

# 45 The Esplanade Public Meeting & Community Engagement Report

March 10, 2021

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## 1.0 Overview

As part of the City of Toronto's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for physical distancing in the shelter system, in February 2021, 45 The Esplanade was leased by the City of Toronto to act as an emergency support, temporary shelter hotel. The City contracted management and provision of service at 45 The Esplanade to Homes First. Homes First has been providing supportive housing and shelter services to Toronto residents for over 35 years, with a focus on the chronically homeless, people with complex mental health and addictions issues, and seniors.

This report summarizes feedback received from members of the public between February 5 and February 18, through participation in a virtual public meeting and correspondence with the Community Engagement Facilitator via phone and email.

## 1.1 Notification & Communications

The virtual public meeting was advertised through direct email to 51 local stakeholders including resident associations, businesses, nearby properties, social service providers, and community groups. A hard copy flyer invitation sharing additional information about the shelter and invitation to participate in the public meeting was delivered via Canada Post to 20,973 residents and businesses between Richmond Street, Parliament Street, Bay Street, and Lake Ontario. The public meeting invitation was also posted on the City's project [web page](#), and shared via the local Councillors' email lists.

## 1.2 Virtual Public Meeting

The City's Shelter Support and Housing Division (SSHA) held an online Public Meeting on Thursday, February 18, 2021, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. that was attended by more than 400 people. The meeting included presentations to share information on the new service location at 45 The Esplanade and provided local residents with opportunity to ask questions and share comments.

The meeting was led by Community Engagement Facilitator Joe Mihevc and the agenda included:

- Introductory comments from local Councillors Joe Cressy and Kristyn Wong-Tam, included in [Appendix 2](#).
- Presentation from Justin Lewis, Director of Infrastructure Planning and Development, SSHA on the context of homelessness in Toronto, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the City's response
- Presentation from Homes First staff, Alexandra Perry, Ryan Evershed and Christopher Encarnacao, on operations and services
- Presentation from Joe Mihevc on the community engagement strategy

Following the presentations, questions and comments were chosen on a rotating basis to include live phone questions, questions submitted via email in advance, and questions typed live during the Q&A.

The presentation and recording of the meeting are available on the project [web page](#), and a complete list of presenters and staff in attendance is available in [Appendix 1](#).

## 2.0 Feedback Summary

During the meeting, 15 questions and comments were received live, and an additional 274 comments and questions were received via the live Q&A chat box and via email prior to the meeting.

The feedback summary follows eight themes listed below, and includes a synthesized sample of the questions and comments received via the public event Q&A, emails to the Community Engagement Facilitator, and record of all questions and responses received live in the public meeting:

- 1) Site Selection
- 2) Community Safety
- 3) Economic Development
- 4) Site Operations & Services
- 5) Harm Reduction & Mental Health Services
- 6) Homelessness & Housing in Toronto
- 7) COVID-19
- 8) Future Plans & Community Engagement

Responses to questions asked live in the public meeting from staff attendees are provided in italics and referenced in [Appendix 1](#). Additional responses to frequently asked questions will be provided in subsequent community bulletins sent to the email list maintained by the Community Engagement Facilitator.

### 2.1 Site selection

A summarized sample of the feedback received on site selection via the typed Q&A in the public meeting and direct email to the Community Engagement Facilitator is provided below:

- *How did the City make the decision to use the Novotel without public consultation?*
- *Why do some wards not have shelters?*
- *Why is there such a heavy concentration of shelters in our area?*
- *Why are there almost no shelters in wealthy areas like the Beaches and Forest Hill and in suburban areas?*
- *Is it time for a special area of the city for this purpose?*
- *What about using Exhibition Place where there is plenty of room and facilities?*
- *How was the lease negotiated with The Novotel Hotel owners and what are the terms?*
- *Where are the other downtown shelter hotels located and how long have they been running? Will any of them become permanent?*
- *Why is City putting homeless in the tourist areas?*
- *Will there be an option to extend the lease?*
- *Is there a possibility that the site will be permanent?*

Additionally, the following questions and responses were received and responded to live during the public meeting:

**Q: Thanks to everyone for all the work during unprecedented times. It is challenging work you're doing. First, having lived in the neighbourhood for a number of years, how did you make the decision to use the Novotel without public consultation? There are other options within one kilometre of here. Second, what's the exit strategy for the City,**

**when the shelter shuts down, where are you going to put people? Commending you all for the work, but challenging for people in neighbourhood.**

*Response - Justin Lewis: As stated in the presentation, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) works with the City's real estate division to consider proximity of the location to other services. With the pandemic we're looking at the site to meet the City bylaws and operational requirements. We need to emphasize that once the site opens, the City will be looking at all services within the vicinity – for example 98 Esplanade will close in Spring 2021. This location is also a temporary location. Regarding an exit strategy at 45 The Esplanade, currently there is no specific strategy. The building is leased until December 2021 and SSHA will follow public health guidelines in a possible second contract if required by the status of the pandemic.*

*Response - Councillor Joe Cressy: The exit strategy is to end chronic homelessness. The City needs to provide an entrance into the shelter system and a model to move out, and while in the shelter provide wrap around services. The immediate goal is to move 3,000 individuals out of homelessness and into permanent housing. The exit strategy is to move away from a shelter model to permanent housing model.*

**Question: Will there be an option to extend the lease?**

*Response - Justin Lewis: The current lease is in place until December 2021. If pandemic conditions necessitate, the City will look for a new agreement at that time.*

**Question: We bought our home 5 years ago. The congregation of shelters is destroying what brought us to the area. We have seen violence and deterioration of community. We no longer feel safe even taking our dog out at night. We understand it's an emergency. No public consultation happened beforehand. This session is an information session, and our opinions don't matter. It should be a privilege to live in the community, and the area is a huge tourist part of the City. Why is City putting homeless in tourist areas? I feel like moving out of neighbourhood.**

*Response - Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam: I recognize that this is a difficult conversation. There are 10 new shelters not necessarily by the local Councillor's choice. The City is facing a homelessness crisis, and we need to put people indoors who are freezing to death. The social determinants of health are the same as safety and we have to be able to work together. We have to figure out how to make the program successful. The shelter does have a limited time here, but during its operation, while individuals who are homeless get indoors, the question is how to help people to move to permanent housing. The homelessness crisis has been here for some time and we recognize that residents in encampments have popped up in the City. Trying to get people indoors is step one, and we want to move them to permanent housing so they're no longer in the encampments. I know it's been difficult; we too have found it difficult. As angry as some of you may be, there are moments where I'm angry too. Until someone is able to build supportive housing, this is pathway.*

## 2.2 Community safety

A summarized sample of the feedback received on community safety via the typed Q&A in the public meeting and direct email to the Community Engagement Facilitator is provided below:

### Community Safety

- *In precise terms, how many security and community safety people will be present inside and outside the shelter on a per shift and daily basis?*
- *How were these numbers established? Is the community safety team adequately resourced?*

- *How frequently will the patrols take place?*
- *Is their geographic area not too large in covering so much of downtown (Yonge to Parliament)?*
- *What are the qualifications of the security teams?*
- *What measures are being implemented to prevent shared public spaces such as Berczy Park from becoming hot spots? Will restrictions be placed on hotel clients?*
- *Will the City pay for extra costs related to additional security that may be required in neighbouring buildings?*
- *How do we prevent the neighbourhood becoming labelled as one of Toronto's worst neighbourhoods for crime and quality of life?*
- *What are the plans to minimize harassment to clients of restaurants?*

#### Policing

- *Is there a mechanism to increase security and police presence if it is determined that the current safety plan is not adequate?*
- *Will there be a study, or will any data be collected to evaluate the crime rate in the area/neighbourhood and will the data be made accessible to the public?*
- *What is the role of the police?*
- *Will there be an extra police presence?*
- *What reassurance are they able to give residents outside of the building to bring some sort of safety and order?*
- *Will TPS commit to responding to incidents that are reported?*
- *Can the TPS give us some statistics on crime rates related to the start of other shelters in the past; what can we expect?*
- *Are the police properly equipped and trained to deal with the types of issues that the residents may be facing, including drug use and mental health issues?*
- *Will the approach to community safety result in the criminalization of community members who are using supportive services?*

#### Parking

- *Will the Green P parking garage be thoroughly patrolled? Will additional security cameras be installed? What about private parking garages?*
- *Is the City aware that there are three levels of parking below the Hotel? Will the City pay for a gate to be installed between 25 and 45 The Esplanade given that it is currently accessible? Will any stairwell and elevators reaching parking levels be closed down?*
- *Can the existing Bell cell transmitters be re-enabled in the underground parking level of 25/45 The Esplanade to allow for cell phone reception as a valuable safety feature?*

Additionally, the following questions and responses were received and responded to live during the public meeting:

**Question: As a woman living in the neighbourhood, with existing conditions in the neighbourhood, I have experienced unsafe situations, people roaming around, etc. Now the City is bringing in a new shelter. It is all good and well trying to fight all of this, but what reassurance are you giving residences outside of the building to bring some sort of safety and order. As a resident I should be able to feel safe when I go pick up my groceries. My biggest concern is safety right now.**

*Answer - Ryan Evershed: The main priority of the program is housing and sheltering people in encampments in the area. People will now be safely housed with support services; they will be provided with a room indoors. Negative activity is expected to be reduced since they'll be indoors most of the time. There will also be a community safety team monitoring the area 24/7. They are there to respond to community concerns, de-escalate, monitor situations, take concerns and escalate/respond accordingly.*

Response - Inspector Moyer: The Toronto Police work in a supportive capacity and are proudly in support of these initiatives. The management and front-line workers are very aware of it. The Toronto Police have a great relationship with security teams in these locations. The conversations that they're having are all built around safety and health.

Response - Ryan Evershed: A large part of my job is working with the community. I love to hear from people, and the more we know of what is happening, the quicker we can respond.

**Question: There's a parking lot in the building and on Church St. I am worried it will become an unsafe haven. How will the City deal with this?**

Response - Jason Smiley: There are two Community Safety Teams of two – four people in total – that will patrol the area, including identification of a possible “hot spots.” Security/Safety teams of the City and the neighbouring condo did a walk through this week to highlight areas that need attention.

**Question: Thank you for this time. I live and have operated a business over past 33 years in this community that already includes seniors, parents, and daycares. People are really angry with City Councillors pushing ideology onto the community. Drug trafficking, needles, drug possession is growing in the community. Why would a resident want this?**

Response - Councillor Joe Cressy: There are hard truths we have to look at and confront in our City. In recent years/decades, the gap between those who are doing well and those who are less fortunate is growing. The hard truth in front of us is that we need to do a better job of taking care of the most vulnerable. We have to seek to end homelessness and it can be done. We have to build safe vibrant liveable neighbourhoods: it is not acceptable to feel unsafe, and part of doing that means taking care of most vulnerable. That's the task in front of us and the St Lawrence neighbourhood also is committed to building this.

**Question: I live next door to a shelter. There is one thing that the small shelter did not accomplish: the small shelter didn't have someone watching for community safety. The area is filled with needles. Security teams would walk past needles. We must make sure that this new program will work as well as you say it's going to work. Is there going to be a curfew, or will we be listening to drunken fights at 2am? While I fully support this initiative, I wonder if the community safety team is strong enough?**

Response - Patricia Mueller: It is not Homes First's plan to have a curfew. We are trying to support individuals in their transition to housing and will work with the community to try to keep noise down.

Response - Jason Smiley: The community safety team will be run by myself personally and my team at the City. The safety team at the nearby shelter was run by the agency. We have 6 community safety teams run by the City directly and they have been received well by the public. We look forward to demonstrating that. Further Homes First has strong a strong skillset in managing safety. Our safety team will complement security inside. The community will get to know them, as they will also be out in the community.

