

Presentation to Toronto City Council – Josie Casciato, ARBO Seniors Association

Good afternoon, Councillors.

My name is Josie Casciato. I've been a long-time resident of North York and I serve on the board of the ARBO Seniors Association alongside Palmira Di Carlo and Rita Del Casale.

We are a federally incorporated, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the rights and well-being of seniors in our community. Formerly known as the York Centre Seniors Steering Committee, we have been active and engaged in the Downsview area since 2018.

As part of the community evolution, the William Baker District was renamed the **ARBO District**, aligning with the development of the upcoming **ARBO Seniors Village** and reflecting the identity of the broader Downsview community.

The ARBO Seniors Association continues to work with senior service agencies and advocates to improve the quality of life for older adults and their families. Our focus remains on active seniors and individuals with mobility challenges.

We are actively engaged in daily initiatives at community hubs located in the heart of Ward 6. We proudly support seniors' clubs at Ancaster and Roding Community Centres. With federal funding from the *New Horizons for Seniors Program*, we sponsor fitness and computer literacy programs that are running throughout the year. We also plan several outdoor events and gatherings focused on reducing isolation, raising awareness of elder abuse, and promoting mental health. One of our key goals is to strengthen the bond between seniors and youth leaders.

This kind of impact doesn't happen overnight—it takes years of dedication and hard work.

We've built strong relationships and collaborated regularly with Canada Lands Company, Councillor James Pasternak, local MPPs and MPs, city planners, and community leaders. All our summits and meetings are held in person to encourage public participation and support our goal of building something truly special, something Toronto can be proud of.

Our work is powered by volunteers. One of our driving forces is Elizabeth Jassem, CEO and co-founder of the original YCSSC. She is a visionary who has been championing the well-being of older adults in Downsview for decades. Since 2018, our efforts have been acknowledged by elected officials, CLC representatives, senior service providers, ZAS Architects, and the Rick Hansen Foundation, known for its leadership in inclusive and accessible design.

Thanks to Ms. Jassem's leadership, the **ARBO Seniors Health Village** concept was approved by North York Community Council and Toronto Council in July 2022 and reaffirmed in May 2024.

Block 3 in the ARBO District has been designated for affordable housing. Canada Lands, as the owner and operator, along with city staff, are preparing proposals in the coming months. These represent important steps toward fulfilling our shared vision of a more inclusive, connected community.

We strongly support selecting an operator that is fully committed to community engagement and to creating a peaceful, culturally respectful living environment.

Today, we are respectfully asking City Council to:

1. **Designate up to one-third of the units in Building 1** for seniors currently living in the Downsview area.
2. **Collaborate with Elizabeth Jassem and ZAS Architects** to ensure the art and cultural design reflects the vision of the ARBO Seniors Health Village.
3. **Prioritize local hiring** and work with service agencies that are leaders in affordable housing and aligned with our mission.

Let us not forget the painful lessons of COVID-19. Many seniors' homes were tragically unprepared. The ARBO Seniors Village is a chance to build a new model—one that ensures dignity, safety, and connection for our loved ones.

After six years of community consultation involving the City Planning Department, CLC, and many stakeholders, we've learned something important: residents may have limited power to make final decisions—but **City Council does**. You hold the responsibility for the outcomes of this process, regardless of what the community recommends or agrees to.

We are here today to say clearly:

The ARBO Seniors Association has been consistently advocating for our community since 2018. The ARBO District Plan was approved in 2024. Major amendments—such as the addition of 300 new apartments—should not be introduced just one year later unless they are minor and in line with the original vision.

We urge Council to listen, protect the integrity of the plan, and support the seniors who have built this community.

Thank you.

Josie Casciato