

*Engaging
communities in
First Step Housing
and Services*

Report of the facilitator on developing
a new framework for siting homeless
shelters in the City of Toronto

Bruce Davis
January, 2017

THIS PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK

Imagine

Imagine a city where neighbourhoods welcome our most vulnerable citizens, where residents and community organizations and city government work together to alleviate poverty and homelessness, where we treat drug addiction as an illness, where neighbours gather together to ask how they can help, where they respond with kindness when they hear new housing for homeless men is coming to their neighbourhood, where they donate food and clothing and toys and toiletries to their neighbourhood drop-in or shelter.

Imagine a city where Councillors are vying to cut the ribbon at a new shelter opening, instead of being escorted to their cars by police after a hostile public meeting.

This is possible.

Toronto is a remarkably generous, respectful, tolerant, welcoming city. Since its inception Toronto has accommodated and supported waves of newcomers from across Canada and around the world and has been a leader in housing, health promotion, social justice and community development. It boasts a vibrant growing economy, rising property values and incredible community assets.

But we are also a city of poverty, vulnerability, precarious employment and expensive housing. And when a new facility to support homeless Torontonians is proposed for a neighbourhood we can also become a harsh city, worried about the threat to our safe neighbourhoods and our families.

In October 2016 I was retained by the City of Toronto's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) Division to facilitate a charrette to bring together government officials, real estate professionals, communications experts, residents and community groups to look at new ways of introducing new homeless shelters in Toronto. City officials anticipate that they will need to open 10 or more new homeless shelters (some are already underway) in the near future to meet the City's goal of reducing shelter occupancy to 90%, and to accommodate people displaced by the closure of Seaton house and several other smaller shelters.

Over the course of the past two months I worked with Toronto City Councillors Paula Fletcher and Ana Bailão, co-chairs of the charrette working group, and city officials from SSHA, the Affordable Housing Office, the Social Development, Finance and Administration Division, and the City Manager's Office to develop a process that would engage charrette participants. As part of our process I also met and interviewed 11 City Councillors, hosted a focus group with community agencies on November 18 and hosted a focus group with people experiencing homelessness at the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre on Peter Street on November 25. Our charrette was held at the 519 Community Centre on November 28.

A by-product of the process was a public opinion poll conducted by Forum Research, the results of which were shared by William Schatten, a presenter at our charrette.

This was an expedited process that started with the premise that we need to change the conversation and the process. We need a new framework.

But the process was also heartening. Virtually everyone who was approached to participate in the process, to give up a half day or a full day from their busy schedules, immediately agreed to participate without reservation. The men and women I met at the Peter Street focus group, arguably the most street savvy, cynical participants, turned out to be full of great ideas and hope. They were also so incredibly proud to call Toronto home and want this process to be successful.

When we set out our mandate was to look at community engagement related to new shelter sites and strategies to increase public awareness about homelessness, but through our conversations it became clear that the model for providing shelter services needed to change and also that overarching leadership was required.

The men and women I met at the Peter Street focus group, arguably the most street savvy, cynical participants, turned out to be full of great ideas and hope. They were also so incredibly proud to call Toronto home and want this process to be successful.

So this report sets out four key facets to a new framework: changing the conversation, rethinking the model for shelters, authentically engaging communities, and leadership.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the many participants in the process who agreed to be interviewed or who participated in a focus group or charette. Special thanks are also due to the incredibly talented team of City of Toronto officials who assisted on the Charrette Working Group: Costanza Allevato, Melody Brown and Carlos Vazquez of the Social Development, Finance and Administration Division; Mary-Anne Bedard, Gord Tanner, Geoff Gillard and Emily Kovacs of the SSHA Division; Simon Liston of the Affordable Housing Office; Jodi Callan of the City Manager's Office; Susan Serran of Councillor Fletcher's office and Rob Cerjanec of Councillor Bailão's office.

Rob Cressman, SSHA's Acting General Manager, gave the process his full support.

Councillors Fletcher and Bailão spearheaded this initiative and will play a key role as this framework evolves in the coming months. Their leadership has been genuine and supportive of the process. Thank you.

Bruce Davis, Facilitator
10 January, 2017

Changing the conversation

Words matter.

They matter in the workplace, on the sports field, in the school yard, and they matter when you are standing in a crowded gymnasium or church hall supporting or opposing a new housing development in your neighbourhood.

What we heard throughout our process is that we can no longer accept heated, hurtful, verbal attacks on our most vulnerable citizens or their supporters or our city councillors or staff. And likewise we cannot brand all opponents of homeless shelters as NIMBY.

We heard that we need to change the conversation.

First, let's discard the idea that we are helping "the Homeless". In the focus group that I facilitated at the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre on Peter Street, the participants, all of whom experienced homelessness, wanted to be treated as individuals. This is not about a capital "H" homeless problem.

One client said “let’s go help Bob or Dwight, not ‘The Homeless.’”

Changing this language also reinforces the need to develop strategies and services to help individuals with their specific needs: housing, life skills, work, addiction treatment, health care.

In our focus group with agencies, Paul tackled this issue of language head on when he confronted us with examples of the language used by Torontonians in community meetings and in deputations to City committees when opposing shelters in their neighbourhood.

Take the following examples, cited by Paul:

“If we are asking the neighbourhood to accept homeless people, let’s give them something good as well.”

“We need to get the community involved early. They’re the ones who know the best place for homeless people to go.”

Now search and replace the word “homeless” with your own ethnic or racial background or sexual orientation. In my case it would harken back to Toronto’s 19th century battles:

“If we are asking the neighbourhood to accept the Irish, let’s give them something good as well.”

You get the idea.

Changing the conversation means using respectful, non-discriminatory language that allows individuals, agencies and politicians to be heard, it means running community engagement processes so that people are not shouted down, and it means that supporters and those with concerns can share their ideas to make projects better.

It means using language that does not stigmatize or further harm Torontonians who are already at their most vulnerable.

One participant at the Referral Centre on Peter Street put it this way, “I am a human. I have rights. I have emotions. I have a voice. I need to be heard. This is my home.”

Community members and some Councillors have objected to the process and the information disseminated at public meetings. Changing the conversation includes making sure that information is accurate and timely, and that community members can ask questions without feeling that they are under fire.

The word ‘shelter’ has itself become pejorative. But rather than trying to cynically rebrand homeless shelters, participants in our process recommended that we rename these facilities or describe them as part of a system of supports, or a continuum of housing. Rather than a homeless shelter being a dead-end, they were seen as a transitional form of housing to allow residents to recover and map out their next steps in housing or health care or job recovery.

Changing the conversation includes making sure that information is accurate and timely, and that community members can ask questions without feeling that they are under fire.

The term “transitional housing”, widely accepted by our participants and City Councillors who were interviewed, is a term that the provincial government uses to define a specific type of housing support, so rather than muddying the nomenclature waters I suggest a placeholder name, *First Step Housing and Services*.

First Step Housing and Services is meant to convey the transitional nature of housing for men and women or families who are living on the street or fleeing violence or who are unable to manage in traditional accommodation (apartment,

rooming house, house). Another potential name is *Bridge Housing and Service Centres*.

First Step Housing and Services for Men and Women, First Step Housing and Services for Youth, First Step Housing and Services for Families all convey a more positive, hopeful journey and can also be expanded to include wrap-around services (covered in the next chapter): *First Step Housing and Services*.

An additional component of the need to change the conversation, is the need to educate Torontonians about poverty, housing prices, addiction and mental illness. We certainly heard from participants that a city-wide initiative is needed to fill the knowledge gap -- how can we expect Torontonians to come to the assistance of the most vulnerable if they don't know the causes, the magnitude, the successes and of course the human beings behind the headlines.

Filling the knowledge gap also means describing what services are being offered by *First Step Housing and Services* and what works.

Recently the City of Toronto's Medical Officer of Health and the Chair of Toronto's task force on drugs led a process to introduce new small-scale supervised injection sites as a means to address overdose deaths and to reduce the harm from drug addiction. This process informed Torontonians on how to make their communities safer *and* save lives through the implementation of supervised injection sites. This type of civic leadership is required to communicate the need for more *First Step Housing and Services* in sites across Toronto.

Advocates for improved shelter services rely primarily on moral or human rights arguments in favour of supporting *First Step Housing and Services*; but participants in our charrette and at the agency focus group discussed the need to also appeal to the enlightened self-interest of Torontonians: make the case for more housing by communicating the costs of poverty and homelessness.

Pauline Larsen of the Downtown Yonge BIA articulated this argument in an infographic that was shared with charrette participants: the cost of homelessness versus the cost of additional social housing. Added together, the cost of shelters, police checks on individuals sleeping outside, overnight hospital stays and correctional institution stays for people without permanent accommodation amounted to \$421,386 per night in Toronto versus social housing costs of \$34,512 per night to accommodate the same number of people.

Put more bluntly, a City Councillor said in an interview “do you want these people sleeping in your ATM or a shelter?”

Those are two ways of appealing to the enlightened self-interest of Torontonians.

If we learned anything from the Forum Research poll that was presented to the charrette it was that Torontonians are divided: when asked if they would support a homeless shelter in their neighbourhood 36% said ‘yes’, while 32% said ‘no’ with the same number either indifferent or don’t know (24% + 8%, respectively). Any strategy aimed at changing the conversation about *First Step Housing and Services* needs to fill the information vacuum that can build support with this middle group.

This research reflects my own experience as a facilitator for several housing projects in Toronto, where opponents of a project might be in a minority but they have a disproportionate impact on the process because of their vocal opposition. Supporters are less inclined to attend a meeting and very few undecideds attend. How these meetings are communicated, what is really up for debate, explaining how people can make the proposal better, all need to be communicated clearly.

The introduction of *First Step Housing and Services* also needs to be positioned as a positive event, worth celebrating, instead of a burden or battle.

Recommendations to change the conversation:

1. It is clear that this issue needs a champion or champions. The City of Toronto should engage civic leaders, business leaders, civil society leaders, faith leaders, youth leaders, eminent persons, academics and members of the Alliance to End Homelessness to mount a public campaign to be launched in early 2017 that will educate Torontonians about poverty/homelessness and the potential benefits/successes of *First Step Housing and Services* and engage them in a new framework to help our most vulnerable residents.
2. The City of Toronto should engage internal and external public relations, marketing communications and public opinion research professionals to develop and implement a strategy to educate Torontonians about poverty and homelessness and engage them in a new framework to help our most vulnerable residents. They can also consider new names for the service.

3. Any communications materials should be viewed through a lens of minimizing stigma and harm, promoting the rights and needs of individuals and underscoring the City of Toronto's existing commitment to reduce poverty and homelessness. Public engagement activities should underscore the need for constructive, non-threatening dialogue.
4. Communications materials developed to engage communities in new *First Step Housing and Services* (where this is appropriate) should make clear what the purpose of the engagement is and what is or is not up for debate.

THIS PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK

Rethinking the model

My mandate as a facilitator and our charrette terms of reference did not include redesigning the way that shelter services are provided, but it was clear from all the stakeholders with whom I talked that the concept of warehousing people in shelters needs to change.

The City of Toronto has made it clear through its decision to close Seaton House and redevelop George Street that smaller scale developments, integrated with wrap-around services and housing options, is the way forward. This was also a clear theme in our consultations.

First Step Housing and Services need to be aligned with other community development and social and employment services inside and outside of the City. Housing needs to be integrated with services, the facility needs to be integrated with other facilities, and the entire enterprise of housing and supporting our most vulnerable residents needs to be integrated into the community, not at odds with it.

We heard that an inventory of needs and community assets should be done in the areas of the city where City officials or housing service providers think that there are service gaps or

opportunities – generally in advance of any specific sites being recommended. That is not to say that *First Step Housing and Services* should only be located where there is already a concentration of poverty, on the contrary, but the needs and assets need to be evaluated first.

Developing an inventory of community assets will bring together community agencies, secular and faith-based groups, cultural and business organizations, local political leadership, and residents’ organizations. These groups will form the basis for better *First Step Housing and Services* proposals and will identify potential linkages.

We heard that *First Step Housing and Services* should include linkages on-site or readily accessible in the community for affordable housing assistance, jobs and life skills training, plus opportunities for computer access, culture and recreation. These are facilities that could also be used by other community members.

Just as individuals experiencing homelessness have specific needs, we heard loud and clear that one size does not fit all when planning *First Step Housing and Services*.

Just as individuals experiencing homelessness have specific needs, we heard loud and clear that one size does not fit all when planning First Step Housing and Services.

We heard that broad access to harm reduction services related to problematic drug use is critical. In our focus group at the Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre we heard that the intensity of drug use in and near downtown shelters makes the choice to stop using much harder to make and sustain. We heard that clients need and want smaller, quieter shelters outside of the city core with access to drug treatment.

Our client focus group also told us that some residents suffer from mental illness and that they really need housing and supports that meet their specific needs.

First Step Housing and Services that accommodates families, couples, or 50/50 men/women were also discussed; pets were also a consideration.

The current City practice of operating separate shelters for men and women makes siting the men's facilities very difficult because of local opposition generated by fears commonly associated with single men. This model needs to be reconsidered. If housing and services can be provided jointly for men and women, why is Toronto not looking at this model? That's what we heard from our client focus group and from some charrette participants.

Charrette participants felt that Toronto should seek out best practices in adopting new design and service standards for *First Step Housing and Services*.

Charrette participants felt that Toronto should seek out best practices in adopting new design and service standards for First Step Housing and Services.

In terms of integrating housing into the community, it was suggested that opportunities to integrate *First Step Housing and Services* into affordable housing or private real estate developments should be pursued. As an example, Red Door Family Shelter in east-end Toronto will soon occupy one floor of an eight storey main street condominium building on Queen Street East. This scheme was negotiated by the developer, the City of Toronto, the Red Door Family Shelter and the local Councillor. The inclusion of a shelter did not appear to have any detrimental impact on the marketability of the development.

Participants suggested that developers could be offered fast-track development approvals processing or incentives, and it was suggested that a portion of Section 37 benefits could also be used to support the development of *First Step Housing and Services* or other affordable housing.

In terms of design excellence, it was suggested that the City could procure the services of architects / planners / urban design professionals who could assist with development of new *First Step Housing and Services* sites. *First Step Housing and Services* does not have to look like an institution but, more than aesthetics, good design can incorporate elements such as roof top smoking areas, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and multi-use common areas that can bring the community inside the facility.

On the matter of optimal shelter size, there was strong consensus across all consultation channels that 100 bed shelters are perceived differently than even a 90 bed facility. There does not appear to be any causal relationship between size and efficacy, but the perception is that 100 bed sites are too large.

When Councillors were asked about shelter size it was clear that it would be easier to site a new facility if it was under 100 beds.

In our client focus group we asked about shelters of 30, 60, 90 and 120 beds and the consensus was 60 beds. No one selected 30 beds and one individual suggested 120 beds because the need is so great.

When Councillors were asked about shelter size it was clear that it would be easier to site a new facility if it was under 100 beds.

Directionally it appears that the City and shelter operators should plan for *First Step Housing and Services* sites in the 60-90 bed range -- however, this will mean looking for more locations than the 10 currently being sought by City staff --

and lowering the size of the shelters will also increase pressure on operating and capital budgets.

Let's be clear about that last point: if we think that *First Step Housing and Services* sites should be in the 60-90 bed range and if we expect them to have multi-purpose community space and on-site wrap-around services, then operating and capital costs will go up and we will need more sites, not less.

The good news is that smaller scale *First Step Housing and Services* will be easier to welcome to a neighbourhood, more sites will potentially be available, and local partnerships will be easier to establish.

On the matter of who should operate shelters, we asked Councillors, our client group, and the agency focus group whether shelters should be operated by the City, secular community groups or faith groups and the result was mixed. Some Councillors felt that they could control a shelter's operations better if it was operated by the City, others felt that the City had less credibility with the public than community groups and community groups were certainly better champions for their clients. With the client focus group there was a strong consensus that faith groups were too judgemental and opposed to harm reduction strategies and they were not favoured. In the end, the prime consideration was the quality of the operator, their credibility in the community and their success with clients. Based on this feedback a mix of public and nonprofit *First Step Housing and Services* providers should continue to be used.

The model of *First Step Housing and Services* being integrated with services, integrated with other facilities and integrated into the community is an abstraction until a site is selected.

In the last section of this report I will address political leadership, but suffice to say at this point that City Councillors are generally expert in community relations, knowing their communities, knowing the key stakeholders, knowing the agencies, knowing the services, but individual Councillors should not be put in the position of approving specific sites.

We heard that the current mandated process needs to change. Currently, staff from the SSHA Division work with staff from the Real Estate Division and present a local Councillor with a site 6-8 weeks before the public is presented with a site at a town-hall meeting, and then that site makes its way to a City Committee and then to City Council.

We heard from every consultation channel that this process is not working for Councillors, operators, community groups or residents.

The first consideration should be the identification of opportunities and gaps across the City. Staff and agency partners see the pressures for more services and they see the ebb and flow of shelters opening and closing. They need to identify the broad catchment areas where further analysis takes place. *First Step Housing and Services* could expand where there is need or where there is capacity or both. All areas of the city need to be engaged in supporting our most vulnerable citizens.

First Step Housing and Services could expand where there is need or where there is capacity or both. All areas of the city need to be engaged in supporting our most vulnerable citizens.

Second, in a ward or adjacent wards where there are gaps or opportunities, a detailed local assessment of the needs and community assets should be done. This assessment would involve City departments, outside agencies, community health centres, police, cultural groups, schools, BIAs, residents' associations and faith groups. People with lived experience should be consulted. We heard that we need to apply an equity lens to this process.

Assessments and consultation should focus on identifying the needs and services related to residents who are experiencing homelessness, and on how the site will meet those requirements. This may include access to transitional and affordable housing, health services, training and support services, food, community space, security, harm reduction or addiction treatment. Other community needs may emerge as part of the assessment process but they are not the focus.

City Councillors can be instrumental in helping to guide this assessment of needs and assets without influencing the findings. They can help identify key stakeholders and can communicate the results to the community.

The third element in a new process is the initial identification and feasibility considerations of 2-3 sites in a local ward or wards. While this might be an onerous assignment for City real estate staff and SSHA officials, especially given Toronto's real estate market, we heard from virtually every Councillor interviewed that multiple sites should be brought to them for feedback. These 2-3 sites would be brought to the local Councillor or Councillors for input, but not their selection. The site would be selected by SSHA's General Manager. If the site is to be operated by a community agency, then the purchase of service agreement would be negotiated and executed by SSHA's General Manager.

The community's role in this process will be outlined in the next chapter, but at this point it is important to mention that *First Step Housing and Services* sites that comply with the zoning by-law can be built as-of-right. There is no statutory requirement for a public meeting; in the City of Toronto it is mandated by Council that public meetings must be held and public notice provisions are mandated, but this type of scrutiny is not applied to any other affordable or rental housing building or any institutional use if they comply with local zoning.

In fact, it is a principle of land use planning that the land use is scrutinized and regulated but not the occupants. We heard from our charrette participants and from the agencies and some Councillors that as long as the site complies with the zoning by-law and its provisions for shelters, then no public meeting is required and no approval from Council is necessary.

I will take up those issues in the next two sections of this report, authentically engaging the community and leadership.

One final note about rethinking the model of emergency shelters and support: that is the use of City-owned properties. The City currently is going through a real estate review, looking to maximize the return on its assets and also breaking down barriers between City silos and between the City and agencies, boards and commissions (ABCs). The City and its ABCs have hundreds of properties, dozens of which could likely meet the criteria for new affordable housing or *First Step Housing and Services*. These assets need to be a key part of the City's strategy to reduce homelessness and poverty.

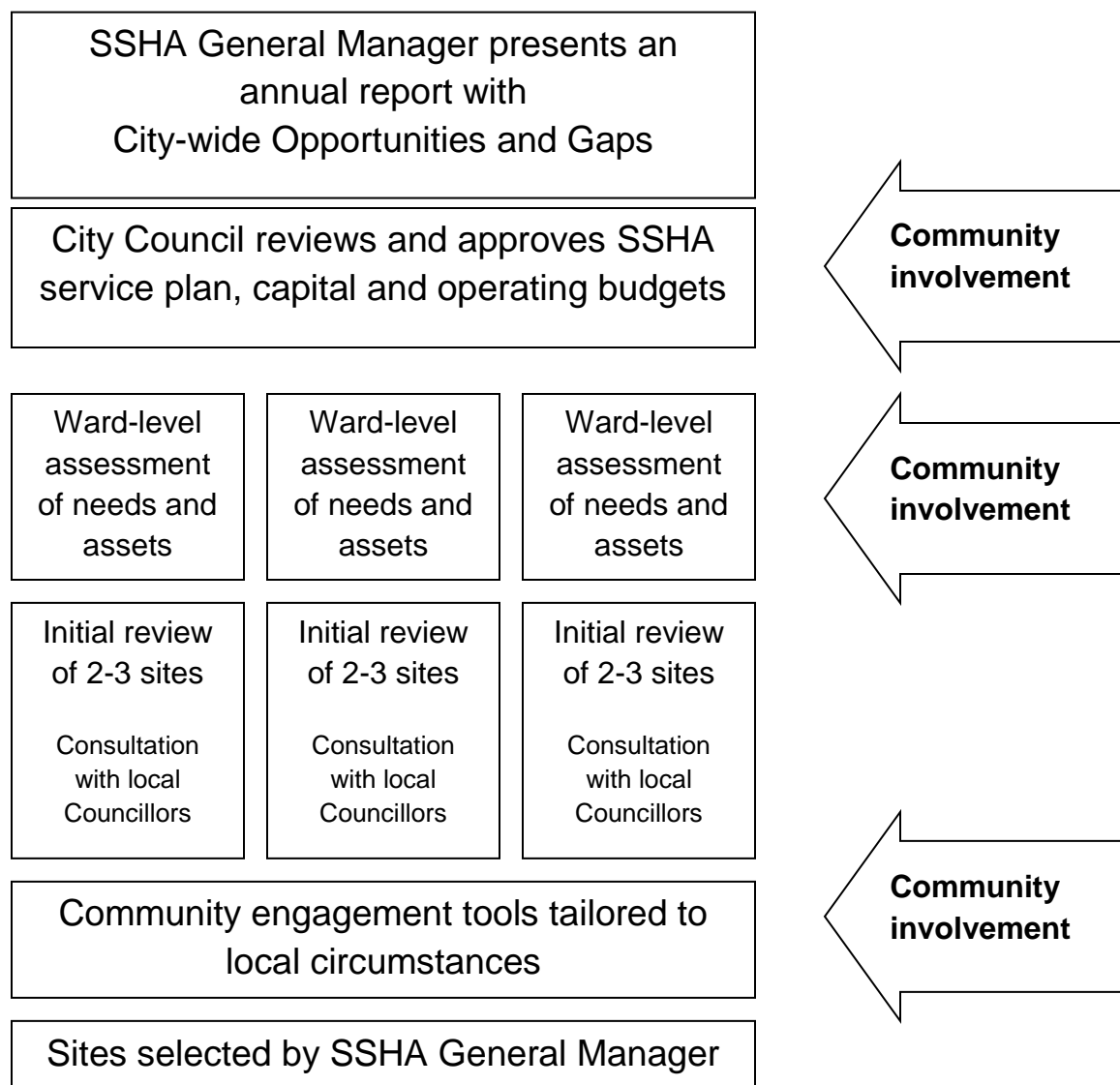
Recommendations to rethink the model:

5. Annually the General Manager of SSHA should present City Council with a capital and operating budget and a city-wide plan for meeting *First Step Housing and Services* requirements. Individual sites would not be identified even if they are known, but areas where there are gaps or opportunities would be generally identified. Once approved, this plan and budget would form the basis for conducting area needs and asset inventories and lead to the location of new facilities.

6. In a ward or adjacent wards where gaps or opportunities for service have been identified, a detailed assessment of needs and assets would be done, in consultation with the local Councillor(s), local stakeholders and residents.
7. The new *First Step Housing and Services* model should include integration with services on site and in the community, integration with other facilities, and integration with the community. This means, whenever possible, co-locating with hospitals, community health centres, affordable housing sites, private real estate developments, or other community hubs. Community use of the *First Step Housing* site should be encouraged.
8. Shelter, Support and Housing Administration should create a roster of architects, planners, and urban design professionals to assess the property and assist with the design of new *First Step Housing and Services* facilities. The community should be involved in the design of these facilities.
9. The City should seek out best practices in services and facilities for people experiencing homelessness: individuals, couples, families. This means design excellence, operating excellence and programming excellence.
10. The City should investigate the feasibility of offering private real estate development incentives to integrate *First Step Housing and Services* into private development schemes. These could include expedited planning approvals, reduced development charges, or use of Section 37 agreements.

11. As it re-examines the management of its real estate portfolio, the City should prioritize the use of surplus assets for *First Step Housing and Services* and affordable housing where this makes sense and where this complies with the zoning by-law.

Recommended new framework:



Authentic community engagement

We need neighbourhoods to welcome and support the vulnerable and the poor and the ill but we will only get to that place if neighbours are genuinely and thoughtfully and fairly involved in the process early on.

Through our consultations we heard two sides of the same coin: we heard that residents were angry because they were involved at the last minute, that they were handed a fait accompli in terms of a shelter coming to their neighbourhood and that they were criticized for expressing NIMBY concerns when they raised issues or objections. On the other side we heard that shelter residents have the right to accommodation, that you don't have the right to choose your neighbours and that public meetings bring out the worst in people.

Both sides are right.

The current Council-approved policy and zoning framework needs to work better for people experiencing homelessness, service providers and neighbours.

We heard that the community needs to be involved much earlier in the process, ideally before a site or sites are proposed.

On a city-wide basis, as gaps and opportunities are broadly identified by City officials, the public and stakeholders can and should have input: is there need for a new *First Step Housing and Services* facility in Scarborough? Or Etobicoke, or North York? Or for indigenous clients? Or women and children fleeing violence? At a city-wide level this engagement could happen through community councils or through the Community Development and Recreation Committee.

Once a ward or adjacent wards have been identified as having gaps or opportunities for service expansion, a local assessment of needs and assets should be done. This assessment should include local residents and residents' associations, BIAs, faith groups, service providers, and people with lived experience.

We heard that consultation should include proactive engagement: at condo board meetings, at school councils, at ratepayer meetings, at drop in centres. It is not adequate to circulate a notice for a meeting and expect people to show up.

All of this engagement would prepare the community to get involved in the next phase of a *First Step Housing and Services* solution. The assessment phase will identify champions-- people willing to get involved, agencies willing to participate-- and it may even spur on housing proposals from community partners. These allies may be counted on to support a new facility during its approval and development and operation.

We heard that all facets of community engagement should be managed by a third-party facilitator, so that City officials and service providers can focus on the "what" and "how", and the facilitator can focus on the process.

We heard that consultation should include proactive engagement: at condo board meetings, at school councils, at ratepayer meetings, at drop in centres. It is not adequate to circulate a notice for a meeting and expect people to show up.

We heard that community engagement principles need to include a code of conduct so that engagement is authentic and respectful, so that people with genuine concerns are able to raise issues without being accused of promoting NIMBY attitudes, and so supporters of new housing feel safe communicating their support.