**Question: Will the Green P parking garage be thoroughly patrolled?**

Response - Jason Smiley: Part of community safety teams work will be to monitor potential hotspots like the Green P garage. A number of areas of concern have already been pointed out, especially stairwells coming out at street level.

## 2.3 Economic Development

A summarized sample of the feedback received on economic development via the typed Q&A in the public meeting and direct email to the Community Engagement Facilitator is provided below:

- *What is the City doing to help restaurateurs on The Esplanade who rely heavily on patio business in the spring, summer and autumn?*
- *Has the City considered the financial impacts to businesses and investments on the street?*
- *There is one LCBO and there will be three cannabis shops on the same block. Can the openings be deferred by the City?*
- *How will the presence of shelters at such locations impact real estate prices?*

No questions related to non-security neighbourhood concerns were asked or responded to live in the public meeting.

## 2.4 Site operations and services

A summarized sample of the feedback received on site operations and services via the typed Q&A in the public meeting and direct email to the Community Engagement Facilitator is provided below:

- *What is the track record of Homes First and the community safety teams in managing shelters? How successful are they in managing community disturbances?*
- *How long can one stay in a shelter?*
- *What activities will be offered to residents other than just hanging out on the sidewalk?*
- *Will residents be permitted to go outside as they please?*
- *Will there be a curfew?*
- *Will there be any standards around large numbers of residents gathering in front of the building?*
- *Can residents be discouraged from panhandling?*
- *Will there be a program and resident requirements to attend skill building classes to find employment?*
- *What is the reasonable amount of time for residents to stay at the shelter?*
- *Once opened, at what pace will it be occupied and when will full occupancy occur?*
- *What is the maximum number of people that will be staying at this shelter?*
- *Where will smoking be located? Could the patio on the second floor be used for smoking and/or as outdoor amenity space?*
- *Can you speak to the conversion rate/success rate of finding long term housing since using the hotels is only temporary?*
- *If someone encounters a person looking for shelter, should we encourage them to go to 45 The Esplanade for intake or is there a better way to support them in finding a room in a shelter?*

Additionally, the following questions and responses were received and responded to live during the public meeting:

### **Question: Has the fire department been consulted?**

*Response - Justin Lewis: This is a very important question. Toronto Fire has been engaged and has walked through the property and conducted a fire safety inspection. They have reviewed everything within the building to be sure it's safe.*

Response - Alexandra Perry: Homes First will be in touch with the Fire Department in an ongoing way.

**Question: Can someone speak to the intake process for the shelter?**

Response - Christopher Encarnacao: A client referred to program will arrive at the facility, meet front line staff, and will be guided to a confidential intake area. The intake process will see what services the client is receiving in the community, what is lacking and how to connect them with services, including proper mental health/harm reduction support. The main goal is to ensure that a client is connected with the case management team with a long-term goal of getting them into safe and appropriate housing. The client can stay for as long or as short as they need to.

Response - Ryan Holford: Streets to Homes is the largest street outreach provider in the City of Toronto. It seeks to help folks sleeping outside to come inside. The service can be accessed through 311. Streets to Homes will be there to provide services. Since April 2020 to now, S2H has referred 1300 people to indoor accommodations in consultation with the interdivisional encampment team, receiving referrals directly from programs, identifying high needs clients based on community calls, establishing lists of clients with the goal to expedite them into the program, ensuring that folks that are staying at the hotel are not also booked elsewhere.

**Question: What activities will be offered to residents other than just hanging out on the sidewalk?**

Response - Ryan Evershed: There will be plenty of things for residents to do. A part of the work of community engagement is resident surveys and newsletters to figure out what they want to do for programming and recreational activities. We will need to take precautions around COVID-19, including adapting to virtual settings. The site has WIFI and access to a tv lounge and large common areas and rooms where programming can take place.

