

November 3, 2023

To: Mayor Chow, Members of Toronto City Council, Paul Johnson, Paul Raftis, Gord Tanner, Gregg Lintern, Patrick Matozzo, Genevieve Sharkey, Denise Andrea Campbell, Dr. Eileen de Villa, Kwame Addo, Jonathan Batty, Abigail Bond, John Elvidge, Wendy Walberg

From: Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety, Members of the Executive Committee - Richard Blais, Diane Chester, John Davidson, Emil Glassbourg, Jenn Hilsden, Garson Hoffman, Jacquelyn Humphrey, Ron Lopata, Hannah Lopata, Curtis Priest

RE: Proposed 24-hour Low Barrier Respite Site — Accountability Issues

On November 8/9/10, 2023, Toronto City Council will be asked to vote on a 10-year plan for addressing the homelessness crisis in Toronto. “This plan proposes to open up 20 sites of 80 beds (1,600 beds in total) over a ten-year span, in neighbourhoods across the city, for a total estimated cost of \$674.5 million.” (Shelter, Housing, Support and Administration 2024 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Homelessness Service Capital Infrastructure Strategy staff report)

Underlying this plan are two policies approved by the City Council in 2017. The first provides General Manager of Shelter, Support and Housing, Gord Tanner (in consultation with other division heads), the delegated authority to site these facilities as he deems appropriate. The second policy is related to community engagement.

Hundreds of residents and businesses in the King West area have serious concerns with both policies. Currently, the City of Toronto, under Mr. Tanner, appears to have slated 629 Adelaide Street West for conversion into an 80-person 24-hour low barrier walk-in respite site that is planned to open in Quarter 1, 2024. This building is in a residential community, merely 100 metres from St. Mary’s Elementary Catholic School, 80 meters from St. Mary’s Catholic Church and 300 meters from Niagara Street Junior Public School. For a community that has multiple existing social services within blocks of this site, the residents and businesses of the area have serious concerns including:

- The close proximity of the proposed respite site to two elementary schools;
- The significant impact to public safety in our community;
- The location of the proposed respite site in a densely-populated residential neighbourhood; and,
- The City of Toronto’s lack of process, transparency, and proactive public consultation with the community.

Residents and local businesses believe that locating a respite site in the very centre of a residential neighbourhood, across the street from an elementary school, puts our children at great risk and is nothing short of reckless. Clearly, this decision was made surreptitiously as there was no proactive public consultation with the community.

The documented increase in crime and violence in neighbourhoods where these sites are located, as described in both these reputable news sources, is especially concerning:

Toronto Star: https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/city-alarmed-by-rising-violence-in-homeless-shelters-including-assaults-on-staff/article_07f45f63-72ea-5f22-8f7a-2a5c6885b3a3.html

CBC: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/consultation-meeting-city-toronto-midtown-shelters-community-concerns-safety-1.5693084>

Since news of this surfaced four weeks ago, residents have repeatedly reached out to Councillor Malik, Mr. Tanner and other City of Toronto staff with no response. Their actions and disinterest in community engagement, or lack thereof, shows how inflexible and inept they are in responding to the community's requests for transparency regarding the process that led to their decision to site the facility at 629 Adelaide Street West. Inflexible in showing any willingness to meet with residents, change their decision or, more importantly, be able to justify it with any documented standards or criteria. Inept in not following the community engagement process that is outlined in the Toronto City Council approved policy (2017.CD16.6) and have made no efforts to correct the missteps that even General Manager Gord Tanner publicly admitted to at the October 24, 2023 Economic and Community Development Committee. Meeting with a community only weeks before ANY Toronto shelter, respite site or warming centre is planned planned to open — and in some cases not at all — is, of course, NOT community engagement.

It appears to the hundreds of residents and business in our community that the City of Toronto has no interest in following their own community engagement policy and are paying lip service to any meaningful public consultation and engagement process.

City Council must insist on a review and update to both the delegated authority and the community engagement policy that were created under a much different set of circumstances than our city currently faces with respect to homelessness.

Councillor Malik has been absent from any meaningful engagement or contribution in support of her constituents. Her approach to 629 Adelaide Street West will be judged at the next election. As will yours as it relates to the your vote on this 10-year plan.

Failing to review the underlying policies will guarantee 20-plus further confrontations in neighbourhoods across Toronto as the 10-year plan is executed. The result will be community unrest and upheaval, further stigmatization of the homeless populations, political and legal challenges and potentially large payouts as the result of class action law suits, based on the negligence of Toronto City Council and City of Toronto staff.

In conclusion, the entire process led and executed by elected officials and City of Toronto staff has been nothing short of a colossal failure on several accounts: first, failure to follow the City of Toronto's own engagement policy; secondly, the City of Toronto's failure to properly consult the community BEFORE the respite site is slated to open; thirdly, failures from Councillor Malik and ANY City of Toronto staff to meet with residents after numerous requests to discuss our concerns; and, finally, the failure to understand at a fundamental level that putting a respite site across the street from an elementary school is unsafe and not good public policy.

Our community has repeatedly reached out to Councillor Malik and City of Toronto staff asking for genuine engagement, information about the decisions that led to choosing this site, and to find other possible solutions. Our community has not received responses. We are calling on the City of Toronto to pause the proposed plan for the respite site at 629 Adelaide Street West and to properly engage with the community on how together we can keep our children safe, build a livable community, and address the urgent homelessness crisis.

We are requesting an immediate meeting with Mr. Paul Johnson, Mr. Gord Tanner and Councillor Malik. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety