

Dated April 26, 2022

Re: Planning and Housing Committee Item PH33.3 Modular Housing Initiative-175 Cummer Avenue

Dear Committee Members,

I am a resident and homeowner in Willowdale for the last 17 years and live less than 500metres from the proposed development. I am an active member of our local community including a member of Silverview Community Association, the Voices of Willowdale, an executive of the Bayview Cummer Neighbourhood Association, as well as a founder of Friends of Silverview Park group. I also speak on behalf of many of my elderly neighbours, many who do not use technology or have the ability to participate in the City's virtual only meetings.

We firmly oppose the proposed development for a modular housing unit at 175 Cummer Ave.

I want to start by saying I have always been one to support the vulnerable and marginalized residents of our society, through both my professional and volunteer work. I believe in affordable housing and other initiatives that aim to help those that are disadvantaged within our communities. In fact here in Willowdale we have many such initiatives. However I also believe in solutions that are well researched and well executed. Meaning that we take time to study our populations of who the solution is intended for, who the solution will impact, all the while upholding the process and necessity for democracy.

There are three main issues of concern with the modular housing being proposed for 175 Cummer Avenue:

1. Lack of concern for the wellbeing of the existing elderly residents and planning concerns
2. Hypocrisy as it relates to environmental and greenspace strategy
3. Poorly thought out solutions for the homeless that ignore their significant and complex challenges

1. LACK OF CONCERN FOR THE WELLBEING OF OUR ELDERLY

It needs to be noted that 175 Cummer Avenue is the same address of 280 Senior citizens who live at Willowdale Manor, a city-run supportive housing building for Seniors only. These seniors, who happen to be overwhelmingly ethnic, low-income with limited English skills, are losing what literally is their front lawn and peaceful green space to accommodate this housing. Furthermore about 20 metres next door with a mutually shared driveway, is Cummer Lodge, a city-owned long-term care centre with nearly 400 beds. Many of these nearly 700 seniors use these front lawns for their recreational and social needs. For those seniors that are somewhat able-bodied they do tai chi classes under the trees; for those that are less mobile they may stroll under the trees and gaze at the flora and fauna; and for those that have greater physical disabilities and confined mainly to their small apartments, they use the only small window in their unit to look out upon the green space with mature trees, watch the squirrels, hear the birds chirping and children walking to and from the many schools in the area. Many of these seniors do not have the luxury of being able to walk even a few hundred metres to another green space.

How did this site come to be selected? It's incredible that of all the possible spots that the city could select or buy, they've selected one next to 700 senior citizens (we remind you, who are also vulnerable) who don't have a voice. Or rather, who have a voice, but for some reason, whom our councillor and city has blatantly chosen to ignore. Two hundred or so out of the 280 elderly residents at Willowdale Manor have gone through great lengths to sign a paper-based petition at Willowdale manor. They have taken efforts to do this during a pandemic when they are also fearful for their own health. Majority of them do not have computers or internet or have the ability to participate in staged city-sponsored engagement meetings. *The paper-based petition has already been submitted in last year's PHC meeting on this same topic and will be*

on public record. The community has rallied behind them. Nearly 1750 online signatures have also been obtained by the Voices of Willowdale petition at Change.org ([Link here](#)) **Please see pictures below** of the seniors who continue to try and get city's attention, yet continue to be ignored. *This lot is zoned for seniors and it should be preserved as such.* In fact, a 3-story development was previously proposed for this very same parcel of land more than 24 years ago and in 1998 the Ontario Municipal Board held a 6-day hearing on the matter and after hearing from technical experts and residents, the **OMB ruled against the rezoning and development at this site.** The OMB indicated it was not in the public interest, the land was not suitable to be subdivided and further more not good planning for the community. See the final OMB decision [here](#). This powerful decision is essentially precedent; in fact the City paid for their lawyers to take this appeal before OMB on behalf of the city division who operates the Willowdale Manor. The same matters cited (traffic, accidents, density, zoning of the land for seniors, loss of green space, etc) are still relevant. In fact, not much has changed within a 500 metre radius of this site, even in 24 years. So does it make sense that we have to go through this extended process again to consider a building of similar significance (3-storeys), that is still not for seniors on this exact same parcel of land. *The land should NOT be subdivided into two portions with a setback (once the ancillary building is included) of less than 3metres. It is not compatible from a planning perspective. Furthermore to have this land that is intended for the seniors, be used to house another vulnerable group of individuals exiting homeless, many who have complex mental health and substance use challenges, is negligent planning.* The few seniors in Willowdale Manor that have computers and email and who speak reasonable English have been nominated by the residents to speak on their behalf. However they have been ignored, despite desperate pleas for someone in the city to at least reply and hear them out. The seniors continue to request an inperson meeting but this has still not happened. *It is incredibly shameful to see our seniors treated like this* with such blatant disregard and disrespect. I was taught to respect my elderly, and one would hope that our elected officials and city staff have a moral duty to do the same. Is this how we would want our own parents and grandparents to be treated in their twilight years? Our Prime Minister says that *our seniors deserve a dignified and safe retirement, to live with physical and psychological safety* – what ever happened to that commitment?

2. HYPOCRISY WHEN IT COMES TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND GREENSPACE STRATEGY

It should also be noted that at this particular site, one is not building upon a paved parking lot or infill space. This proposed site is a *park-like green space, home to 60 majestic trees, most of them mature and decades-old.* We have been told this development will require the cutting of at least 19 trees (again most of them very mature). Additional trees may also be cut or compromised as plans change and construction ensues. We should be clear - these are not sickly or dying vegetation - the trees are in full spectacular bloom each Spring. A picture is indeed worth a thousand words. **Please see below images.** Or better yet, come actually visit this outdoor site in person to see the beautiful trees that are going to be cut down; come see how the frail seniors at Willowdale Manor and Cummer Lodge are just metres away and use this green space; come see how these old majestic trees frame the prominent corner and gateway to our Newtonbrook East community. These mature trees also provide shade and natural cooling for many of the Manor seniors who cannot afford air conditioning units. The choice of this particular site by one city division highlights the *disregard and hypocrisy for the city's own Parkland Strategy* which states that our 'park system is much more than official city parks, it includes open spaces, conservation lands, ravines, hydro corridors, schools and other privately owned, public accessible lands'. We should be *protecting and preserving our trees and green space,* rather than cutting down and starting from scratch. Replacement with small saplings as has been suggested will take at least 50 years to mature to what this space currently looks like. We teach our children and the next generation to love and protect their green space for their future. How do we explain this hypocrisy to them?

3. FAILING TORONTO'S HOMELESS

At the community 'engagement' sessions, the organizers have been going through great efforts to evade the well documented notion (supported by peer-reviewed publications) that a substantial percentage of chronically homeless have either a mental illness or addiction challenge. Conservative statistics indicate that 30-40% of the chronically homeless will have a mental illness and another 30-40% will have addiction challenges. About 1/3 will struggle with both (concurrent). It almost seems that the city has employed a purposeful strategy to downplay the needs of the chronically homeless because of the stigma associated with these disorders. However by doing this, the city is actually doing a disservice to addressing the true needs of this population. As a homeless person, one can't begin to heal, if our own city won't acknowledge their needs from a health and social point of view. In addition, recently published research highlights how a significant percentage of our chronically homeless will also have chronic physical health and disabling conditions, such as traumatic brain injuries which can cause erratic, impulsive or aggressive behaviours. Furthermore and probably most importantly, authors of the esteemed Housing First study acknowledge that 'improved health and well-being requires more than just a roof over one's head. To make a successful transition, many people – particularly those with serious mental health and substance use issues – need intensive supports: case management, culturally appropriate services that enable healing, harm reduction services, peer support, and connection to primary care, mental health and addiction care. Research shows that investment in these services is not only critical to achieving a lasting reduction in chronic homelessness, but also that much of the costs are offset by reductions in the use of other services. Our goal must be more than moving people off the street. It must be to help people live full lives and be connected, healthy and well.' The '24/7 supports' that are always vaguely described and have been implemented at the first two modular housing site are inadequate to meet the intensive mental health and addiction challenges of this population. In other words, do it properly and don't leave out critical pieces of the puzzle to success. Otherwise, we risk greater harm than good, especially to the frail seniors who already live on this same parcel of land.

Finally, consideration should be given to what the homeless require nearby to help them live healthy lives. This site is located smack-dab in the middle of an interior residential neighbourhood versus closer proximity to an arterial street like Steeles, Finch, Yonge or Bayview. As such the nearest grocery store a 20min walk away, although named "Valu-Mart" is known to community members to be one of the more expensive grocery stores in the area, even moreso than the Loblaws at affluent Bayview Village. The closest 'affordable' grocery store No Frills is two bus rides away on a low-service bus route that even in rush hour, only comes every 20-30 minutes. Also the nearest library for free computer, internet and courses is a 3km or 40 minute walk away. Furthermore, the culturally appropriate and mental health services are located closer to downtown and far away from this residential community on the northern most edge of Toronto. **See attached aerial images.** So in other words, location matters.

Committee members, there needs to quality in execution of any plan, and in this case that starts with transparent and proper site selection, in order ensure optimal outcomes for all stakeholders. And yes for added clarity, those stakeholders include the constituents who already live in these communities. It needs to be stated that this **whole process has been an affront to democracy**. I have never seen so many people, thousands across the city and most importantly in Willowdale, that are so upset by how the political agenda has taken away so many democratic rights of citizens. Housing Activists are being given greater time and voice at virtual city-meetings than real residents. In fact the residents are barely allowed to speak since the moderator is cherry-picking who gets to speak and ask questions. The federal government has provided billions of dollars and an unprecedented opportunity to begin tackling our long standing homeless challenges. The provincial government does not support the MZO to be used for this site. Let's not waste

this opportunity to do something wonderful that creates meaningful and sustainable change, as opposed to hasty, secret, poorly thought out plans that fail our communities and erode the public's faith in democracy.

Sincerely,
Sugy Kodeeswaran
Owner and Resident, Willowdale

Pictures of the majestic mature trees at 175 Cummer Avenue, at least 19 of these will be cut down, including one of the original Willow trees after which our community was named





Pictures of the senior tenants at Willowdale manor, 175 Cummer who self-organized a silent protest with handmade cardboard signs. Many more of their voices on video can be found at www.voicesofwillowdale.ca, under Community Voices, Gallery.







Aerial Images of Local Community, highlighting lack of access to transport and necessities



Access to Transport & Necessities

REFERENCES

1. high-end **\$400k+** units - the shops will **NOT** be at an affordable price range
<https://www.blogto.com/real-estate-toronto/2018/10/newtonbrook-plaza-toronto/>
2. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7703388/yonge-north-subway-extension-rising-costs-metrolinx-ttc/>

