

Report prepared for City of Toronto, Shelter Support and Housing Administration by:



COMMUNITY SAFETY WALK REPORT

2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard
West Project Site

November 27, 2020

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BACKGROUND

At its meeting of July 28, 2020, City Council authorized the City of Toronto to accept the offer to enter into an agreement to purchase the adjoining properties municipally known as 2950 and 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West for use as a municipal shelter, and possibly, affordable housing. You can see the link to the Council decision at: www.toronto.ca/ShelterExpansionSites.

If the due diligence process is completed successfully, the property acquisition's transaction is anticipated to close in December 2020. As a result of the Council Motion, Barnes Management Group was engaged as a third party community engagement facilitator with respect to the proposed shelter to be located at 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West. The Community Safety Walk was facilitated by Barnes Management Group as one of the key activities during the Early Community Engagement Process.

During the Early Community Engagement process for a proposed shelter to be located at 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West, community safety emerged on numerous occasions as one of the top concerns identified by community members with respect to the proposed shelter at this location.

In response to the many community concerns voiced around safety, the need for conducting a Community Safety Walk was one of the activities identified as being an important component of the early community engagement process. It is the first step in identifying safety issues and areas of concern to be considered when looking at how best to successfully integrate the proposed shelter into the community.

It is important to note that there are many safety concerns pertaining to this area as it currently exists, and all issues identified were those that form part of the existing conditions in the area surrounding 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West, in the absence of the proposed shelter. These are not issues that have arisen or have been caused by the introduction of a shelter into the community.

It is important to highlight that this walk was conducted as part of an early engagement process and as such is only the first step in identifying safety concerns. It is not a definitive or exhaustive list of all issues that may arise with respect to safety, but instead, a beginning to pull together and identify those community members who are interested in being engaged in contributing to making positive changes in the area of community safety. It is the beginning of a process which will evolve over the period leading up to the opening of the proposed shelter at this location.

During the course of the Walk, there were also many extraneous observations, comments and discussions pertaining to issues not related to safety. The findings noted here, however, are focussed only on those issues relating to community safety.

All other issues raised have been responded to or have been covered in other components of the Early Engagement Process.

This report outlines activities conducted between the period of September 24th and October 30th, 2020.

COMMUNITY SAFETY WALK WORKING GROUP

A working group was created to develop an approach to conducting the Community Safety Walk where key stakeholders and residents in the area could come together and participate in identifying issues of community safety, and to contemplate how best to address those issues. The Working Group consisted of:

- two representatives from the Shelter Support and Housing Administration Division, City of Toronto
- two representatives from Councillor Grimes' Office
- two representatives from Community Safety and Wellbeing, Social Development, Finance and Administration Division, City of Toronto
- two Early Community Engagement Facilitators from Barnes Management Group.

The Community Safety Walk Working Group held 3 planning meetings prior to the Community Safety Walk. The group met to do the following:

- review approaches and best practises in conducting a Community Safety Walk,
- determine an appropriate route for the walk;
- identify community stakeholders to participate in the walk; and
- determine how best to conduct the walk given the COVID-19 restrictions regarding outside gatherings and physical distancing that were in place at the time.

Given the parameters of the early community engagement, it was determined that one walk would be feasible at this stage of the project; and that additional walks will occur in order to adequately identify safety concerns particular to the 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West location. The working group acknowledged that the community concerns around safety were beyond the 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West location and that additional community safety initiatives in the area were needed. The working group received guidance that some concerns may only be identifiable at certain times of the day or evening; as well as different days of the week, and during different seasons of the year. It was also pointed out that future Community Safety Walks in the neighbourhood would need to encompass a larger area than the route taken on this particular walk.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

It was the intent of the Working Group for the Walk to be inclusive and to involve as many representatives from as diverse a group of community stakeholders as possible. To this end, the Working Group identified a wide range of community stakeholder groups and residents who would comprise a good cross section of the community and/or who had indicated an interest in participating in the Community Safety Walk.

In addition, during community stakeholder meetings which also occurred during this early community engagement process, each Stakeholder group that was met with was advised of the Community Safety Walk and was invited to identify a representative from their group to participate in the walk.

Invitations were extended to these groups, and a request was made for each group to identify one representative to participate in the walk, and to act as a conduit for information pertaining to the walk to flow to all members of their respective groups.

These invitations resulted in 14 stakeholder group representatives being identified and invited to participate in the walk, including:

- Lakeshore Village Business Improvement Association (B.I.A.)
- New Toronto Ratepayers Association
- New Toronto Lakeshore Village Residents Association
- South Etobicoke Cluster Steering Committee (comprised of 5 community service provider organizations)
- CAPREIT, owner of apartment buildings immediately north of the proposed shelter site
- LAMP Community Health Centre
- Co-Op Housing Associations (Nakisha, Barsa Kelly Carl Can, Lakeshore Garden)
- Women's Habitat
- School Trustees and Principals
- Faith Community (including 11 faith groups in the community)
- 22 Division, Toronto Police Services
- Two Independent Residents identified by Councillor's Office
- City of Toronto, Shelter Support and Housing Administration.

In addition to these 14 individual community stakeholders and/or residents, two additional community members joined the walk while it was in progress, and who were not on the participant list which increased community participation to 16.

All Community Safety Walk participants had access to information pertaining to the walk, key safety issues to look for, safety protocols and equipment and a route map in

advance of the walk. Walk participants were provided with Personal Protective Equipment in the form of masks, hand sanitizer, as well as bottled water, and a notebook and pen to take notes during the course of the walk.

THE COMMUNITY SAFETY WALK

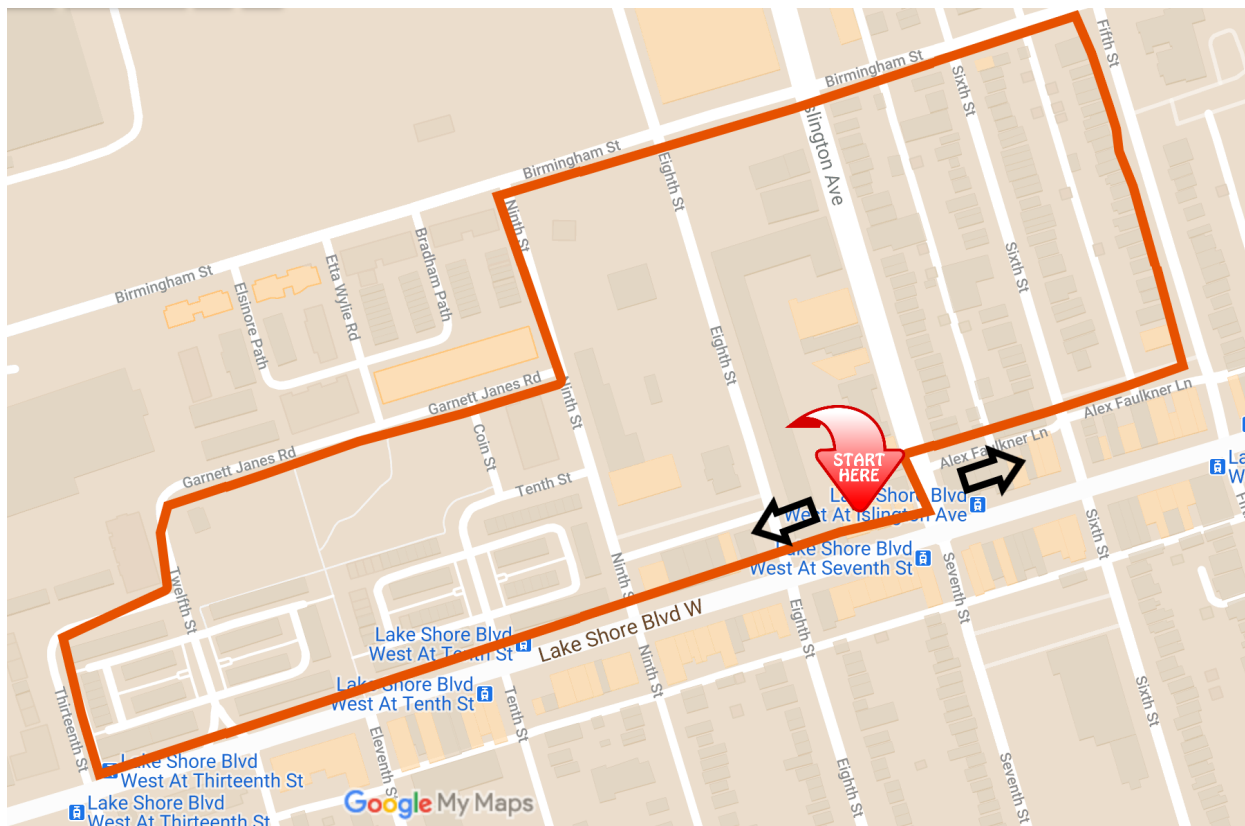
The Community Safety Walk was held on October 24th at 3pm. All walk participants gathered at the 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West site; and were then separated into two individual groups to comply with COVID-19 restrictions pertaining to social gathering size and physical distancing.

