

From: [Jade MacGowan](#)
To: [Executive Committee](#)
Subject: Deputation for 230 Sherbourne J MacGowan
Date: March 29, 2022 11:46:45 AM
Attachments: [230 Sherbourne Deputation.pdf](#)
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Hello,

My name is Jade MacGowan, and I am pleased to request to sign up to present a deputation to the Executive Committee in support of expropriating the properties at 214-230 Sherbourne Street.

I have attached my deputation to this email, as well as an editorial piece from the Toronto Star that might interest the committee to read and reflect upon.

I am looking forward to speaking to the Committee tomorrow.

Quana, thank you,

Jade MacGowan (he/him)

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To City of Toronto Executive,

Good day to the Executive Committee. My name is Jade MacGowan, and I'm a community health worker supporting the Integrated Prevention and Harm Reduction Initiative (iPHARE) at Regent Park Community Health Centre. I'm a harm reduction worker and overdose response specialist with nearly a decade of community fieldwork under my belt. Many thanks to the Committee for hearing our concerns today, and for hopefully listening to those who have been on the front lines since well before this global pandemic to speak to the crisis of homelessness and housing in Toronto, and specifically to 214-230 Sherbourne Street.

The housing crisis in Toronto has ravaged our communities for decades, and this is not the first time that the Downtown East has pushed for the acquisition of 214-230 Sherbourne. Many of our community members are forced to live and sleep outside, just steps from Dundas and Sherbourne, a vital corner to this area, with limited access to dignified resources like bathrooms, shower, laundry, and food, while combatting a toxic drug supply that has left so many of our community members in despair and has disproportionately impacted the lives of Black and Indigenous community members. The direction for this expropriation began in 2018, and in 2022 we are still waiting for the City to help.

The housing crisis and the overdose crisis in Toronto are firmly interlinked. Even with the opening of shelter hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic - which are nearly at capacity and have been for months - , more than 1,000 people remained on the street, exposed to bitter winter and unable to socially isolate if they became sick. Lack of decent, affordable housing is as much a precursor to death by COVID-19 as it is a precursor to overdose. There have been a great many grassroots and community organizations that have assisted in the winterizing of camps and trying to help the communities survive, but we can't be everywhere at once. Just one month ago, a man passed away of exposure in a bus shelter barely a block from 214-230 Sherbourne Street, a chilling recall to Drina Joubert, who died from exposure steps from 214-230 Sherbourne in 1985, nearly 40 years ago.

I believe it is the responsibility of those with influence over the structures we live under to understand and internalize the drivers of homelessness, which, according to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness is structural in nature and the result of systemic failure. It is the responsibility of those who have taken the stand to power to create and implement programming that uplifts the humanity and sovereignty of the people it is meant to serve. And finally, is the responsibility of our city's politicians to protect its most vulnerable people. It's shameful that the City of Toronto could lose a bid on a mansion and surrounding lots that have sat vacant for a decade, while a homelessness crisis has torn through our communities. It's ridiculous to even say that aloud.

230 Sherbourne has been home to a great many Toronto luminaries before its decade-long vacancy, but its first role in the community was as a boarding house, in the 1920's. It later served as a rooming house for low-income tenants. I see no better way to honor this piece of Toronto's history and put a better step towards its future than to expropriate the home, and the vacant lots surrounding, and transform it to rent-g geared-to-income housing.

The committee has sat before many deputations to address the housing and homelessness crisis in Toronto, and it is the words of a Master's student named Rayna who sat before the committee in 2019 that have followed me in my work - "our apathy means death." Our apathetic approach to the Downtown East, especially during a global public health crisis, is deeply shameful and the deaths of our community members during this time have been entirely preventable.

As a community member and worker it is vital to me that the housing crisis in Toronto become a friendlier and more thoughtful, caring response than a footnoted agenda item, as well as its response to the overdose crisis. I am imploring that the Committee move forward with the expropriation of 214-230 Sherbourne and use this action as a stepping stone towards a modality of government that uplifts our communities and helps to keep them safe.

The Star wrote an editorial piece on 230 Sherbourne, which I encourage the Council to read: [Sherbourne Street mansion should be saved as affordable housing | The Star](#)

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EDITORIAL

Sherbourne Street mansion should be saved as affordable housing

It's time to ensure that 'Drina's House' becomes a home again in a neighbourhood where everyone should have a place to call home.'

By **Star Editorial Board**

Thu., March 10, 2022 3 min. read

READ THE CONVERSATION (2)

A week before Christmas, 1985, it was too cold to live on the street but just cold enough to die on one. Drina Joubert, who had repeatedly tried and failed to secure help from the City of Toronto's social service agencies, did just that, freezing to death in an empty truck parked behind 230 Sherbourne Street.

After Joubert's death, housing advocates tried to transform 230 Sherbourne into a supportive housing project called "Drina's House." They, too, failed in that effort to ensure the necessary services for the most vulnerable among us.

Nearly four decades later, on Feb. 4 of this year, a man reportedly sought refuge from the cold in a bus shelter at Sherbourne and Shuter streets. He also died of suspected hypothermia, less than 150 metres away from 230 Sherbourne. According to housing advocates, he was at least the fourth person to die of exposure this year alone.

The house at 230 Sherbourne Street could have saved their lives, just as it could have saved the life of Drina Joubert. It's a grand house, but it's not a home. Instead, the 30-room heritage-listed Victorian mansion known as William Dineen House, sits vacant. And it's been vacant for the past 10 years.

For most of those 10 years, advocates have again been working to ensure the city acquire the property — along with six adjacent vacant lots from 214 to 230 Sherbourne — and develop them as part of the revitalization plan for the Dundas-Sherbourne neighbourhood.

The city attempted to purchase the properties in 2020 but negotiations were unsuccessful as the owners apparently wanted to sell to developers. Now the opportunity presents itself again as the owners are accepting declarations of interest on the properties this Friday, March 11. On Tuesday, the city confirmed it will submit a letter of intent.

This is welcome news after four decades of tragedy. While the realtor's marketing materials again appear directed at developers, if the owners are unwilling to sell to the city, the city ought to consider acquiring the properties through expropriation — something housing advocates have demanded for years. The existing house and vacant lots are, after all, ideally situated for conversion to affordable and supportive housing.

The properties lie at the epicentre of a neighbourhood that is home to many vulnerable residents, including low income people and those with an array of physical and mental disabilities. Consequently, the neighbourhood is also home to many critical resources, and in Toronto's winter weather, affordable housing is every bit as critical as any other service.

And while 230 Sherbourne has been home to many luminaries, it also has a long history of serving people who need temporary lodging. In fact, it was first used as a rooming house in 1911-1912.

Converting it to affordable housing would therefore honour its history, and by extension, the history of Toronto. The city has lost many of its grand old homes in recent years, including two demolished a decade ago on the now-vacant Sherbourne lots. With each home that is destroyed, a small part of our history, of our city, is lost along with it.

We can save those homes, and in so doing we can save lives. And we can begin by saving 230 Sherbourne. It's time to ensure that "Drina's House" becomes a home again, one home among many in a neighbourhood where everyone should have a place to call home.

Most of all, it's time to ensure no one ever again freezes to death just steps away from an empty mansion.

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