

Locating Municipal Shelters in the Downtown East Area

Date: March 26, 2019

To: City Council

From: Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration and
General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

Wards: 13

SUMMARY

This report is in response to the Planning and Housing Committee's direction on March 20, 2019 that the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, and General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, undertake an analysis and report on how the Downtown East Action Plan can inform the locating of new shelters and other services for vulnerable populations in the Action Plan boundaries. Staff will be reporting on the 12 month Action Plan and presenting a five year Action Plan at the Economic and Community Development Committee in June 2019.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director of Social Development, Finance and Administration and the General Manager of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration recommend that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financing impacts arising from this report. The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At the June 26, 2018 meeting, City Council adopted [CD29.5](#), the enhanced 12 month Action Plan for the Downtown East to address the heightened need for crisis supports and service coordination in the area. Council directed the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, to report back in the second quarter of 2019 on a comprehensive five-year Action Plan to coordinate City services and address long term community needs in the Downtown East.

At its March 20, 2019 meeting, through the report entitled Zoning for Municipal Shelters ([PH3.2](#)), the Planning and Housing Committee directed the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, and the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, to report to the March 27, 2019 meeting of City Council on the following:

- a. How the development of the 5-year Action Plan for the Downtown East can be used to inform the locating of new shelters, respite sites, and other services for vulnerable populations in the Action Plan boundaries.
- b. How the as-of-right provisions would impact decision making with regards to siting new shelter facilities in local geographies with existing shelter or respite facilities already lacking adequate programming and wrap-around services, including access to washrooms, daytime programming, counselling and referrals, and complex case work support systems.

COMMENTS

In June 2018, City Council approved an enhanced 12 month action plan for the Downtown East area, an area bounded by Bay Street in the West, the Don Valley Parkway in the East, Bloor Street (including the respite site north of Bloor) in the North, and Front Street to the South. The purpose of the plan was to provide recommendations to address the service gap and immediate crisis needs in the area with consideration to six focus areas: Mental Health, Harm Reduction & Substance Use; Housing, Homelessness & Shelter; Planning, Parks and Public Realm; Economic Opportunities; and Community Safety. The 12 Month Plan included 36 action items, assigned to multiple City Divisions. It also included a direction to report back with a five-year action plan for the area in the second quarter of 2019. Implementation of the 12 month plan began immediately and has involved a process of regular engagement with numerous stakeholders in the Downtown East area in addition to direct actions to address issues.

The context underlying the plan is that there are a multitude of service providers (both internal and external to the City) working in the Downtown East offering a range of supports to the various marginalized populations who have resided in the area for decades. Many of these individuals face multiple intersecting challenges related to homelessness, trauma, substance use and mental health. These challenges result in behaviours with increasing complexity as the anxiety and lack of safety that comes from being marginalized compound or even create mental health and substance use issues.

The situation in the area has also been amplified by the overdose crisis. The resulting behaviours are complex, but the solutions are less complicated – people living in chaos need a safe space to be and to sleep, a sense of community to belong to and to help imagine a different future for themselves, and the connection to self-directed supports to help them move forward.

Though there are many services present in the area working with vulnerable populations, there continue to be challenges in ensuring the Downtown East area is a safe and inclusive community. The 12 month Action Plan has included a number of items to help to address this issue. These include:

- Increased service levels for street, laneway and parks clean-up to enhance cleaning including needle pick-up;
- Increased number of City outreach workers and the creation of a Downtown East Outreach Working Group with membership from City staff and community agencies to coordinate efforts;
- A bi-weekly Issues Arising phone call to triage emerging concerns in the area;
- Access to City washroom and shower facilities at the three community centres in the area during regular operating hours seven days a week, as well as mapping of all public washroom facilities in the area to identify gaps;
- Providing training to over 200 front line staff from City divisions and community agencies on de-escalation, overdose prevention and response, harm reduction and suicide prevention; and
- A newly formed safety network at Dundas and Sherbourne that brings together local residents, police and community agencies to collaborate on local safety concerns. The agencies involved also initiated a pilot to respond to complaints about sharps on private property.

Lack of service coordination is often identified as one of the reason why challenges persist in the area. Opportunities to better coordinate the availability of services, and to better link services to needs within a given area are being explored as part of the 5 year Action Plan. However, research in the community has shown that the central cause is further upstream.

First, over 90% of agencies who participated in consultations as a part of the Downtown East Action Plan indicated insufficient crisis and preventative mental health services and access to housing with supports as the primary issues facing the community. Wait lists for supportive housing pose a persistent challenge; city-wide nearly 60% of people seeking supportive housing had been on the wait list for two or more years. There are currently more than 15,000 households on the Province's Access Point waiting list for mental health supportive housing in Toronto. There is a need to complete additional on-the-ground research to understand how the level and type of supports in the area meet the specific needs and wants of the population. This work would provide evidence for an enhanced alignment of funding with community need.

Second, there have historically been challenges in terms of monitoring service delivery outcomes as systems and resources used to track complaints and monitor and assess compliance with service standards were limited in capacity.

All City-funded shelter and 24-Hour Respite Sites are required to meet service standards set out in the Toronto Shelter Standards and the recently adopted 24-Hour Respite Site Standards. Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) has also recently rolled out a new Quality Assurance approach to support the implementation of standards and to track overall compliance. This new approach will establish a regular assessment of compliance with service standards to identify patterns of success and target opportunities for improvement to build capacity of service providers. Currently, SSHA is in the process of completing baseline assessments for 24-Hour Respite Sites, including those located in the Downtown East. Results of the assessments will be communicated to service providers in the second quarter.

The Downtown East area is not only a location for service provision, but it is an also area where people live, work, learn, and play. Findings from the initial implementation of the 12 month Action Plan have shown that services that support and stabilize marginalized members of the community are vital. However, concerns emerge when it is unclear how safety is being maintained for vulnerable populations and the broader community. Neighbourhood Safety Tables have been convened and are active in the area providing spaces to identify, triage and take action on safety issues that are identified by stakeholders in the community. Through the Downtown East 5 year Action Plan, staff will continue to take action on opportunities to enhance the response to people in crisis, training of staff and community, and continued cleaning of streets, parks, and laneways in order to respond to these concerns.

Findings from the development of the Downtown East Action Plan can be used to inform the siting of new services for vulnerable people in the area in two key ways.

First, the Action Plan will recommend the implementation of a collaborative coordinated communication mechanism in the area that convenes City staff, service providers and other key local stakeholders to address issues and identify solutions. This mechanism would provide a forum for consultation on emerging items such as locating new services.

Second, the Action Plan will recommend that a systematic community-based research project be undertaken to understand how marginalized populations live out their daily lives in the area. This be used to inform programmatic responses and identify where there are opportunities to shift services for greater impact.

With respect to zoning, the locational provisions of Zoning By-law 569- 2013 and the Municipal Shelter By-law were enacted with the intention of encouraging the distribution of shelters throughout the city and avoiding the concentration of shelters in any one location. At the time the Zoning By-law was enacted, it was also felt that a distribution of shelters across the City would ensure that community services were not overburdened in any one given area. Given the location of existing municipal shelters, 15 years of applying the 250-metre separation distance requirement as envisioned by the Municipal

Shelter By-law has not resulted in a distribution of shelters across the city. Ward 13, which has similar boundaries to the downtown east, encompasses 41% of the City's shelter beds, excluding those located in hotels and motels. Together, the three wards that comprise the downtown core, Wards 10, 11, and 13, are home to 65% of the City's permanent shelter beds.

In February 2018, Council authorized the addition of 1,000 new beds to the shelter system by the end of 2020. One objective of this initiative was to address the intensification of shelter beds in the downtown core and locate shelters throughout the city to ensure that people who become homeless can continue to access their professional and social supports in their current community. Between January and December 2018, staff assessed 379 potential sites, of the potential new shelter locations considered, more than 80% were located outside of the downtown core.

In 2017 and 2018, SSHA opened three new shelters, all of which are located outside the downtown core. With seven new shelters scheduled to open in 2019, six will have the opportunity to benefit service users in communities outside of the strict downtown core.

In addition to the 1,000 new beds that will be added to the system by the end of 2020, new shelters are being identified to accommodate clients who are currently staying at Seaton House. Approximately 30% of the shelter beds currently located in the Downtown East are located at Seaton house which will close in 2020 as part of the George Street Revitalization Plan, reducing the density of shelter beds in the Downtown East.

SSHA will continue to seek new shelter sites across the City to ensure that people who are experiencing homelessness can remain in their local communities. All new shelter sites will be designed and implemented according to the new shelter service model approved by Council, which includes new design guidelines, smaller facilities, 24/7 client programming including housing-focussed case management, employment, health and recreational programming, peer support and dedicated staff for community outreach and engagement. Issues of programmatic importance, including access to washrooms, daytime programming, counselling and referrals, and complex case work are a top priority when potential new shelter sites are being considered, however, these programmatic concerns are not directly impacted by the Zoning By-law. The proposed increase in as-of-right zoning provisions will not, in-of-itself, lead to increased density of shelter beds in areas with existing shelter or respite facilities.

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