Prior to the walk, a detailed email was circulated to all walk participants outlining details of the walk, COVID-19 safety precautions, the route map, and an outline of various safety related issues to look for throughout the duration of the walk. In addition to the email that went to all participants prior to the walk, all walk participants were invited to take part in a Pre-Walk (virtual) meeting held on October 21st.

All Walk participants were invited to submit their notes of items observed on the walk and were given a one-week period following the walk to do so. Detailed submissions were received from two of the stakeholder groups participating in the walk, as well as one community member. The feedback received has been incorporated and/or summarized in this report. The feedback received was extensive and shared the experience and perspective of many community members. The concerns articulated had similar themes.

The quantum of information received by the Community Engagement Facilitators around community safety demonstrates the passion that exists among community members, as well as the urgency they feel with respect to finding resolution to many of these longstanding community safety issues. As was stressed at the beginning of the walk, only issues that pertain to community safety are included in this report.

The Walk followed a pre-determined route map which was developed by 22 Division, Toronto Police Services, and lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The route followed is outlined below:



The routes chosen were identical for both groups but conducted in reverse order in order to comply with social distancing measures. One group altered their route slightly, part way through the walk, to include areas of specific concern as identified by group participants. During the walk, community members in the one group determined that the proposed route did not walk east along Lake Shore Blvd West, which was a primary concern of residents. As a result, the route was adjusted to head east along Lake Shore to 2nd Street, then back along the north laneway to 4th Street, north on 4th Street, west on Birmingham, south on 5th Street, west on the laneway, north on Islington, west on Birmingham and south on 8th Street returning to the laneway behind 2950 & 2970 Lake Shore Blvd West.

Both groups reconvened at the completion of their walks; and a spontaneous larger group discussion took place in the parking lot, immediately north of the proposed shelter site. This large group discussion focussed primarily on issues related to recent and ongoing criminal activity in the area. Several questions regarding criminal activity were addressed to the two police officers assisting with the walk. The Community Engagement Facilitator concluded the gathering by thanking participants and indicated next steps in compiling the notes from the Community Safety Walk.

FINDINGS

Walk Participants were asked to point out any and all issues of concern related to community safety as participants progressed through the safety walk route. There were also many extraneous observations, comments and discussions pertaining to issues not related to safety. The findings noted here, however, are focussed only on those issues relating to community safety. All other issues raised have been responded to or have been covered in other components of the Early Engagement Process.

Key findings during the Community Safety Walk focussed on five key areas or themes as follows:

Criminal Activity and Community Policing

While participants did not observe any specific criminal activity during the course of the community safety walk, there were numerous references to the high level of criminal activity in the area. This was a significant factor which contributed to community members having a sense of not feeling safe in their community, and of feeling the need to restrict their activities (going for a walk, shopping on the local strip, going to restaurants or coffee shops) out of fear for their personal safety. It is important to note that the issues identified are across the entire neighbourhood, and not just on the streets or areas covered during the course of the walk. Examples of concerns related to criminal activity, community safety and community policing include:

- Hearing gun shots, knowledge of assaults and stabbings, theft, break-ins, drug dealing, as well as speeding and reckless driving on the side streets and on Lake Shore Boulevard West.
- Frequent drug dealing activities occurring in the laneways north and south of Lake Shore Boulevard; as well as at the skateboard park.
- Cars being broken into and stolen, articles stolen from cars and articles stolen from yards
- A sharp increase in violent crime that has occurred in the area of 10th Street and 13th Street.
- Recent gun violence and a shootout that took place on 8th Street.
- The number of community police officers covering this area and the frequency of their patrols are low. Participants spoke about a need and desire for more police presence in the area, particularly on foot or on bikes.

Not Feeling Safe

Many walk participants spoke of a feeling of “not feeling safe” in their community. Concerns voiced focussed on Lake Shore Blvd West and the alleys immediately to the north and south of Lake Shore Blvd, the parks, the skateboard park, and numerous side streets which were poorly lit or overgrown with vegetation. There were many concerns raised about the current level of harassment community members experience

from people loitering, and/or consuming alcohol and using drugs openly on the street and in the nearby alleyways and parks.

Several examples of individuals congregating, notably, but not exclusively at the corner of Fifth Street and Lake Shore Blvd West, and often seen urinating and defecating in public was cited as a concern, and especially when their children witness such activity.

Parents noted not feeling safe walking on Lake Shore Blvd West after dark, or hesitating to let their children go to the store unaccompanied largely because of the number of gatherings of individuals consuming alcohol and engaging in activities that made residents feel fearful on the street.

We heard much discussion during the course of the Community Safety Walk about the overall condition of the neighbourhood, the level to which it is maintained, the garbage and litter that was evident in planters and on the sidewalk, and the significant number of vacant stores on the New Toronto retail strip.

The general appearance was one of a neighbourhood neglected and not well maintained, which many residents felt added to an environment that was inviting of criminal activity and gatherings of individuals loitering or panhandling that ultimately created an overall sense of being in a dangerous environment. Many vacant stores and an overall lack of pedestrian traffic were noted in the area. Community walk participants, including the police officers, indicated that populated sidewalks and busy neighbourhood streets are a key crime prevention characteristic, and that populated sidewalks make many types of criminal activity less likely. During the walk, issues were raised by the apartment owners of the buildings immediately north of the proposed shelter site. They regularly experience issues of homeless individuals sleeping in the stairs and entrance ways, breaking the Fire Safety Plan box, and trespassing on their property. They also experienced many vandalism issues on their properties.

Street Lighting

An absence of adequate lighting was noted along Lake Shore Boulevard West as well as in the laneway north of Lake Shore Boulevard West. Service providers indicated that this resulted in large patches of dimly lit areas and expressed concern about potential drug dealing and human trafficking in these areas. Residents reported feeling unsafe walking in the laneways after dark, and that posed a safety concern for vulnerable people in the area.

It was also pointed out that the type of lighting used in the laneways is outdated and the type of bulbs used should be replaced with ones that provide a brighter light level.

Neighbourhood Schools

During the course of the walk, several nearby schools were pointed out, and concerns were expressed pertaining to their proximity to this area. The specific concern cited

surrounded the need for students to walk through the area on their way to and from school.

Community safety walk participants articulated concerns about children walking alone in the area to attend schools located on 7th Street, 10th Street and 2nd Street as well as a nearby daycare centre. Community safety walk participants shared that guardians may be needed to escort children on their walk to and from these schools to ensure their safety and well-being. They feared children would be exposed to inappropriate language, harassment, panhandling and activities not appropriate for school age children to witness or experience.

Some community safety walk participants spoke of children being exposed to public defecation, urination, masturbation, and sexual acts by individuals loitering in the area.

Miscellaneous Items (sidewalk conditions, garbage, vegetation, etc.)

During the course of the community safety walk, participants identified a number of specific items that they determined required immediate attention. Concern was voiced about the amount of litter and garbage that was on the streets and in the laneways. The number of used needles that were often seen near the needle exchange at LAMP was raised in particular. Community safety walk participants were concerned as the needle exchange is in very close proximity to the Day Care Centre located at LAMP. Many items were documented by staff from Councillor Grimes' office and a commitment was made to address them immediately. A list of the items identified, and where action has been taken by Councillor Grimes' office is outlined below.

IDENTIFIED ISSUE	ACTION TAKEN
On-going litter issues along sidewalks, ditches and planters of Lake Shore Blvd. W, between Ninth St. & First St.	Request Manager of Collection Operations, Solid Waste Management Services (SWM), to increase service frequency in the identified stretch. Specifically, increasing schedule to combat issues of loose litter on street & sidewalk, as well as emptying of City garbage bins.
Dangerous sidewalk conditions, north side of Lake Shore Blvd. W, between Sixth & Second St.	Escalate to senior-level Transportation Services staff, with a request for a comprehensive assessment of the sidewalk and make repairs as necessary.
Overgrown hedges & weeds, along laneway on north side of Lake Shore Blvd. W, between Second St. & Third St.	Request 311 to assign City staff to prune shrubs along laneway.
Litter and derelict furniture along laneway, on north side of Lake Shore Blvd. W, between Second St. & Islington Ave.	Request senior-level SWM staff to conduct street sweep, and Transportation, road operations, to remove derelict furniture.
Loitering at public square benches, located on south side of Lake Shore Blvd. W., at Fifth St.	Request Toronto Police 22 Division, to increase neighbourhood patrolling in the area.
Tree's & planters in poor conditions, along Lake Shore Blvd. W, between Ninth St. & First St.	Request Supervisor, Urban Forestry (Commercial Trees), to inspect trees and mulch in planters, and conduct maintenance, as necessary. Including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree planting • Trim/prune • Weed/mulch