Response - Alexandra Perry: COVID is making it a bit tricky but hasn't stopped programming completely. Having programs running is essential to wellness. Homes First has had lots of feedback from community members and has had external folks come in to help. We definitely value community members' engagement and it is on a priority list. Our Community Engagement Coordinator is currently being hired which will help continue finding safe ways to support our clients.

Response - Ryan Evershed: We are very aware this neighbourhood has lots of community engagement and a rich sense of community already here to help develop partnerships. We encourage everyone to reach out and connect to develop more programs and engagement opportunities.

Response - Michael Lyster: What Homes First is hoping to do in this case is to provide safe and supportive options for people, which will mean that it will be less likely that they will do things perceived as negative on community outside. Homes First will be responsive to neighbours, and if they know what's happening with clients, we can work with them to address that. We promise that things will be listened to and evaluated.

**Question: Once opened, at what pace will it be occupied and when will full occupancy occur?**

Response - Justin Lewis: The full capacity of the site is 254, though the existing contract is for 205 rooms. The intake will proceed at a pace that will allow for good integration and management of services.

Response - Patricia Mueller: intake will be based on what can happen with people coming from encampments. We will be working with specific park encampments so people are placed



together on the same floor to help build community within the building. We will probably have a slow ramp up to work with Streets to Homes. Homes First has been in business for many years, so can do it fast if needed; however, we want to build community, and anticipate intake will be a slow roll out.

## 2.5 Harm reduction and mental health services

A summarized sample of the feedback received on harm reduction and mental health services via the typed Q&A in the public meeting and direct email to the Community Engagement Facilitator is provided below:

- *What is to stop people who may be acting out?*
- *What training can the City provide to residents around de-escalation if we happen to encounter someone who is mentally ill or who threatens us directly? How does one report an incident?*
- *Drug trafficking, needles, drug possession is growing in the community. We now see people shooting up in public and needles littering parks and sidewalks. Where are the shelter residents going to buy the drugs that they are allowed to consume onsite?*
- *Will the community safety teams actively intervene if they witness drug deals occurring?*
- *Will this be a safe consumption site?*
- *How does this differ from a harm reduction site?*
- *What about Detox and Rehab? Why is this not discussed?*

Additionally, the following question and response was received and responded to live during the public meeting:

**Question: Will pharmacists on site be dispensing real drugs or will they help them break their habits?**

*Response - Alexandra Perry: Homes First is a harm reduction organization, ensuring client/resident safety first and foremost. Methadone is important as an opioid replacement medication; it helps clients to stabilize to focus on other areas of their life; it is a positive thing, and we are excited to be able to offer methadone within the program.*

## 2.6 Homelessness and Housing in Toronto

A summarized sample of the feedback received on homelessness and housing in Toronto via the typed Q&A in the public meeting and direct email to the Community Engagement Facilitator is provided below:

- *What is the City's longer-term strategy for addressing homelessness and the lack of affordable housing?*
- *With all the developments happening in Toronto, why is there still a problem with homelessness?*
- *What about modular homes?*
- *Is permanent housing possible for the residents of this particular site?*
- *How is this shelter being paid for? What is the cost to the taxpayer? What about liabilities with respect to potential hotel damage? Is the cost of this shelter reflected in the city budget?*
- *How is the city addressing encampments? How does this shelter relate to the encampments?*
- *Why is the level of homelessness in the City increasing and what needs to happen to reverse this trend?*



- *Why is 98 The Esplanade closing in the Spring? Will the City be able to meet demand for shelter space if it closes?*
- *How will the City sustain care and support for the unhoused community of Ward 10 and 13 after this lease is up?*

## 2.7 COVID-19

A summarized sample of the feedback received on COVID-19 via the typed Q&A in the public meeting and direct email to the Community Engagement Facilitator is provided below:

- *How is COVID-19 being monitored at the shelter and how is the city ensuring that it doesn't spread? Will there be onsite testing?*
- *Will the shelter in the hotel have reduced capacity due to social distancing requirements?*
- *Is COVID-19 running wild in The Roehampton? How can we trust 45 The Esplanade to control the spread of the pandemic?*
- *What types of public health guidance changes would result in a lease extension?*