On the basis of the needs and assets inventory, City officials or an agency partner would propose 2-3 sites to the local Councillor or Councillors for their feedback. These sites would not be released to the public until this consultation has occurred and the properties have been assessed for their feasibility and suitability.

Through our consultations with agencies and some Councillors and some charrette participants we heard that there should be no requirement for a public meeting for a *First Step Housing and Services* facility if a specific site meets the criteria in the zoning by-law. This needs to be clarified and City Council should amend its policy accordingly.

Why are these projects subject to greater scrutiny than group homes or affordable housing sites where they comply with land use requirements?

We heard loud and clear that town hall meetings should never be used as a form of public consultation. These meetings, where a location is unveiled and residents grill local politicians and City staff and where the dynamic can become very polarized, are not constructive and can lead to the spread of misinformation and further victimization and stigmatization of the people we are helping.

Notwithstanding the fact that there is no statutory requirement imposed on the City for a public meeting, we heard that there are benefits to involving local residents in certain aspects of any new *First Step Housing and Services*

facility, for example, in a design charrette with the architect; on a community liaison committee; as a local service volunteer/mentor; or if the housing is being operated by a community partner, as a fundraising volunteer or Board member. These public engagement tools should be used as and when required, rather than having them mandated by City policy.

There are a range of community engagement tools that can be used to involve the broader public in launching a successful *First Step Housing and Services* facility: a design charrette, a series of open houses, site visits, web sites, visits to neighbourhood organizations such as BIAs and school councils, invitations to a community launch and ribbon-cutting, but all of these would be deployed as a means of improving and supporting and launching the facility, not approving it.

Community liaison committees are one tool that can be used to help manage the introduction for *First Step Housing and Services* into a community, mitigate risks and harness the power of local volunteers. Community liaison committees can also provide a forum for complaints although with well-run shelters the number of complaints are very low.

We are not recommending that the public approve new *First Step Housing and Services* facilities, instead we are recommending a more authentic, thorough and process-oriented involvement well before a new site is proposed. This engagement should be directed at how to support our most vulnerable Torontonians.

Recommendations to authentically engage the community:

12. City Council should amend its policies related to the Shelter By-law/Zoning-by-law to remove the requirement for a public meeting and notice circulation and instead include a range of public engagement options such as open houses, websites, charrettes, focus groups and meetings with community groups and residents.
13. Shelter, Support and Housing Administration should create a roster of third-party facilitators to engage when proposing new *First Step Housing and Services* facilities.
14. Community engagement should start with the annual plan developed by the General Manager of SSHA for developing new *First Step Housing and Service* locations across the city. This plan should be available for public input through the Community Development and Recreation Committee and City Council. This report would not include specific new *First Steps Housing* sites.
15. In wards or adjacent wards where service gaps or opportunities are identified by SSHA , local needs and assets would be assessed. Local stakeholders, residents' association, BIAs, faith groups and service providers should be engaged through these assessments and these will form the basis for a web of allies who are committed to supporting *First Step Housing and Services* facilities in the community. Councillors should play a key role in identifying stakeholders who should be involved and in recommending engagement strategies.

16. Once a site is proposed for a *First Step Housing and Services* facility the public should be engaged to make it a success. Open houses, charrettes, focus groups and meetings with community groups can all be effectively used to engage the community. These processes need to make it clear that the site is not subject to public approval, but that the public's help is needed to make these services a success. Public engagement should be subject to a code of conduct so that engagement is authentic and does not further victimize the people we are helping.

Leadership

If we want a city where neighbourhoods welcome our most vulnerable citizens, where residents and community organizations and city government work together to alleviate poverty and homelessness, where we treat drug addiction as an illness, where neighbours gather together to ask how they can help, where they respond with kindness when they hear new housing for homeless men is coming to their neighbourhood, where they donate food and clothing and toys and toiletries to their neighbourhood drop-in or shelter, then we need leadership.

How else can we convince Torontonians who already have busy lives, who are struggling to get to and from work or school, who are raising a family, who carry record levels of debt, who are worried about retirement, to tackle the most intractable problem in our city?

We need our municipal leaders to mount an initiative that will identify the issues and solutions, provide a realistic plan for mobilization and fund and support strategies and implementation components that will be successful, starting with *First Step Housing and Services* but also including other initiatives to make housing affordable.

Our municipal leaders need to call on business leaders, civil society leaders, faith leaders, youth leaders, eminent persons, academics and other levels of government to join the campaign.

We need City Council to look at a city-wide approach, where gaps and opportunities have been identified, and then fund a city-wide plan and operating and capital budgets. We need City Council to revise its policies based on these recommendations and free-up City-owned land.