As this remediation action is currently in progress, the final report will contain an update on the progress made on addressing these issues.

LAKESHORE VILLAGE ACTION GROUP

The Lakeshore Village Action Group conducted a Community Safety Audit on October 7th, with the support of LAMP Community Health Centre. That group has requested that information from their community safety audit be included with this report. The following is an excerpt from their letter to Councillor Grimes' office outlining the findings of their safety audit:

We conducted a community safety audit on the evening of October 7th with the support of LAMP Community Health Centre. Residents who live directly in the Lakeshore Village Community participated. The area covered included Birmingham Street, along Ninth to Tenth Streets, Lakeshore Village Park, Twelfth Street, Garnett Janes Road, Elsinore Path and Bradham Road. Our survey highlighted the following three physical issues contributing to an unsafe neighbourhood.

Lighting. *Lighting throughout this area is a severe problem. The primary streetlights are dimly lit. This could be due in part to the design of the lighting. The frost globes, although decorative, do not radiate sufficient lighting to make a community feel safe. Furthermore, there is no light in some locations, such as the park or Birmingham's south side. Some lighting is broken, such as the corner of Ninth Street and Garnett Janes Road. There are large street sections in darkness due to a missing streetlight (Ninth Street).*

Lack of Speed bumps. *The area and streets make it easy for drive bys and racing. Interrupting and changing the speed along these streets would deter this occurrence. Slowing down the traffic with speed bumps could occur along any one of these streets: Garnett Janes Road, Elsinore Path, Etta Wylie Road, Ninth Street.*

Lack of Signage. *There is little to no signage along the streets and in the area to deter fast driving, consider children at play, seniors crossing, etc. Recommended increase signage.*

The items identified in the Lakeshore Village Action Group are being responded to by Councillor Grimes' office, and have been included in this report, at the group's request for information purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM BARNES MANAGEMENT GROUP GOING FORWARD:

1. Councillor Grimes' office take immediate action to address the concerns listed in the above chart which resulted from the Community Safety Walk, and to provide an update in the final report on progress made on addressing those issues; and that the Councillor's office work directly with the Lakeshore Village Action Group to respond to the issues raised in their safety audit held on October 7th, 2020.
2. Once the use of the site at 2950-2970 Lake Shore Boulevard West has been determined (i.e., proposed shelter, affordable housing or a combination thereof) and once a Service Provider has been identified; it is recommended that a Community Safety Audit group be created that combines representation of community stakeholder groups that participated in this Community Safety Walk, the Lakeshore Village Action Group, as well as other key stakeholders.
3. This group could continue to move forward the work required to identify any additional community safety concerns; and to work collaboratively to develop solutions to respond to the wide range of long-standing community safety issues identified by both groups, and to support the successful integration of the proposed shelter (or affordable housing) into the community.
4. Additional Community Safety Audits be conducted at different times of the day and or evening, on different days of the week and weekend, as well as during different seasons of the year, and along a broader route than the one followed for this Community Safety Walk. Each of these variables will potentially give rise to other safety issues and highlight activities that may occur only at specific times. These enhanced community safety audits would be able to identify the full spectrum of remediation activities required throughout the neighbourhood in order to address the range of safety issues that exist in the community.
5. Toronto Police Services, 22 Division work collaboratively with community members and service providers in the area to create a forum for information sharing, identification of community safety issues and concerns related to criminal activity; and develop a collaborative approach to responding to concerns about ongoing criminal activity and community safety issues.
6. The creation of public education opportunities with respect to homelessness, the current housing crisis and the needs of marginalized community members who are homeless or who live in precarious and unsafe housing conditions. LAMP Community Health Centre will lead the co-ordination of such public education opportunities in collaboration with other relevant community partners.