Additionally, the following questions and responses were received and responded to live during the public meeting:

### **Question: How is COVID-19 being monitored at the shelter and how is the City ensuring that it doesn't spread?**

*Response - Patricia Mueller: When people present to the shelter, Homes First does not turn anyone away other than for behaviour. If anyone presents with symptoms, we send them to a testing location. The procedure with the City is to transport individuals and isolate them. Specific hotels/shelters have been established in the City for individuals in recovery. We also encourage all residents to wear a mask in common areas, staff wear masks at all times, and all PPE that is required is available. We mark the floor with where to stand, determine capacity for certain rooms. We provide regular reminders to people about COVID precautions and also provide wellness checks with all clients.*

*Response – Michael Lyster: We are working with Inner City Health Associates on COVID testing, and we have a nurse on site.*

## 2.8 Next Steps & Community Engagement

A summarized sample of the feedback received on next steps and ongoing community engagement via the typed Q&A in the public meeting and direct email to the Community Engagement Facilitator is provided below:

- *How can I help and support the efforts of Homes First to support the needs of individuals struggling with homelessness?*
- *How can I donate needed items?*
- *How can I get involved?*
- *Can I donate clothes?*
- *Can residents support the community garden at 1 Church St?*
- *Will information be shared to the Saint Lawrence Neighbourhood Association and other local residents' groups?*
- *What are the plans in terms of receiving ongoing feedback from the community once the shelter is opened?*
- *Who are the appropriate contacts and how can residents communicate concerns?*

Additionally, the following questions and responses were received and responded to live during the public meeting:

**Question: Are people available to come to speak to classrooms?**

*Response - Ryan Evershed: Great question. Yes, that is something we at Homes First have talked about and are capable of doing. We want to reach out to community and doing presentations on homelessness with elementary students and other groups. We want to reach out and provide info or education to community by doing presentations on homelessness with elementary students and other groups.*

### 3.0 Next Steps

The shelter at 45 The Esplanade began accepting residents the week of February 22, 2021, and is expected to remain operational through the duration of the lease until December 2021.

Following the public meeting the presentation and recording of the event were posted to the City web page: [www.toronto.ca/physicaldistancingsites](http://www.toronto.ca/physicaldistancingsites).

The Community Engagement Facilitator and Housing Service Provider will issue bulletins to the email list to share updates and responses to frequently asked questions received. Additionally, a Community Liaison Committee will be formed in March 2020. The Community Liaison Committee will identify, and problem-solve concerns and challenges related to the shelter in collaboration with City staff to ensure for the success of the shelter in the community. It will include interested representatives from stakeholder groups such as residents, businesses, and community organizations.

Homes First will continue to make connect and make themselves available to the public for on-going questions, concerns and engagement inquiries.

## APPENDIX 1: Public Meeting Staff Attendees

<b>City of Toronto, Shelter Support Housing &amp; Administration</b>	Justin Lewis, Director, Infrastructure Planning & Development Loretta Ramadhin, Project Director Sinead Canavan, Project Director, Issues Management Jason Smiley, Corporate Security Alexandra Vamos, Manager, Planning and Engagement Robyn Shyllit, Supervisor, Stakeholder & Community Engagement Carolyn Doyle, Program Coordinator Suhal Ahmed, Policy Development Officer Ryan Holford, Streets to Homes
<b>City of Toronto, Spadina-Fort York – Ward 10</b>	Councillor Joe Cressy Tom Davidson, Director, Waterfront Revitalization Initiatives Bushra Mir, Advisor, Constituency and Planning
<b>City of Toronto, Toronto Centre – Ward 13</b>	Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam Edward LaRusic, Advisor, Constituency & Planning
<b>Homes First</b>	Patricia Mueller, CEO, Homes First Ryan Evershed, Manager of Community Engagement & Client Programming Alexandra Perry, Manager of Hotel Programs Michael Lyster, Director of Housing and Shelters Christopher Encarnacao, Manager of 45 The Esplanade
<b>Toronto Police Services</b>	Inspector Matthew Moyer
<b>Community Engagement</b>	Joe Mihevc, Third Party Community Engagement Facilitator Krista Mihevc, Note taker

