

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

From: Diane Chester - Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety

Re: HL8.1 - Our Health, Our City: A Mental Health, Substance Use, Harm Reduction and Treatment Strategy for Toronto — 629 Adelaide Street West / 24-hour Emergency Shelter

Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety (NNCS) is a group of hundreds of parents, residents, and businesses in the downtown west area of Toronto. We came together after learning in mid-September, through a rumour and not from the City of Toronto, that a 24-hour low barrier respite would be sited in the heart of our neighbourhood at 629 Adelaide Street West and would open early 2024.

We have read that 24-hour low barrier respite sites are a part of Toronto Public Health's new strategy to help with homelessness and especially those with mental health and addiction issues. And, we also noted your promise to include "civil society" in these processes. The purpose of this letter is to outline our community's very troubling experience with the City of Toronto's process, specifically, Shelter, Support, Housing and Administration along with City Council's support through the delegated authority to site a 24-hour respite site at 629 Adelaide Street West.

As previously mentioned, in mid-September we learned about this site through rumours. We began emailing Councillor Malik and requesting information — it appeared to us that she was also caught off guard. Her office responded explaining we would hear something soon — no date. We also received several emails from an individual with Barnes Management Consulting without a signature block — we were unaware who this organization was.

On Friday, October 6 at 6:30 p.m., we finally received an email from Barnes Management Consulting, that only went to members of the community who had emailed Councillor Malik. It was confirmed, a 24-hour low barrier respite site was coming to our neighbourhood and a public meeting would occur in January 2024. Such a significant and serious City of Toronto-led change to a community with no proactive formal engagement.

629 Adelaide Street West is an aging, poorly maintained building near Queen and Bathurst in the heart of a densely populated neighbourhood. This is the site the City of Toronto has chosen to lease for 10-years, we have heard for \$35,000 per month plus renovations, and is:

- a 30-second walk from St. Mary Catholic Elementary School;
- a two-minute walk from Niagara Street Public School;
- in the middle of a cul de sac of multiple one-way streets;
- in a very poorly lit area;
- surrounded by laneways and hidden dead end areas;

- directly across from several church parking lots;
- mere metres from homes and families; and,
- two blocks from a safe injection site and multiple social services already in our community.

It is well-documented shelters and respite sites significantly impact public safety in communities and communities have no recourse.

As a result of the lack of engagement and a genuine dialogue, including meeting with us where we live, the NNCS took it upon themselves to visit and interview residents, street patrol, security guards and businesses at other 24-hour low barrier respite sites and similar facilities including: 21 Park Avenue, 69 Fraser Avenue, 25 Augusta Avenue, and 129 Peter Street. Here is what we have learned: human feces (on private and public property), garbage thrown on the street especially from food handed out by the respite sites, noise 24-7, violent fights, people yelling, home break-ins, vandalism, people on drugs and unable to walk, drug use, people on private property sleeping/eating/leaving garbage, used needles/drug paraphernalia — these are not our words — these are the words of the people who live and work in the area around these sites. In July 2023, 25 Augusta Street was shut down and we were advised by the residents living beside this facility that there are now no issues in their community since the facility closed.

So, who is aware of the impact to neighbourhood public safety due to the siting of these facilities? Shelter, Support, Housing and Administration; Toronto Police Services; all members of Toronto City Council, Toronto Public Health, Corporate Real Estate Services, City Planning, Legal Services, all 350 City of Toronto community agencies, faith-based organizations; Queen West/Parkdale Community Health Center, the list goes on.

On Thursday, November 16, a 45-minute zoom meeting was arranged only for some residents in our neighbourhood that were hand picked by Barnes Management Consulting, with only two days notice held at 12 p.m. At this meeting, we were advised that **as a result of community input**, the City of Toronto will be changing the site to a shelter/emergency shelter (these terms are used interchangeably).

We were, in fact, previously advised multiple times in emails from Councillor Malik and Barnes Management Consulting and City of Toronto senior staff, that our concerns or any input into the process, especially regarding public safety, will not be accepted or heard until the facility is opened — **due to delegated authority**. Imagine our complete confusion and frustration.

We have now participated on six zoom meetings with five of those meetings all as a result of our community constantly expressing our concerns. This was not proactive engagement — it was reactive. Five of the zoom meetings Barnes Management Consulting chose the people who would be invited.

Additionally, there are many folks in our community who are unable to participate on zoom meetings — another option was not offered to them.

All zoom meetings are highly managed undemocratic webinars. We cannot see who in the community is attending the meeting, unlike face-to-face meeting, and we can't see what questions community members are posing. When we attempt to ask questions we are shut down by Barnes Management Consulting and many people advised their questions were not answered. We have documented these meetings. Not genuine engagement.

Additionally, a public notice was delivered (we don't know who received it) that stated the site (full programming not fully described) will have 60 to 80 beds, yet at the meeting on November 16, 2023, General Manager Gord Tanner advised 50 beds. We constantly receive contradictory information.

Over these past six weeks, due to the delegated authority and the lack of proactive communication by the City of Toronto and Councillor Malik, we have organized: frequent meetings; an online petition signed by more than 2,500 people; five rallies; media events; managed a Facebook page for nearly 700 people; sent and continue to send hundreds of emails and make phone calls to City of Toronto Staff, the Mayor, Councillors, Councillor Malik; 10 residents deputed a Economic, Community and Development Committee; attendance by 15 residents at City Council when the SSHA 10-year plan was debated; meetings with MPP Chris Glover; meetings with provincial officials; contact with Toronto Police Services multiple times; contact with Toronto Fire Services; we have submitted multiple FOIs to try to understand how this all occurred; and, the list goes on. What a terrible use of everyone's time.

We have advised as many people as we can during these six weeks and we are on public record advising all public officials in the City of Toronto and other jurisdictions that this is a reckless decision in a community where we are already neighbours with multiple social service agencies including a safe consumption site. You are placing too many services into a very small area. A shelter, an emergency shelter, or a 24-hour barrier respite site — does not belong at 629 Adelaide Street West.

What is most troubling is that due to the delegated authority we are not given any evidence based criteria as to how these sites are managed — especially the outcomes for the folks who use this facilities. What are the metrics for success? Our community has been completely shut-down and we are significantly impacted. It results in us having absolutely no confidence in St. Felix Center and the City of Toronto managing this site — we have evidence of this at 69 Fraser Avenue and that respite site DOES NOT have homes, schools, children anywhere near the site. In fact, there is a massive encampment that has been there for a very long time.

I warn every other community in Toronto to expect this undemocratic approach to building and supporting our neighbourhoods. There are more than a thousand staff who work in Shelter, Support and Housing Administration along with all of the other divisions managing this issue — hundreds of reports and hundreds of recommendations and over many years and the city is in a terrible place now.

We are stonewalled by our municipal government and Councillor Malik, it's demeaning, disingenuous and insulting. Our community would recommend a "lessons learned" session so these failures are not repeated in other communities.

And when the zoning for these sites was removed by advice from the City Planning division several years ago, there was virtually no attendance from communities (approximately 10 people) and City Planning admitted in their staff report it was not broad public consultation and there was no plan to build community relationships.

The only message we receive is: the City of Toronto has delegated authority to place these sites and we are not required to engage you.

Without proactive engagement, communication, and public education with all members in our “civil society”, the term used in your new strategy, especially early on in the process when sites are being considered — the City further stigmatizes homelessness. This has repeatedly led to conflict, misunderstandings, frustration, fear, and anger in our neighbourhoods — and eventually results in disinformation campaigns on social media.

Is this how you want to continue to solve the homelessness emergency?

This would not occur in heart of a residential community in Rosedale, Baby Point, Forest Hill, Bridal Path, etc.

We don't support an emergency shelter at this location for all the reasons we have stated in this memo and have repeatedly expressed in previous communications to you.

Diane Chester
Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety