

April 30, 2021

Mayor John Tory
City of Toronto

RE: Seeking Positive Outcomes for Supportive Housing at the Trenton/Cedarvale Modular Housing Site

Dear Mayor Tory:

We are a group of local residents and parents who have serious concerns about the City of Toronto's proposal for modular, supportive housing at Trenton and Cedarvale in East York. While the concept is noble, we believe there is significant execution risk in delivering the positive outcomes that we would all like for the new and existing residents.

It is our view that positive outcomes would be created in an environment that permanently supports people out of homelessness and allows them to eventually reintegrate into the community. Based on our research, however, the current city plan does not look like it can achieve this.

Our group has attended, and participated in, numerous community and City of Toronto meetings and will also be in attendance for the next meeting on May 3rd, as your staff try to push forward an ill-conceived plan to place this development, designed for singles, into this family-supported community. We appreciate the magnitude of the homeless crisis in Toronto, and we recognize that this site can accommodate modular housing. We, the community, are not fighting the location of this project. Instead, we are requesting the City redesign the current plans to allow for permanent housing for families experiencing homelessness. We feel that this approach will result in better outcomes for the new residents: not only because history tells us that the singles-only model has been unsuccessful, but because there is a clear need, in this city, to house families, and this particular site, across from Stan Wadlow Park in East York, is the best location to do it.

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There is a clear case for a family development at Trenton and Cedarvale. However, the Housing Secretariat is ignoring this population and the benefits of this site. In the City of Toronto, there is a significant segment of the recorded homeless population (~20%) and a larger portion of the unrecorded/hidden homeless population that consists of families.

The 2018 Street Needs Assessment, the study used to support the Modular Housing Initiative, indicates the following:

Overall, 20% of respondents reported that their children and/or other dependents were staying with them that night. Of these households, 71% had either one or two dependents, while 29% had three or more dependents. Families reported having an average of two non-adult dependents, the average age of non-adult dependents was six years old.

The 2018 Street Needs Assessment further reveals the following:

While one-third of all respondents reported their first homeless experience as children or youth, this was considerably higher among outdoor respondents (63%).

It is evident that homelessness in childhood is a major predictor for homelessness in adulthood. We see, right in front of us, an opportunity to change the trajectory of the lives of children. Not only do we have our sights set on the present, but we are looking to the future. An investment in permanent housing for families will see the City reap the rewards in the years to come by tackling a major predictor of future homelessness.

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Raising the Roof conducted 3 year comprehensive study and published a paper entitled *Putting an End to Child & Family Homelessness in Canada*. The following are two key takeaways from the report:

1. Families stay in shelters **three times longer** than other groups with the average length being 50.2 days, a 50% increase over a five-year period.
2. Between 2005 and 2009, shelter use by children increased by over 50%.

By limiting the modular housing project at Trenton and Cedarvale to single units only, it is apparent that the City of Toronto is ignoring vulnerable families in our community. The City is preventing children from having the opportunity to finally live in a permanent home, a stable environment that they have likely never experienced in their young lives. Instead, the City proposes that six year olds should remain homeless in the shelter system, or be placed in other types of housing, elsewhere in the city, with fewer amenities and supports at their doorstep.

This is a community of families designed to support families. We are requesting the City of Toronto build for the segment of the homeless population that the existing community is already equipped to support. The neighbourhood surrounding the Trenton and Cedarvale site would open doors for children to build the foundation they need to thrive and close the door on homelessness permanently. They will be welcomed, assisted and encouraged to become part of the community: a rewarding outcome for both the new and the existing residents.

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The selected site is across the street from Stan Wadlow Park in East York. It is also across from an elementary school, daycare, public swimming pool, community centre and hockey arena. Stan Wadlow Park is itself fitted with several baseball diamonds and a skate park. For an adult, the location is relatively meaningless, merely a greenspace with little to offer. But that same location is myriad of possibilities for a child. They see adventure and fun, a safe place to spend their days, connecting and playing with friends. It offers opportunities to learn new sports, or join a team and experience a sense of belonging. For a single parent, a City-subsidized daycare, two schools, all within walking distance. Parents have amenities within eyesight, easing some of the stress that comes along with raising a young family. Where else could an opportunity such as this exist in the City of Toronto? By opening this modular housing development to families, you are directly offering children the prospect to not just break the cycle of homelessness, but to succeed and become a member of a community, not only in childhood, but into adulthood as well.

We are asking you, John Tory, and the City of Toronto, to please not waste this opportunity, for the success of the Rapid Housing Initiative and the members of this community, both new and existing, are depending on it.

The LURA Consulting's website states:

We get people engaged, connected and talking to generate new ideas and solutions that benefit plans, strategies and ultimately your communities.

We have been, and continue to be, engaged in this process. We have generated an excellent idea with a viable solution that benefits the City, those experiencing homelessness and the existing community. Will the City listen?

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We believe that a successful outcome for this project should not be measured by the number of units built, but by the number of people successfully supported out of homelessness. The proposed 64 single units will house 64 people. Fewer units housing families can also house 64 people or more. The ultimate success would be to see these vulnerable people eventually exit supportive housing all together. We believe that the best means to achieve this goal at the proposed site would be to develop it for families.

What is the City's objective, units or positive and successful outcomes? Based on dialogue with city officials and consultations with the community, it appears that the City has prioritized the number of units built over genuinely making a difference.

Please support the sensible solution which we have set forth. Lives are depending on it.

Sincerely yours,

East York Cares -
Representing the interests of over 460 local households