
Fatima House Community Liaison Committee

Meeting #1 Summary

November 10, 2020, 6:30pm to 8:30pm by Zoom



Overview

On November 10, 2020 the first meeting of the Community Liaison Committee for Fatima House (1059 College St) was hosted on Zoom with seven CLC members attending along with City staff and representatives of the shelter operator, Fred Victor. Jane Farrow and Leah Birnbaum of the Dept of Words & Deeds facilitated the information session and prepared this summary.

Project website: www.toronto.ca/ShelterExpansionSites; click on "Fatima House"

Shelter operator: www.fredvictor.org/what-we-do/housing/shelters/

Project Team:

- Dept of Words & Deeds, Community Engagement Facilitation
 - Jane Farrow
 - Leah Birnbaum
- Fred Victor, shelter operator:
 - Keith Hambly, CEO
 - Sylvia Braithwaite, Director of 24-hour Services
 - Denise Knee, Senior Manager, Fatima House
- City of Toronto Shelter, Support & Housing Administration (SSHA):
 - Jennifer McGowan, Supervisor, Stakeholder & Community Engagement
 - Leslie O'Reilly, Housing Consultant, Homelessness Initiatives & Prevention Services
- Councillor Bailão's office:
 - Ana Bailão, Deputy Mayor and Councillor, Ward 9
 - Emily Summers, Constituency Assistant

Agenda:

6:15 - Tech check for participants

6:30 - Welcome and opening remarks – Councillor Ana Bailão

6:35 - Introductions and overview of meeting objectives, reporting and CLC agenda

6:50 - Mandate and Draft Terms of Reference review

- General review of CLC roles and responsibilities,
- What is Fred Victor's role? (Keith Hambly)
- What is the City's role? (Leslie O'Reilly)
- What is the CLC and community's role? (all)

7:20 - General Fatima House update, timelines, occupancy

7:30 - CLC Q and A, Discussion and feedback on Fatima House program and ongoing transition of people into the community

- Volunteer and support opportunities and uptake
- What can be done to ensure that Fatima House is a good neighbour and welcome community asset?

8:15 - Next Steps

8:30 – Adjourn

CLC Members:

- o Meg Marshall, Coordinator, BIA College Promenade
- o Mary Lou Harrison, Director of Partnership & Administration, St. Anne's Anglican Church
- o Peter Gorman, Warden at St. Anne's Anglican Church
- o Cintia De Aguiar, real estate broker at College and Dufferin.
- o Erella Gagnon, moderator, Friends of Dufferin Grove listserv
- o Annabelle Bernard, Community Engagement Associate, Sistering
- o Khadija Ismail, Counsellor, Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Woman against Rape
- o Marcie Ponte, Executive Director, Working Women Community Centre (regrets)

Meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of the month in the evenings. Upcoming tentative meeting dates are:

- December 8, 2020, 6:30pm to 8:00pm
- January 12, 2021, 6:30pm to 8:00pm
- February 9, 2021, 6:30pm to 8:00pm

Key Discussion Items

The meeting began with a discussion of the composition of the Committee itself and its role. People then shared concerns they had heard from the broader community as well as ideas for welcoming the shelter and transitioning people into the community. The following topics were discussed:

- Clarity around the building and the permanence of the shelter service: the beauty of the building itself was discussed as well as the longevity of the shelter use. Fred Victor confirmed that they have a 5 year lease that is renewable up to 15 years.
- Security questions and concerns: Security cameras are present and will be monitored. The site is staffed 24/7. The use of security guards is not anticipated to be needed and this will be re-visited if necessary.
- Rules and regulations for residents: For the women who live at the shelter, it is their home while they are there. Residents commit to house rules during their stay and staff work with them to address any issues with compliance. If a placement is not working, Fred Victor seeks alternate arrangements so no one is ever discharged to the street.
- Support for people in distress: The committee discussed ways to support people in distress including sharing resources for nearby support services and setting up clear ways to communicate with Fatima House. City staff cautioned that Fatima House staff are not responsible for addressing issues within a particular catchment area but are responsible for the shelter itself and noted that issues that may arise in the neighbourhood may be unconnected to the shelter. The CLC discussed developing communication resources to help area residents know who to call in different circumstances.
- Neighbourhood relations: Fred Victor staff will do walkabouts in the neighbourhood with CLC members to meet local businesses (taking COVID protocols into account). Options for having neighbourhood groups use meeting space within Fatima House are up for discussion, pending COVID restrictions.
- Ideas for supporting the shelter: The group shared many ideas for supporting the shelter and welcoming the new residents to the neighbourhood when they arrive. These will be further discussed with Fred Victor staff who are very grateful to be receiving such a warm welcome.

Detailed Discussion

Terms of Reference

The group reviewed the draft Terms of Reference which is a working document that can change as the committee evolves. CLC members are reviewing the Draft Terms of Reference and will send feedback, comments or suggestions to the Dept of Words & Deeds. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed at the next CLC meeting in December.

CLC Membership

We are looking to have approximately 15 to 20 people on the CLC. Suggestions for others to join the group are welcome. Potential members should be community-minded and represent a group or a community sector and act as a liaison between that group and Fatima House. Representatives from local schools have been invited to send a representative, and the local daycare will be invited as a follow up to the meeting.

Discussion Topics:

1. Clarity around the building and the permanence of the shelter service.

People in the neighbourhood have had questions about the building and its design. Some people have expressed concern that the building looks too fancy to be a shelter and have wondered whether it will be turned into a condo. How stable or long-term is the shelter expected to be?

Fred Victor has a five-year lease on the property. The lease is renewable for up to 15 years. The quality of the finishings are intentional as people deserve to live in a place that is well-built to high standards.

ACTION: A CLC member suggested that Fred Victor prepare a short introduction about the shelter to be posted on the neighbourhood listserv.

