

To: Mayor Chow and Executive Committee Members

Re: EX15.3, June 18, 2024 - Advancing the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) and the 2025 Shelter Infrastructure Plan (Report for Action)

I have been fighting along with Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety for almost a year to prevent the siting of a replacement shelter at 629 Adelaide Street West. Our experience can serve as a cautionary tale for other Toronto neighbourhoods who will soon face the establishment of 20 further dormitory-style 24-hour emergency shelters (each accommodating up to 100 people) in their communities – under the terms of the HSCIS Capital Infrastructure Strategy and Shelter Infrastructure Plan.

It is imperative that all Toronto citizens know that shelters will be sited in their communities, close to their homes and schools, without distancing provisions, without consideration of public safety and without prior consultation. This runs counter to the City's own commitment to building healthy communities – because a corner stone of community health (public engagement in decision-making) has been effectively removed. This attack on the democratic process and individual rights cannot and will not stand.

City Council, through its Executive Committee, needs to set aside its pride and accept the fact that times and conditions have changed to such an extent that it is no longer safe to site shelters and/or supervised consumption sites near schools or within high-density residential neighbourhoods. Distancing provisions must be put in place to protect schools and communities. Site-selection for replacement and new shelters must include community consultation and consideration of public safety. The plan to site a replacement shelter at 629 Adelaide Street West must be cancelled.

Public safety trumps everything -- even the City's expedient land use/zoning revisions and questionable policy/practice changes (designed to remove citizens from the site selection process and limit public engagement in decision-making). In the face of a threat (proven by objective facts and experience) – particularly a threat to their children -- citizens will always speak up for what they believe is right and truth/fairness/honesty will prevail in the end. This is democracy in action.

Times and conditions have changed and everyone knows it. With the addition of wrap-around supports including distribution of harm-reduction supplies, Toronto shelters are de-facto crisis care facilities for individuals with (often untreated) mental health and drug addictions.

The 2024 CAMH report confirms that shelters are dangerous places for both guests and shelter staff. The 2022 John Howard Society report, *No Fixed Address*, reveals that a large percentage of shelter users are either recently out of prison, out on bail, on probation and that anger management is something this population struggles with.

I am aware of at least two deaths in the City where the weapon used was a needle or crack pipe most likely supplied by Toronto Public Health and distributed by a shelter.

I am aware of several incidents of children seeing (and hearing) drug addicts/shelter guests injecting or inhaling drugs, exposing themselves, and worse, on their way to school or in front of their schools. As a society, why do we care about "online harms" – why do we bother putting blocks and filters on children's computers so they can't see what we see – why do we bother caring at all, if we have such a laissez-faire attitude to what we allow children to see and experience in real life? Is this not ridiculously contradictory? The City should not have to be reminded that it has a duty of care to its citizens, especially children.

I respect the commitment and activism of my friends in the Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety. With every successive iteration, their position becomes stronger and clearer. Here are the objective and reasonable reasons why the plan to site a shelter at 629 Adelaide Street West must be canceled immediately.

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 the 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. 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.

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.

Jill Patrick
Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety