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November 17, 2021

To the Members of the General Government and Licensing Committee:

Re: Acquisition of Commercial Lands at 120 Varna Drive for Community Space

Summary:

In Spring of 2021, the Lawrence Heights Safety Action Plan was created by Mayor John Tory's roundtable with Councillor Mike Colle, Chief of Police James Ramer, Toronto Community Housing (TCHC), and representatives from Transportation Services and Social Development, Finance and Administration. One of the major recommendations was the urgent need for a community space in Lawrence Heights for residents to meet and collaborate on safety initiatives for Lawrence Heights.

Ground floor retail space at 120 Varna Drive, currently owned by Heights Development, is available for sale. The space is approximately 13,000 sq. ft., and is situated at the base of a new, privately-owned residential condominium building that has been built as part of the revitalization of Lawrence Heights.

This retail unit at 120 Varna Drive provides a unique opportunity for a community space to assist in coordinating community safety initiatives and implementing community economic development initiatives in Lawrence Heights.

Given the opportunity to invest in longer-term safety and economic outcomes, some considerations for the space should include

- Ownership opportunities for equity-seeking groups;
- Supporting groups that have a similar vision for economic growth for Lawrence Heights and groups that might have historical connection to the community; and/or
- Having this be a city-operated space that can drive economic development for the community.

As part of TCHC's commitment to economic and social development, TCHC will continue to work with the City and key employment partners to drive economic advancement in Lawrence Heights, particularly in next phase of the Lawrence Heights revitalization.

Recommendations:

That the General Government and Licensing Committee recommends that:

City Council request that the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture and Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management consider the purchase of the 13,000 sq. ft. retail unit at 120 Varna Drive to develop a community space for tenants and agencies to deliver programs and expand the availability of much-needed accessible community space in Lawrence Heights.

Thank you,

Councillor Mike Colle
Ward 8, Eglinton-Lawrence