But we do not need City Council to approve individual *First Step Housing and Services* sites.

There was almost universal consensus through our consultations that the process for locating new shelters should be depoliticized. In fact, when our charrette break-out groups started to report back to the main group in plenary it was clear that this was something that everyone could agree on.

Depoliticizing the process was also supported by the agency focus group and by half of the Councillors who participated in our interviews. Others saw a modified role for Councillors in the decision-making process, especially early on in the site selection process.

In the end, we need to strongly recommend that City Council delegate the approval for specific *First Step Housing and Services* sites to SSHA's General Manager as long as the activities fall within Council-approved annual operating and capital budgets.

Council would see an annual report from SSHA's General Manager, as part of the division's annual budget submission, outlining service gaps and opportunities across the city.

In the end, we need to strongly recommend that City Council delegate the approval for specific First Step Housing and Services sites to SSHA's General Manager as long as the activities fall within Council-approved annual operating and capital budgets.

We heard that the policies related to the Municipal Shelter By-law need to be modified to allow for more flexible community engagement and site selection.

We heard that the role that some individual Councillors play in the engagement process can be a barrier to the development of new shelter sites so we are recommending that Councillors be involved earlier, that they play a key role in the needs and community assets assessment process, that they identify stakeholders, but that they not be put in a position where they have to approve a specific *First Step Housing and Services* site.

We need City Council collectively to hold City officials accountable to ensure that plans and budgets are properly managed, that the community is authentically engaged and that real progress is made to develop appropriate housing and services.

Recommendations for city-wide leadership:

17. City Council should approve service plans, and operating and capital budgets on an annual basis that respond to the gaps and opportunities identified by the General Manager of SSHA in their annual report to Council.
18. City Council should examine the potential for providing private developers with incentives to integrate affordable housing and *First Step Housing and Services* into their schemes, and for eliminating fees and levies currently applied to new shelters.
19. City Council should examine City-owned properties with a view to integrating *First Step Housing and Services* into these sites.

20. City Council should amend its policies related to the Shelter By-law/Zoning-by-law to delegate to the General Manager of Shelters Support and Housing Administration the approval of specific sites for *First Step Housing and Services* provided that these sites are within the operating and capital budgets approved by Council.

Conclusion

The City of Toronto is faced with the challenge of locating 10 or more new homeless shelters in anticipation of several shelters closing, shifting demand for services and the need to meet the City's policy of 90% occupancy of shelter beds.

This is a daunting task, one that can pit neighbours against one another or bring them together. It can demonstrate that the City of Toronto and its staff and leadership can work with communities. It can integrate services. It can work.

But the current process for finding new shelters needs to change.

In November 2016 I helped to facilitate structured conversations with City Councillors, community agencies, shelter users and charrette participants, drawn from the real estate and communications sectors, community organizations and agencies. Through all of these consultation channels we heard common themes: the need to depoliticize the process, the need to integrate services, the need to engage communities earlier in the process, the need for respectful and authentic communications, the need for city-wide leadership.

Our consultation process was an opportunity to listen and learn, to reset the process so that we call all focus together on the task at hand: serving Toronto's most vulnerable.

Bruce Davis
Toronto, Ontario
January 2017

Bruce Davis

Bruce Davis is a consultant specializing in communications, community outreach and policy development.

Since 1997 Bruce has been involved in controversial policy issues in the City of Toronto, including the passage of the non-smoking by-law, the first by-law banning the cosmetic use of pesticides and the sewer-use by-law. His practice has also included work on economic development, real estate development, energy, public health, environmental issues and tax policy. In 2016 Bruce was retained by Toronto's Medical Officer of health to help with communications and outreach for supervised injection sites in Toronto.

Bruce is no stranger to issues affecting Toronto's most vulnerable citizens. In 1990 he was the first Returning Officer in Canada to enumerate homeless voters. In 1995 as a volunteer he helped establish an Out-of-the-Cold program in the Bloor/Yonge neighbourhood. He assisted with communications and outreach when the Out-of-the-Cold program at the Church of St. Aidan was threatened by local opponents in 2007. He was a community outreach consultant on the redevelopment of Liberty House at 793 Gerrard Street East. In 2014 Bruce successfully assisted the Red Door Family Shelter to develop a community campaign when it was faced with eviction by a real estate development and in 2016 returned to help the Red Door family Shelter as it moved to its temporary home on Gerrard Street.

Bruce has worked with young offenders, Somali-Canadian mothers focused on youth violence, and from 2000 to 2010 Bruce was a trustee on the Toronto District School Board. In 2012 Bruce received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for his community service in Toronto.

Bruce divides his time between Toronto and Kingston, Ontario.