

185 Yorkland Boulevard Program - Temporary Shelter

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Update: April 27, 2021

Contact Information

What is the contact information for the temporary shelter at 185 Yorkland Boulevard?

Fred Victor: Sylvia Braithwaite, Director of 24-Hour Services at Fred Victor by email: sbraithwaite@fredvictor.org

Q: Why was a shelter opened at 185 Yorkland Boulevard?

A: In Dec. 2018, The City of Toronto released a Request for Proposals (RFP) inviting hotel/ motel operators to submit proposals for the purposes of providing short term accommodation to homeless individuals. The purpose of the RFP was to create an established roster of cost effective hotels and/ or motels that can be utilized as emergency shelter service on an as required basis. This program model was proven to be successful in responding quickly to fluctuations in demand for shelter space due to seasonal and/ or specific system pressures. 185 Yorkland Blvd was originally identified through this process. Prior to the pandemic, the hotel site had been partially utilized by a purchase of service shelter provider (COSTI) to shelter refugee and newcomer families to address shelter capacity shortages.

As part of the City's three-tier response to COVID-19 and to help individuals who are experiencing homelessness, the City opened new spaces to meet the Ontario Ministry of Health and Toronto Public Health guidelines for physical distancing in the shelter system. Since mid-March 2020, the City of Toronto has opened more than 40 additional sites, including 25 which remain operational, and moved more than 3,600 individuals for physical distancing into a combination of hotels, temporary respites, interim and permanent housing. The City took these urgent actions in order to save lives and protect vulnerable people, who are at greater risk of COVID-19 related harms. 185 Yorkland Boulevard was converted into a temporary shelter through this process in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More information the City's Pandemic response for homelessness can be found at the City's website: <https://www.toronto.ca/news/city-of-toronto-covid-19-response-for-people-experiencing-homelessness/>

Q. When did temporary shelter services open?

A: As part of the City's pandemic response, on March 13, 2020 the City of Toronto entered into a new agreement. The contract agreement covers guest room rental, prepared meal service and space for office & programming use. New shelter services at 185 Yorkland Boulevard were opened over time based on shelter demand and the necessities of the pandemic response.

- On March 16, 2020, SSHA's Family Residence program began directly operating the shelter services at 185 Yorkland Boulevard. Up to 40 families were transferred to 185 Yorkland Boulevard
- By April 7, 2020 to create physical distancing within existing shelter programs, singles sector (single adults) shelter residents were relocated to the 185 Yorkland Boulevard site.
- By June 30, 2020, persons residing in encampments were relocated to the 185 Yorkland Boulevard site. The City took these steps as many people experiencing

homelessness have underlying chronic medical conditions that increase their risk from COVID-19.

- On October 21, 2020, the City of Toronto transferred oversight of temporary shelter operations to Fred Victor.

Q: Who is operating the site?

A: Fred Victor is directly operating the shelter services at 185 Yorkland Boulevard. The social service charitable organization has years of experience operating shelter, housing and other related programs and services in 20+ sites across the City of Toronto. The program is being funded by the Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration (SSHA) Division of the City of Toronto.

Q: What type of shelter program is located at the site?

A: This is an emergency shelter with specialized supports for homeless women, men and couples. The main goal of the program is to assist clients with securing permanent affordable and safe housing with service connections to the community of their choice. Staff are on site 24/7 and are responsible for day to day operations such as admissions, discharges, COVID-19 screening and wellness checks and program oversight.

Q: What is the current capacity of the site?

A: The daily occupancy fluctuates based on need; 317 rooms are available

Q: What support services are provided at the site?

A: Residents come to shelter sites with a range of needs, both material and physical. Fred Victor provides residents access to site enhanced case management and housing services, mental health and addictions counselling provided by staff and peers.

Support services provided include:

- A Counsellor/Case Manager who will work with shelter residents on developing a permanent housing plan
- Shelter residents will be assessed, and the appropriate referrals made for community services and supports both inside the shelter and with outside organizations.
- 3-Meals daily will be provided
- Inner City Health Associates will provide access to primary health care and referrals.
- Inner City Family Health Team provides supervision and provision of Social Workers providing trauma informed therapeutic support for residents.
- Harm reduction interventions will be led by staff from South Riverdale Community Health Centre and Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre.
- Multi-disciplinary Outreach Team-Toronto North Support Services provide intensive mental health and addictions services to support residents on a long-term basis.

Q: Is there harm reduction and supervised consumption services at the site?

A: In early March 2021, an Urgent Public Health Needs Site, also known as overdose prevention site or supervised consumption service at the 185 Yorkland Boulevard Temporary Shelter program opened, to allow shelter residents to consume drugs under trained supervision to reduce the risk of overdose. This service is for residents of the shelter only and not open to the public.

The City is working with Toronto Public Health and other community harm reduction programs to introduce a range of harm reduction measures in all shelter locations through iPHARE (Integrated Prevention and Harm Reduction initiative). iPHARE is a multi-pronged effort by the City and community agencies to address opioid-related deaths in Toronto's shelter system.

Please visit the City's website to learn more about iPHARE:

<https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/overdose-prevention-and-response/iphare-program/>

GENERAL

What gives the City authority to open new shelters? How are new shelter locations selected?

A: Shelters are one of many municipal services that the City provides. Like daycares, libraries and community centres, it is important that shelters are available in neighbourhoods across Toronto. When seeking sites to support the emergency need for physical distancing in the shelter system, City staff seek buildings that are available, affordable, of a suitable size and close to transit and services.

As authorized by Council and City by-laws, City staff have the [Delegated Authority](#) to site new shelters in locations that meet zoning by-laws before engaging with the community. In March 2020, additional authority was delegated under Municipal Code Chapter 59, Emergency Management as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with the typical authorities that allow City staff to place shelters in locations that meet zoning by-laws, further emergency authorities have been granted under these emergency orders to City staff to rapidly expand the shelter system to ensure the safety of staff and residents.

The City remains committed to working with the community to address any questions or concerns regarding the new temporary shelter sites. For more details, please visit [New Shelter Locations](#).

Q: Where does funding for shelters come from?

A: The City of Toronto pays for delivery of COVID-19 response programs for people experiencing homelessness, including new temporary response sites such as 20 Milner Business Court. While the City has received funding from the federal and provincial governments, the costs exceed funding provided and additional City funding has been required. The City is working with provincial and federal governments to request additional funding to address the scale of the response in Toronto and to meet the needs of organizations in Toronto to respond.

Q: How do shelter users get referred or assigned to a shelter?

A: Individuals experiencing homelessness in Toronto can contact SSHA's Homelessness Initiatives and Prevention Services - Central Intake service who will assess how to find them appropriate shelter within the options available. This service is available 24/7 at the Central Intake Line or by dialing 311.

Some residents may come via referrals from other community agencies or individuals who contact the shelter directly, including 'walk-ins'. In these cases, Fred Victor will work with the individuals and Central Intake to find available and appropriate space.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

What actions are being taken to support community safety?

A: Community safety is a priority for the City whenever and wherever new services open. Ongoing safety planning will be a key component of the community engagement process. Fred Victor staff bring management practices that have proven successful and all staff are trained on de-escalation, conflict resolution and crisis prevention, intervention and management.

The following safety measures are in place at 185 Yorkland Boulevard to support the residents and community:

- On-site security staff
- Walks around the site every 30 minutes by security staff
- CCTV cameras to monitor the site
- Regular meetings with community members and TPS 33 Division

It is important also to remember that people using shelter services are equal citizens of the city. They can move around communities and use amenities such as parks, public benches like all residents in our collective city. And like all residents, they are also expected to conduct themselves within the rules/laws and by-laws.

There is zero tolerance for any violent and/or criminal activity occurring in the shelter or out in the community. As needed, 911 should be called for crimes in progress or the non-emergency police number 416-808-2222 | 416-467-0493 (TTY) to report crimes where no person is in immediate danger (for example, theft, vandalism, fraud). If a shelter resident is found to have acted inappropriately, aggressively, violently, or criminally, they will be accountable for these acts, which may result in their discharge from the shelter.

Q: Since the shelter opened, nearby properties and businesses have seen an increase in trespassing and vandalism on those properties, will the City pay for additional surveillance and security for affected properties? What will the City do to make my property secure?

A: Vandalism and trespassing are crimes and should be reported to your local police division as the local police division will assign officers / patrols and activities based on information from the community. There is helpful information on the Toronto Police Services website that can help property owners, although labelled apartment building security, the tips could apply to commercial rental properties and condos as well.

- <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/crimeprevention/apartment.php>
- <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/crimeprevention/graffiti.php>
- <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/crimeprevention/personalsafety.pdf>

The City does not pay for or compensate people for security measures on private property.

The City has started developing [SafeTO](#), a Community Safety and Wellbeing (CSWB) Plan that aims to shift from a focus on emergency response to move to a culture of prevention. The plan will prioritize four challenge areas: community trauma, community violence, harm and victimization, and community justice to help bring about a safer Toronto.

COVID-19

Q: How has COVID-19 impacted shelters?

A: Due to COVID-19, and with guidance from Ministry of Health and Toronto Public Health to create physical distancing in the shelter system, City staff have had to move rapidly to open over 25 new temporary shelter locations. These efforts help to support physical distancing, prevent potential outbreaks in shelters, minimize the spread of COVID-19 in shelters and the community more broadly, and provide space for people to move indoors from encampments. The creation of the temporary shelter locations has provided up to 3,000 new spaces in temporary shelters and hotel programs.

Given the risks associated with COVID-19 and the health guidelines for physical distancing, the City and numerous community agencies have had to work quickly to protect people experiencing homelessness. Since mid-March 2020, new shelter programs across 14 Wards have opened across the City, many without prior community engagement. As required, the City will continue to look for and open sites that enable physical distancing in the shelter system and that also provide space for people who are currently living outside.

Q: How long will the City need the physical distancing shelters?

A: The City will continue to follow the guidance of the City's Medical Officer of Health and Provincial guidelines related to operations for COVID-19 and physical distancing. The City will be leasing 185 Yorkland Boulevard as a temporary emergency shelter from the property owner from until December 31, 2021. Extensions of the lease will be a function of controlling the spread of COVID-19.

Q: What precautions are being taken to prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the shelter and the community?

A: The City continues to follow current public health guidance regarding physical distancing and all shelter operations, and shelter residents and staff are priority groups to receive vaccinations to COVID-19 and many have already been vaccinated.

Since the onset of COVID-19, Toronto Public Health has worked closely with staff in City's Shelter Support Housing and Administration division to prevent spread among people experiencing homelessness. Shelter Support Housing and Administration has and will continue to implement comprehensive infection prevention and control measures in all shelters including the temporary shelter at 185 Yorkland Boulevard. Information is shared with shelter residents on how to protect themselves and others.

Shelter residents are expected to follow all physical distancing guidelines and by-laws while outside the shelter like any other community member. Disposable masks are available to shelter residents if they are unable to get their own masks. Shelters use Toronto Public Health signage and educational materials on physical distancing. Areas within the shelter have floor markings and each room is set up for physical distancing.

Q: Are shelter users required to take a COVID-19 test prior to moving to a physical distancing shelter?

A: There is active monitoring and screening of current shelter residents and the City has a standard screening process using Ontario Public Health guidelines at all points of entry by phone or in-person for those needing shelter. Fred Victor is actively engaged with The City, Toronto Public Health, and community health partners to conduct universal testing if needed. No guests are permitted in the building to mitigate the health and safety risk to residents and the community.

Q: What steps are taken if someone in the shelter tests positive for COVID-19?

A: All individuals experiencing homelessness who are under investigation for or confirmed positive for COVID-19 are cared for by healthcare providers in facilities that provide safe isolation and observation consistent with public health direction.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS IN TORONTO

Q: What does homelessness look like in the City of Toronto?

A: It is difficult to know the exact number of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. The last comprehensive count of people experiencing homelessness was the 2018 Street Needs Assessment. The count planned for April 2020 unfortunately had to be postponed and SSHA is conducting its fifth Street Needs Assessment (SNA) in April 2021 instead. The 2018 survey can be found here: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/99be-2018-SNA-Results-Report.pdf>. For more information about the 2021 survey: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/community-partners/street-needs-assessment/>

At the end of March 2021, the City estimates there were 7,745 people experiencing homelessness who accessed the shelter system at least one time in the past three months. More details can be found on our Shelter Flow Data here: <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/research-reports/housing-and-homelessness-research-and-reports/shelter-system-flow-data/>.

Q: Can you speak to the conversion rate/success rate of finding long term housing since using the hotels is only temporary?

A: For most people, homelessness is a short-term occurrence, resulting from a housing crisis caused by job loss, family breakdown, or other temporary crisis situations. More than half of people who use the shelter system in Toronto stay less than two months and are able to successfully achieve housing stability. However, for some people, homelessness is a more significant challenge resulting from complex health, mental health and other systemic factors. A smaller group of people, 10% of those using shelters, stay for one year or more and require more supports to exit homelessness successfully.

Just over 6,000 people who accessed the shelter system in 2020 moved into permanent housing. More information about the flow of people into and out of the shelter system can be found here: <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/research-reports/housing-and-homelessness-research-and-reports/shelter-system-flow-data/>

Q: What is the City’s longer-term strategy for addressing homelessness and the lack of affordable housing?

A: In 2019, City Council adopted the [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#), which provides a comprehensive blueprint to assist more than 341,000 people with a focus on creating permanent housing solutions. This includes 40,000 new affordable rental home approvals of which 18,000 would be supportive housing units.

In September 2020, City Council endorsed the Housing and People Action Plan and the COVID-19 Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy which identifies 12 priority actions for the next 12 months, including actions to invest in housing and supports to decrease the volume and duration of need for emergency shelter. City Council also requested support from other orders of government for the 24-month Housing and Homelessness Recovery Plan to create 3,000 permanent housing opportunities, including \$48 million to provide 2,000 housing opportunity with support