

To: Mayor Chow and Executive Committee Members
From: Diane Chester, Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety
Re: **EX15.3, June 18, 2024 — A Cautionary Tale**

This staff report serves as a cautionary tale for all Toronto neighbourhoods who will face the establishment of 20 further dormitory-style 24-hour emergency shelters, each accommodating up to 100 people.

- **No accountability:** For 10 months our neighbourhood, near Queen Street West and Bathurst Street, has persistently voiced public safety concerns regarding the proposed siting of a 24-hour emergency shelter at 629 Adelaide Street West. Despite our efforts to engage senior staff and Councillor Malik through multiple channels, our concerns are dismissed.
- **Public safety not considered:** The proposed shelter's location presents a unique and troubling scenario. No other neighbourhood in Toronto contends with the convergence of a 24-hour emergency shelter, a supervised-consumption site, and a multitude of other social services in such close proximity to two elementary schools and a residential area. This clustering raises legitimate public safety concerns.
- **Documented incidents:** Our concerns are rooted in documented incidents at other facilities, including Parkdale Queen West supervised-consumption site. These incidents have included instances of violence, criminal activity, public drug use, drug dealing, assaults, encampments, fires, property damage, and tragically, fatalities. Particularly troubling is the extensive documentation of these issues at two other respite sites—25 Augusta Avenue and 169 Liberty Street—both operated by the same city-funded service provider set to manage the proposed shelter at 629 Adelaide Street West. These incidents raise serious doubts about the provider's ability to safely oversee such a critical facility in the heart of a residential neighbourhood.
- **Facility design flaws:** Structural design flaws around the proposed site, including a lack of critical outdoor space, contribute to safety concerns, mirroring issues reported in a June 6, 2024 Toronto Star article regarding a Toronto Community Housing facility. Laneways, dead-ends, and large parking lots—adjacent to schools and homes—exacerbate all potential public safety risks. With no outdoor space, the laneways beside Parkdale Queen West supervised-consumption site are a grim reminder of what will unfold beside St. Mary's Elementary School, St. Mary's Parish, and residences. Moreover, the proximity to the supervised-consumption site suggests that at least 50% of shelter residents will have serious substance use and mental health issues, further complicating neighbourhood challenges.
- **Councillor proposed interventions:** Housing individuals with severe substance use and mental health issues in a dormitory-style shelter in close proximity to schools and residences is reckless, as supported by the recent violence in shelters study from CAMH and expressed to residents by Toronto Police Services 14 Division. Unfortunately, Councillor Malik's recent proposed interventions, such as infrastructure enhancements of lighting, road safety, beautification are profoundly inadequate to address these complex issues. Furthermore, Councillor Malik stated on her website that the site would include a patio on the north side of the building on city-owned property, yet the city's Transportation Services division had not given approval for such a feature.
- **Mismanagement:** The decision to lease 629 Adelaide Street West was a desperate measure, prompted by a failed lease negotiation at 65 Bellwoods Avenue due to neighbourhood public safety concerns—a building half the size. Clearly, there was a lack of proper project management planning and financial management to site such an expensive facility, especially without considering many issues including the most critical—public safety. This 50-bed multimillion-dollar facility originally planned to open in November 2023—a windfall for the building owner—remains closed. This service is not a private sector venture—this is a facility fully-funded by the City of Toronto.
- **2017 delegated authorities:** In 2017, Toronto City Council delegated authorities for city staff to site these facilities without communicating with neighbourhoods. This decision, made when the homeless population was around 5,000 and before the toxic drug crisis, raises concerns. Managing these facilities and their impact on neighbourhoods has become significantly more challenging, especially in light of the recent CAMH study linking violence to shelters, and the city's new shelter violence reporting procedures known as BRASS. This facility will handle individuals with severe substance use and mental health issues—in the heart of a residential neighbourhood without critical outdoor space.
- **Freedom of Information Request:** Over the past 10 months, our neighbourhood has been mired in confusion and uncertainty regarding this new facility. Despite a multi-million dollar lease being signed, there were ongoing discussions in hundreds of emails between senior city staff, third-party consultants, the service operator, and real estate agents, on various aspects, including the city's ability to approve funding, the purpose of the facility, the target demographic, capacity, high per diem costs, and the opening date (originally November 2023 yet the facility remains closed). The lack of funding for security and safety patrols coupled with the lack of shelter experience from the service operator further exacerbates the situation. These issues reflect systemic flaws within the city's homeless program. With plans to open 20 shelters, including five in 2024, concerns about mismanagement persist. Our neighbourhood has lost faith in the city's ability to address this crisis adequately.
- **Threats from private firm and city staff:** Then, on May 6, 2024, both prior to and during a “community walk”, residents were discouraged and threatened from participating by the city-funded engagement firm, Barnes Management, and by senior city staff. Despite these threats, we attended calmly expressing our public safety concerns—the only in-person opportunity for residents in 10 months since learning about the facility through a rumour.
- **Community legal challenge:** Our community submitted a \$200 city zoning-use review application to gain clarity on applicable zoning by-laws for a shelter at this location—the city responded advising it was not permitted use. Consistently silenced, we had no other option but to undertake a legal challenge (funded by residents) against the city and the city-funded service operator. Despite facing an uphill battle, we refuse to remain silent in the face of reckless decision-making that jeopardizes the safety and well-being of our neighbourhoods.

It's simply unacceptable to burden Toronto neighbourhoods with the siting of unsafe shelters as a result of the city's longstanding failure to provide adequate supportive housing and rehabilitation and treatment facilities. We have consistently voiced our serious concerns on public record. Once more, we implore you to cease the irresponsible placement of the 24-hour emergency shelter at 629 Adelaide Street West.

Diane Chester
Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety