

## **MEETING SUMMARY**

Wednesday, September 9, 2020  
7:00 – 9:00 pm, WebEx (Online + Telephone call-in)

---

### **OVERVIEW**

On Wednesday September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, The City's Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division (SSHA) hosted a Community Information Session to share information and answer questions about the new shelter that will open early in 2021 at 705 Progress Avenue, as part of the [George Street Revitalization](#) project. The Information Session was held online and by phone in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the health and safety of Toronto residents and City staff.

The session was advertised by the City through a flyer, which was mailed out to approximately 8,000 residents and businesses within a 500 metre radius of 705 Progress Ave. The flyer was also sent by email to many social service agencies and hand delivered to businesses in close proximity to the new shelter. The session was also promoted on the project website [www.toronto.ca/progressshelter](http://www.toronto.ca/progressshelter).

Approximately 40 people logged on online or called in over the course of the public information session using the WebEx platform. A link to the recorded session and a copy of the presentation slide deck are available online for the public to access at [www.toronto.ca/progressshelter](http://www.toronto.ca/progressshelter).

The Community Information Session is part of the City's Community Engagement Process, which is about building a Welcoming Community. While members of the local community do not have a role in deciding where shelters are located, they can play a very important role in building that welcoming community.

The meeting included:

- Opening remarks from Councillor Paul Ainslie. A summary of Councillor Ainslie's opening remarks is attached to this summary as Appendix A.
- A presentation about four different aspects of the shelter by different presenters. The presentation is attached to this summary as Appendix D and is also available on the project website.
- The first part of the presentation, by the 3<sup>rd</sup> party Community Engagement Facilitator, Paul Dowling, focused on the community engagement process for the 705 Progress Avenue shelter.
- Loretta Ramadhin, Project Director, Infrastructure Planning and Development in the Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division described the context for the development of the new shelter.
- A presentation by Jason Ho, Project Lead with G. Bruce Stratton Architects, provided an overview of the location of the shelter and features of the design.
- A presentation by Monica Waldman, Manager of Seaton House, in the Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division. Monica described the program that will be provided in the new shelter. A summary of her presentation is attached as Appendix B.

- Following these presentations, a question and answer period was facilitated by Paul Dowling. Responses were provided by SSHA staff and Jason Ho.
- After all questions had been answered, Paul Dowling made some closing remarks about the next steps, which included inviting suggestions from participants for membership in a Community Liaison Committee.
- Councillor Ainslie ended the Session with closing remarks. A summary of Councillor Ainslie's closing remarks is attached to this summary as Appendix C.

Paul Dowling & Associates facilitated the Information Session and prepared this summary. The summary is not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript. A recording of the Information Session and the presentation slide deck are available at [www.toronto.ca/progressshelter](http://www.toronto.ca/progressshelter)

*Note: The intent of this summary is to capture the range of perspectives that were shared at the meeting. It does not assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives, nor does it indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of the City of Toronto.*

## COMMENTS & QUESTIONS RECEIVED AT THE COMMUNITY INFORMATION SESSION

Following the opening remarks and presentation by SSHA, participants asked questions and shared comments during a Question & Answer session.

The points below summarize the questions and comments shared. The feedback has been grouped under the following themes: Community Safety, Shelter Services & Supports, Shelter Planning & Public Engagement, Operations and Information about People Living at 705 Progress. Responses from City staff are noted in *italics*.

### COMMUNITY SAFETY

#### **What actions will be undertaken to promote community safety in the area surrounding the 705 Progress Avenue shelter? How will the new shelter location work with Warden Woods Respite Centre to address community concerns?**

*We will work with Warden Woods to explore what has gone on in the past and will meet with local businesses and workers to make sure that people have contact information for the shelter where they can call or email with any issues. We will respond to issues within 24 hours.*

*Locating shelters close to schools and child-care centres is not unusual. In fact, we even have a location where they are co-located, a child-care center and a men's shelter together. We've found in all of the locations across the city, shelters have been very good neighbours with schools and child-care centres.*

*People may have reservations about these arrangements; but we are reaching out and encouraging the community to reach out to us. We are aiming to be a good neighbour in this community as well. Our Good Neighbours Policy means respecting the community we're in and, in turn, helping the community to respect the shelter.*

*If any business owner has concerns about security at the respite centre, they can call the security number (416) 678-8234 or Warden Woods directly at (647) 895-5119 to speak to Beulah Esuk, the Client Engagement and Community Lead.*

#### **Can you share if there is going to be additional security added to the 705 Progress complex given the adjacent children's programs?**

*This is still under discussion. We would need to evaluate if it would make sense to have community safety teams at the site. We haven't needed security at Seaton House; though we realize that George Street is different from here.*

#### **Will the shelter contribute to criminal activity in the area? How will Councillor Ainslie respond if there are issues?**

*We will be building a relationship with the local police division so that police will attend shelter meetings and shelter staff will attend community police meetings and we will keep track of trends in incidents.*

*As with any group of people, some shelter residents may make bad decisions, but most are trying to get to better places in their lives and want to be positive members of the community.*

*Councillor Ainslie: I fully support having this shelter. As a City Councillor, my first priority is helping those who need help the most. We all need to be good neighbours. I'll be working with the Community Liaison Committee and Monica and her staff and others to make sure we have an inclusive panel of the community to address any issues.*

## **SHELTER SERVICES & SUPPORTS**

### **What will happen to the Warden Woods Respite Centre after the shelter opens?**

*Both buildings are part of a larger shelter system. The Warden Woods Respite Centre will remain open until April 2021 due to Covid 19 and the need for continued physical distancing. Further assessments on what will happen after the shelter opens will continue in the coming months. This may include shifting the clients into permanent housing.*

### **Will the respite centre and shelter be working together?**

*There will be several months of overlapping services at the beginning once the shelter is open. In its current location, Seaton House works with neighbouring organizations to coordinate care for clients who use multiple services. This new shelter can learn a lot from Warden Woods and the two will work cooperatively.*

### **Where will the people who stay in the shelter be in the daytime?**

*There will be a designated space adjacent to the building for smoking, garden beds, BBQs, etc. as well as computer labs, lounges, tv rooms, etc. in the building. People will also likely go to the mall or the park or businesses around the shelter. Some may work and we will also be partnering with the EPIC program that focusses on employment, training and upgrading trades. The shelter is open 24/7 so people are not asked to leave during the day. We hope they will become members of the community. In addition to the exterior client lounge, we have communal areas such as program rooms and a client education room as well as a pet area and various meeting spaces throughout the interior.*

### **Some of the hotels being used as emergency shelters are putting in place harm reduction programs after residents move in. Will you have harm reduction programs in place from the beginning?**

*There are different kinds of harm reduction programs, but Seaton currently operates from a harm reduction framework which includes counselling, naloxone, safe use supplies, etc. We will work with the supports that currently exist in the community. We work with people from where they're at; so, if someone is using substances, we want to make sure they are doing so in the safest way possible for themselves, the shelter, and the community at large.*

### **What are the eligibility criteria for the transitional living program/affordable housing?**

*At Seaton House, we develop and implement a housing plan with each client. This could include getting identification, seeing if they have ever applied for affordable housing before, and helping folks put in applications for different kinds of housing, including the private market.*

*Most people experiencing homelessness are eligible for affordable housing but the number of housing units available is low and there are waiting lists; we try to help them do applications simultaneously, giving people as many options as possible. If there is a specific transitional housing program that meets a client's particular needs or has specific requirements, we will work with that.*

## **SHELTER PLANNING & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

**Will the community be able to donate items or services to the shelter and will there be any volunteer opportunities?**

*Yes, absolutely! Seaton House would love to partner with the community - not just with social services but with people who live in the community, through sock drives, gardening programs, etc.*

*We can connect that through the Councillor at his office or directly with the shelter or with the Community Liaison Committee.*

*We'd love that. COVID has made things more complicated; but I'm hoping we can gear things up again. People who experience homelessness appreciate interactions that don't centre on them being homeless but are just opportunities for connection. We are hiring a program coordinator who will be the point person for this kind of engagement.*

## **OPERATIONS**

**Will you be hiring staff for the new shelter?**

*We will be relocating staff who currently work at Seaton House to this site. It is important for staff to move with clients with whom they have already established rapport. There are a number of workers who are commuting to downtown from Scarborough and so are already a part of the Scarborough community.*

*We won't be hiring directly for this shelter. The city does that hiring through a city-wide pool. We are always hiring; so, if someone is interested, they should check the city's website frequently for openings ([www.toronto.ca/employment](http://www.toronto.ca/employment)).*

## **INFORMATION ABOUT PEOPLE LIVING AT 705 PROGRESS**

**With regard to connections between the new shelter and Seaton House: once 94 men are initially placed at 705 Progress from Seaton House, will the remaining beds be available for people from Scarborough? What about the other 306 people at Seaton House who aren't coming to this shelter?**

*It is important to us that no clients be displaced from shelters as part of the George Street Revitalization project. There are temporary sites now (including Scarborough Village Residence, Junction Place on Runnymede and 2299 Dundas) and other sites where clients are being relocated based on the services available at those sites and the needs of each client.*

*The 400 shelter beds will be accounted for (with some rearranging due to COVID) and regular housing plans will be continued with Seaton House. We will be having information sessions with existing Seaton House clients to show pictures of the Progress Avenue site and other sites and will include clients in the decision of where they'd like to go.*

### **Do people have a choice of where they move?**

*Absolutely. We want this to be a humanizing process for folks and we want it to be empowering. We're working with adults who have a right to say where they want to be. With the Junction site, we had pictures of the new site and asked clients to talk to their caseworkers to express interest and had an overwhelming response of people wanting to move out of the downtown core to the west end.*

*We look at length of homelessness, when there is more interest than there are beds, to determine who moves. It gets difficult with the programs - 705 Progress does not have an infirmary program; so, someone needing that service would not have their needs met here. However, it is a fully accessible shelter for those with mobility issues and is pet-friendly.*

### **It's been said that the occupancy is 90 to 94 men. After COVID, will occupancy increase? Will you have bunkbeds?**

*We don't want bunkbeds. We want to create a welcoming, respectful environment. We want to get away from a large number of people packed into small spaces, which means getting away from bunkbeds.*

### **As we welcome our new neighbours at 705 Progress, what kinds of thoughts/thinking has been going into the fact that we have a significant number of Scarborough residents already experiencing homelessness and there are 100 new people coming in? How are we going to mitigate existing Scarborough residents already underhoused not being housed in these new beds?**

*Downtown core shelters are saturated. In our experience with relocating people from Seaton House to Runnymede, we were able to house everyone pretty quickly. On the day Runnymede opened, we worked intensively with local outreach programs to see how we can collaborate and provide sufficient services.*

*Once beds become available, we want to make sure we can invite people in, triaging to include those living in encampments and encouraging them to seek services when they need them. The goal is to rehouse people quickly and that should allow everyone access to beds as quickly as possible.*

*We are an emergency shelter; so, if someone were to arrive looking for a bed, we would provide one immediately if one was available. If we're full, we'll invite them in for intake and refer them to another shelter, providing TTC fare for the trip if necessary.*

## **NEXT STEPS**

The Community Engagement Facilitator, Paul Dowling, thanked participants for their continued participation in the process. Paul will continue to receive questions and comments raised through email and by phone.

Paul told participants they can stay up to date on the process, sign up for updates, and continue to connect with him by visiting the project website (<https://www.toronto.ca/progressshelter>) and sending emails to Paul at [705Progress@toronto.ca](mailto:705Progress@toronto.ca). Updates will also be available on the project website (listed above).

The next step will be to establish a Community Liaison Committee to receive information about the shelter, provide input to physical and program design issues, and explore local resources that can be brought to bear to support the shelter. The Community Liaison Committee will start to meet in October and meet regularly up to the shelter opening and beyond.

The membership of the Community Liaison Committee will include Councillor Ainslie, City staff, the Toronto Police Service, local businesses and residents and community service agencies. Suggestions of people that would be good for the committee should be sent to the Community Engagement Facilitator, Paul Dowling, at [705Progress@toronto.ca](mailto:705Progress@toronto.ca).

The Community Liaison Committee will work with City staff to plan an Open House for when the shelter is ready for occupancy. With COVID-19, it may have to be a virtual Open House; but it will be a great opportunity to welcome the community in when the shelter is ready.

After the shelter opens, the Community Liaison Committee will continue for a period of time, as the responsibility for community engagement transitions to an on-site Program Coordinator responsible for ongoing community engagement and systems navigation

## Appendix A – Summary of Councillor’s Opening Remarks

*The information below is a summary of remarks provided by Councillor Paul Ainslie at the September 9th Online Information Session. It is intended to capture key points and is not a verbatim transcript.*

---

### **Councillor Paul Ainslie:**

- Thank you for taking the time to join city staff and me to learn about this new facility opening early next year (2021)
- There is a need for new facilities to assist those experiencing homelessness; we all need somewhere to call home, live and prosper, and have a good life
- People experience homelessness all over the city and we need to provide services in many neighbourhoods
- We hope to eventually end homelessness in Toronto, making these facilities unnecessary in the future, except for short term stays
- We want to hear your concerns and thoughts on how we can work together as a community to make this new shelter a success for the community and the residents
- Staff will do their best to answer your questions and to assure we have a well-integrated shelter in our vibrant community.



## Appendix B – Summary of 705 Progress Shelter Programs

Remarks by Monica Waldman, Manager of Seaton House:

705 Progress will be managed and operated by Seaton House staff, building on their years of experience at the George Street location.

- We use a Housing First approach as our mandate is to support our clients throughout the housing process and to ensure that they are connected to the supports and resources they need to remain stably housed in the long term
- We are committed to working from a Harm Reduction approach, meeting clients 'where they are at' to set goals that they identify as priorities related to their substance use.
- We are committed to equity and diversity
- We would like to build on the strengths of Scarborough and are enthusiastic to connect with existing agencies in Scarborough to meet the needs of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- We want to build partnerships in the Scarborough community to address the issue of homelessness in Scarborough with a vision of becoming a stepping-stone to housing for single men currently experiencing homelessness in Scarborough (providing access to showers and laundry as an engagement tool).
- We will develop processes to engage with the local community, beginning with the establishment of a Community Liaison Committee (expected start: October 2020)
  - We have found that, over time, CLC meetings can be helpful when they are carefully planned, communicated and moderated. Meetings can help to overcome fears and concerns that were based on lack of information.
  - We look forward to transitioning the CLC meetings from an information sharing forum that is chaired by the City to a community-based group that recognizes the shelter as an asset to the neighbourhood and works creatively to support and grow one another. This can be via sock and clothing drives, BBQ's, info sessions for the community, community tax clinics, garden groups, art or pet care clinics, workplace/apprentice opportunities to limitless possibilities.
  - While it's too soon to tell how this unique CLC will come together for 705 Progress one thing is consistent across all our George Street Revitalization sites – and it's the City of Toronto's commitment to Excellence and our accountability to the people we serve. Your questions will be answered, your concerns addressed or considered and, most importantly, your support will be vital to co-creating a thriving asset in your neighborhood.
- The community can expect a high level of responsiveness, support and ongoing communication from 705 Progress with a range of options for getting involved or providing feedback.
- Our Program Coordinator will be a community contact for communication and community engagement once the shelter is opened.

## Appendix D – Closing Remarks

### **Councillor Paul Ainslie:**

- Thank you to everyone who joined the meeting this evening and for sharing your thoughts and concerns
- I've been listening and taking notes. I look forward to realizing this project over the next few months with the SSHA staff and others at the City, residents and the community, especially through the Community Liaison Committee
- A warm welcome to the Scarborough community to Monica and shelter staff, I know you're going to do great things
- Thank you, Jason Ho, for sharing the plans for this new building
- Thanks everyone for your work to get everyone a safe and warm place to sleep
- Stay safe and well, everyone. Thank you for your participation and I look forward to talking with everyone more.