

December 16, 2025

Re: Item DM35.2 - Reimbursing Certain Reasonable Legal Expenses of Shelter Operators and Consultants - by Councillor Paula Fletcher, seconded by Councillor James Pasternak

Dear Mayor Chow and Members of Council,

I am writing to place on public record my serious concerns regarding the City of Toronto's approval, operation, and oversight of the St. Felix Centre 24-hour emergency shelter at 629 Adelaide Street West, following the recent motion on shelter siting and resident legal actions.

I urge Toronto City Council to reject Item DM35.2. This motion shifts legal risk from the City of Toronto's fully funded engagement consultants—who, like any contractor, are required to carry insurance—to taxpayers and wrongly allows Council to label ongoing litigation “nuisance,” a determination that rests solely with the courts. Toronto citizens have the democratic right to challenge government decisions.

629 Adelaide Street West was originally approved as an **80-bed low-barrier respite site**, this facility—fully funded by the City of Toronto—was later converted (November 2023) without any real transparency into a **50-bed, 24-hour emergency shelter**—operating in the very centre of a dense residential neighbourhood with no safe outdoor space, narrow laneways, immediate proximity to homes, and two elementary schools within metres. This change occurred without meaningful public engagement, promises of face-to-face meetings that never occurred, without a site-control plan, and without resolution of significant zoning concerns that residents repeatedly raised and the City has never substantively answered.

Residents' decision to seek legal recourse should not be mischaracterized as “nuisance litigation.” That term applies only to judicial findings, not political debate. In this case, legal action arose after sustained failures by the City and the service operator to respond to legitimate questions regarding zoning compliance, public safety, site planning, and adherence to the City's own shelter standards and design guidelines.

A zoning review commissioned by residents concluded that a **municipal shelter was not a permitted use** under the site's current I1 D3 zoning pursuant to former By-law 438-86 and the Municipal Shelter By-law. This finding has never been addressed by City staff.

When residents cannot obtain answers through normal channels, litigation becomes a last resort—not an abuse of process.

The experience at 629 Adelaide is not isolated. Across Toronto, poorly sited and inadequately overseen facilities—including at 545 Lake Shore Blvd. West, Parkdale Queen West CHC, St. Felix Centre former respite sites at 25 Augusta Avenue and 95 The Esplanade, South Riverdale CHC, and 81 Elizabeth Street—have resulted in documented disorder, death, safety risks, repeated emergency service calls, and neighbourhood breakdown. These outcomes are predictable when high-risk services are placed in residential areas without proper planning, transparency, or accountability.

At 629 Adelaide Street West specifically, residents have endured:

- Operation without a site-control plan.
- City of Toronto Order to Comply (October 30, 2025) with the Noise by-law due to severe violations and extreme noise from rooftop mechanical equipment impacting neighbours health and making parts of residential homes essentially unusable.

- Illegal sidewalk obstructions and unpermitted construction.
- A patio and fence (sited directly across from neighbours bedrooms and living rooms), approved through an encroachment agreement, illegally constructed requiring City staff to obtain approval from Community Council—after construction although in place for months.
- Severe light pollution onto private properties from poorly sited new exterior lighting and 24-hour bright interior lighting, multiple ventilation odours from washrooms and the commercial kitchen directly beside homes, and the associated noisy ventilation impacts.
- Unsafe waste collection and delivery practices in bike and traffic lanes and illegal parking.
- Trespass and laneway obstructions.
- Failure to fully implement Community Walk recommendations.
- Lack of access to the Community Liaison Committee.
- No response to concerns or acknowledgement from St. Felix Centre nor TSSS for months requiring multiple emails to be sent and escalation to Senior City of Toronto officials.
- Ongoing, unexplained daily neighbourhood surveillance by private “One Community Solutions Community Safety Teams,” causing fear, loss of privacy, and erosion of trust.

These conditions are inconsistent with the **Toronto Shelter Standards** and the **Shelter Design & Technical Guidelines**, which require respectful collaboration with neighbours, sensitive siting, integration with surrounding communities, and maintenance of public safety. The City’s stated “Good Neighbour Policy”, publicly referenced multiple times, is not reflected in practice.

Further undermining public trust are contradictions in City communications, including characterizing the program as a “relocation” despite new funding and operating agreements, and internal correspondence suggesting this framing was chosen to manage public opposition. When residents are provided incomplete or misleading information—or none at all—confidence in the process collapses.

Delegated authority and engagement for shelter siting was granted by Toronto City Council to Toronto Shelter and Support Services in 2017 under vastly different social conditions and is no longer appropriate. Homelessness has more than doubled, the opioid crisis has intensified, and neighbourhood public safety impacts are more severe. Yet the City continues to rely on an outdated, politicized engagement model that leaves residents without meaningful recourse.

Residents are not opposed to helping vulnerable people. They are opposed to decisions made without consultation, imposed without accountability, and executed in ways that disregard both neighbourhood safety and, in the end, the dignity of shelter residents themselves.

The path forward requires transparency, full adherence to all City policies, genuine engagement, and a recognition that neighbourhoods must be treated as partners—not obstacles. Respectfully, labeling concerned residents as “nuisance litigants” rather than addressing all these documented failures only deepens mistrust and prolongs conflict.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with Mayor Chow to discuss constructive reforms to shelter siting, oversight, and neighbourhood engagement. Trust can be rebuilt—but only through accountability, openness, and respect for the neighbourhoods asked to absorb these—fully documented—public safety impacts.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Chester
Niagara Neighbourhood