## **APPENDIX 2: Introductory Comments, Councillor Joe Cressy and Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam**

### **Councillor Joe Cressy**

To City of Toronto staff who are here and most especially to everybody who's here joining us tonight from the neighbourhood, whether you're joining from your living room or your dining room or your bedroom or your bathroom, thank you.

These are incredibly hard times for everyone in our city - certainly harder for some than others - so I sincerely hope, as we start, as you're here with us tonight, that you're okay. I have a few very brief opening comments because I really want to have the chance here for people to ask questions and to hear from you.

Even prior to COVID, on the one hand our city was doing so well in so many ways - as a livable city, as a multicultural city, as a growing city - but in a number of other ways, even before COVID, the cracks were showing. One in five adults in our city was living in poverty, nearly one in three children was living in poverty.

And with this pandemic that we're all experiencing, it's not only exposed some of those challenges - in fact, but also made many of them worse. And perhaps that is no more visible than on the issue of housing. We know, and you've just heard that we have nearly 10,000 people who are homeless in our city, and a shelter system housing more than 7,000 a night. When the pandemic hit, not dissimilar from other congregate settings like our long-term care in particular, there was a real risk and a real necessity to ensure physical distancing in our shelter system. And so this is an urgent moment. I can tell you, as the Chair of the Board of Health, that with these transmissible variants here, we still must continue to do everything we can to provide adequate physical distancing for those who lack housing, both within our shelter system and for those we see in far too many of our parks who need indoor accommodations. This is the basis of the critical urgent response as part of an emergency that we're going through, and that is what has brought us to the discussion around the temporary shelter today as an emergency response.

And I would just tell you that as your Councillor, my focus here is first and foremost ensuring that we're doing more than providing shelter, but rather wraparound comprehensive supports including healthcare services, mental health services, and housing referral services. This includes the full gamut of services that are needed not just to provide shelter but to help people exit homelessness because that's the goal.

The other critical piece for me is to address how this happened so quickly, as many people are asking. That is part of an emergency when you've got to respond quickly, but the other critical part is we have to work together as a community to ensure that not only are we providing care for those who are most vulnerable, but we're also maintaining and building livable neighbourhoods together. We have to do both, and we will. That's our work now: to roll up our sleeves together.

### **Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam**

It's nice to be here with all of you this evening. I wish we were meeting under different circumstances. It brings me no joy to talk about homelessness, and I know it's a very difficult topic for many individuals. And when you are already locked in your home for the past year now, it just makes it even more challenging.

I know that all of us are very passionate Torontonians who care very deeply about what happens to one another. During the pandemic we've actually seen some of the very best outcomes and the very best human behaviour in how we all reach out to neighbours and try to support one another.

I'm going to speak very briefly just because I think Councillor Cressy has said a lot of excellent things to set the table for the conversation. I'm here to support you. I'm here to support the community, and I think that it's important for us, in turn, to try to support the success of this service. Ultimately, at the end of the day, we are living in a pandemic.

Homelessness, as we know, is oftentimes manifest because of the lack of affordable housing. We have to be able to recognize that the social determinants of health happen to be exactly the same as the social determinants of safety. When people have places to go, they feel safer, and when we see people not necessarily on the street and facing homelessness and poverty, they are also better cared for. So finding a pathway to housing is the ultimate objective, and that's what I think we are here to do this evening. We are here to listen and learn about the program and also, most importantly, to hear your concerns and how we might be able to address them, to meet the needs and the requests that you have, so the City can operate a successful service in your neighbourhood with your support. With your attention this evening, I suspect that we can do it. So thank you very much everyone for the opportunity to speak.