2. Security questions and concerns

A CLC member has been hearing questions about how security will be handled at the shelter; both for the protection of the women living there and for the surrounding community should any issues arise.

There are security cameras around the building focused on particular areas of the property. There is a monitoring system inside that will be reviewed regularly. The shelter is staffed 24/7 with support staff on call as needed. All staff know how to work with people experiencing mental health crisis or trauma.

There is no current plan to hire security staff to patrol the property. Fred Victor is open to using staffed security if the need arises but prefers to have experienced, trained staff handle issues that may arise.

There will be a nursing clinic on-site and mental health nurses will come in to work with the residents. The times for the clinic services are being negotiated and the services will be delivered by a third party. These are embedded services within the shelter. Nurses can make referrals to doctors as required and

there will also be a psychiatrist providing clinical supervision for the team. The services will be available to shelter residents only.

3. Rules and regulations for residents

A CLC member asked whether there are conditions that residents must meet in order to stay at the shelter and if so, what the consequences are if these conditions are not met.

The shelter has a set of house guidelines and a community contract residents sign when they arrive. If conditions are breached, staff will make every effort to move a person to another program or shelter that may better serve their needs. People are never discharged to the street and staff will make arrangements for transportation.

Fatima House is not a drop-in service where people come and go. It is a shelter which means that while someone is living there it is their home. Staff work with all residents to help them secure more permanent housing and to help them adhere to the house guidelines during their stay.

4. Support for people in distress

The Committee discussed what to do if someone in the vicinity of the shelter is in distress and shared some examples of when these situations have occurred. Fred Victor staff talked about taking new residents on an orientation tour to ensure that they are familiar with the new building and the neighbourhood. Once the shelter opens they can also share a contact number for people to call if a shelter resident needs assistance.

The discussion continued about the difference between a shelter and a drop-in service. Fatima House will have 20-25 women moving in in December. The average stay is about six months. It is home for people while they live there and the staff get to know them very well. There is an intake process to help with orientation.

A CLC member shared a resource that is used in another neighbourhood: a one-page sheet showing contact information for all of the support-related services nearby.

City staff cautioned that there are limits to what issues a shelter operator can resolve within a neighbourhood. It is easy for the shelter to be invoked whenever someone is in distress in the area but these are not always connected. There is often an expectation from the community that the shelter has experts who can resolve every issue. However, the City does not fund Fatima House to take care of a catchment area; it is funded to take care of Fatima House. There are other resources and services like 311 and the Streets-to-Homes team that can respond to certain situations, along with 911 for emergency situations. This committee has to be cautious about taking on issues that take place outside of the shelter. The Councillor's office offered to be a resource for people needing referrals to other municipal services.

ACTION: CLC members to discuss developing a contact list to help the community know who to contact in various scenarios and the services available in the community.

5. Neighbourhood relations

A CLC member shared concerns from local businesses about potential impacts of having a shelter open nearby. The committee discussed the shelter's experiences in its current location on Lombard Street in order to share its track record for building and maintaining good relations with neighbours.

Fred Victor staff reported that they have worked closely with a lot of the condo developments close to their Lombard Street location. They created a communication system that incorporated monitoring of local areas into their regular safety checks. Sometimes staff would encounter people who were not from the shelter but they were able to support them and that helped the relationship with the neighbouring condos. At Fatima House there will be a private outdoor space for smoking and relaxing outside which is expected to mitigate some of these issues.

The Committee discussed ways to share good news stories from the shelter. Suggestions included sharing success stories of women who have gone through the shelter and now are back on their feet or facilitating placements for residents at local businesses.

The use of meeting space within Fatima House for neighbourhood groups was also discussed. There is a meeting room that could be used for this but given COVID-related protocols this will likely be delayed. Booking protocols and sensitivities related to privacy also need to be considered with the CLC and Fred Victor staff.

The Committee discussed ways to introduce Fatima House staff to local businesses and Fred Victor staff are enthusiastic about planning some walk-about to do these community introductions.

ACTION: Fred Victor to follow up with individual CLC members to arrange some neighbourhood walk-about.

6. Ideas for supporting the shelter

The Committee discussed ways to welcome the residents to the shelter when it opens and shared ideas for how the community can support the shelter. These will be further discussed with Fatima House staff to see which ones are feasible during COVID and which will provide benefit to the residents and the neighbourhood. City staff shared that many of the women are nervous about the reception they are going to get coming to the community. A warm welcome would help allay these concerns although we also need to be aware that many of them just want a quiet and safe place to live without a lot of attention. Ideas included:

- Having volunteers offer sessions in art therapy, yoga, music, community cooking, and gardening.
- Setting up links between residents and community members modeled on a Big Sister / Big Brother or mentorship model.
- Connect shelter residents with a local family to share meals or offer a personalized welcome to the neighbourhood.
- Host a holiday-related event in a public park with distancing in place. Or perhaps a virtual event.
- Zoom events like trivia nights.
- Ideas around food – like cooking together or linking with local food-related businesses.
- Yoga classes and free massages have been offered by a community member. Chair yoga or yoga over zoom were also discussed.
- Self defense classes.

- Asking local business owners to buy some welcoming balloons and sign a card welcoming the residents.

Fred Victor welcomes all these suggestions to be discussed further. Staff also described some of the programs that are already in place like providing special meals and accommodating special diet requirements. Meals are prepared on-site and staff do the cooking on weekends. Staff have already connected with different groups to provide meals and the residents love it because they get some interesting variety. More of that kind of service and connection would be welcome. Given COVID perhaps it would have to be in the form of providing pre-cooked delivered meals rather than cooking together.

ACTION: Fred Victor to have internal discussions about what types of donations and volunteering is needed and to report back.