the meeting. Space limitations at the Community Centre meant more than half of those attending the meeting could not gain access to the building and hear information about the proposal from staff. Two additional meetings were subsequently booked. One was

hosted by the Ward 11 City Councillor on June 9, 2016. The meeting was attended by Councillor Nunziata, Councillor Doucette, Councillor Palacio, staff from the Mayor's Office and approximately 300 residents. A second meeting was hosted by the Ward 13 City Councillor on June 13, 2016. The meeting was attended by Councillor Doucette, Councillor Nunziata, Councillor Mihevc, staff from the Mayor's office and over 200 residents.

The vast majority of the local residents at the community information meetings voiced opposition and expressed concerns regarding the proposal. Their concerns are very similar to what staff have heard during other meetings on proposed shelter programs. Often these concerns can be addressed through further discussions between City staff, other stakeholders, and a community liaison committee prior to and after the shelter opening. A separate report is concurrently before Community Development and Recreation Committee regarding SSHA's strategy in locating shelter services and some of the challenges that arise.

The concerns expressed can be grouped into the following themes:

- **Proposed Location:** General concerns regarding the proposed location and a fear it will negatively influence further development and neighbourhood revitalization. Participants also described that the underpass on Runnymede Road connecting Ward 11 and Ward 13 is heavily travelled and is a pathway which connects the community to the south. The underpass is already dark and now residents will need to walk past the proposed shelter to access this pathway.
- **Lack of Local Services to Support a Shelter:** Many residents expressed concerns there is not enough local services to support a shelter for homeless men.
- **Process:** Participants expressed that the process was rushed with not enough notice or information provided. The limited space at the first meeting prevented some people from hearing the proposal. Some also expressed a general feeling that the proposal was a done deal.
- **Crime and Safety:** Fear that vulnerable people in the community would be at greater risk for violence and crime. Others expressed concern there would be an increase in people loitering, using drugs or drinking in local parks and public areas.
- **Proposed Service:** The size of the shelter is too large and residents fear programming provided at the site will not meet the needs of the residents. Some argued a smaller shelter at this location or scattered across the City would be more acceptable.
- **Impact on Property Values:** The shelter will have a negative impact on the value of homes and land in the local area.

If the site is approved by City Council, a community liaison committee will quickly be established by SSHA and will include local community stakeholders. The committee will meet on an as needed basis to support the integration of the shelter into the local community, help address residents' concerns, as well as address any issues which may arise as the service operates. Information about the community liaison committee was shared at the meeting, including the plan to establish it before the shelter opens.

One specific issue raised by residents relates to the underpass on Runnymede and perceived safety issues. If City Council approves the recommendations in this report and prior to the opening of the shelter, staff would work with local residents and the community liaison committee in proposing ways to animate the underpass and create better lighting to address safety concerns.

SSHA staff would also use the community liaison committee as a vehicle to gather input on the exterior façade of the 731 Runnymede Road as well as landscaping. Program input including how staff can have a presence on the street and in the area surrounding the shelter to address fears of loitering would also be welcome. There will be opportunities to offer use of the commercial kitchen to other community groups and organizations as well access to meeting space.

Next Steps

Should City Council approve the recommendations in this report, SSHA will work with Real Estate Services to enter into a lease for 731 Runnymede Road and proceed with plans to open the facility as soon as possible. Some renovations to the property will be completed including the installation of a full commercial kitchen, dining area, laundry area, larger washroom and shower areas as well as privacy walls for sleeping space. It is estimated the shelter will open by the second quarter of 2017.

SSHA has been working to meet City Council's mandated 90% occupancy rate in all sectors in the emergency shelter system. The 100 beds proposed in this staff report will assist in meeting this target as well as maintain bed capacity which would otherwise be lost with the closure of Seaton House.

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SIGNATURE

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