

20 MILNER BUSINESS COURT COMMUNITY INFORMATION SESSION SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

On Thursday, May 13, 2021 the City of Toronto's Shelter, Support & Housing Administration (SSHA) Division hosted an online session to share information and answer questions about the use of 20 Milner Business Court as a temporary shelter for single women experiencing homelessness. The virtual event was held in advance of shelter residents moving from the 2685 Kingston Road women's shelter program to 20 Milner Business Court during the week of May 17.

A closed caption recording and transcript of the meeting is available on the project website. Please visit www.toronto.ca/physicaldistancingshelters to access the project website.

NOTIFICATIONS & COMMUNICATIONS

The session was advertised by the City through a flyer which was mailed out to postal addresses within a 500-metre radius of 20 Milner Business Court. Flyers were also hand delivered to over 30 businesses and organizations in close proximity to the site as well as being distributed via email to 11 key stakeholders.

The session was also posted on the City's project website, shared through the local Councillor's email list and webpage and shared with community members a part of the community engagement process.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING

The City's Shelter Support and Housing Division (SSHA) held an online Public Meeting on Thursday, May 13, 2021, from 7:00 to 8:15 p.m. that was attended by 30 participants including 7 on the Mandarin interpretation line and 2 on the Cantonese interpretation line.

The meeting included presentations to share information on the new temporary site and provided participants with an opportunity to ask questions and share comments.

Simultaneous interpretation was available via telephone in both Mandarin and Cantonese, and the presentation slide deck from the event is available on the project website in both English and Traditional Chinese.

The following agenda was led by Community Engagement Facilitator David Buwalda from Barnes Management Group:

1. **Welcome remarks** by City Councillor Cynthia Lai – Scarborough North (Ward 23).
(Please see Appendix 1 for a transcription of her remarks)
2. **City of Toronto Shelter Services Overview** by Sharon Campbell, Project Homelessness Initiatives and Prevention Services, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, City of Toronto.
3. **Program overview** of temporary shelter program at 20 Milner Business Court by Nicole Williams, Manager, Scarborough Women’s Shelter, Shelter, Support & Housing Administration, City of Toronto.
4. **Community Engagement overview** by David Buwalda.
5. **Question & Answer Period** facilitated by David Buwalda.
(Please see Appendix 2 for a description of how questions were selected during the Question & Answer period).
6. **Closing remarks** from Councillor Cynthia Lai.

The following panelists answered questions from the public following the presentations:

- **Sharon Campbell**, Project Director, Homelessness Initiatives and Prevention Services, Shelter, Support & Housing Administration, City of Toronto.
- **Loretta Ramadhin**, Project Director, Infrastructure, Planning & Development Shelter, Support and Housing Administration.
- **Nicole Williams**, Manager, Scarborough Women’s Shelter, Shelter, Support & Housing Administration, City of Toronto.

QUESTION & ANSWER PERIOD SUMMARY

During the Question & Answer period, questions asked were received through the Question & Answer box and also verbally, through the Cantonese interpretation line. There were also some questions received by email in advance of the session which the community engagement facilitator read out loud.

Topics included:

- 1. Shelter programs and operations**
- 2. COVID-19 protocols**
- 3. Housing and homelessness**
- 4. Ongoing community engagement**

The following questions and responses were received and responded to live during the public meeting. Minor edits have been made in order to enhance the readability and remove duplications.

1. SHELTER PROGRAMS AND OPERATIONS

Q1. Is the shelter taking over the entire business at 20 Milner Business Court? If not, is there a chance of expansion if needed?

Response from Loretta Ramadhin: Right now, we are committing to 100 rooms, but there is room to grow. If there's a need, depending on how the pandemic plays out, and if we require more space, we may eventually use all the rooms in the hotel, but right now, we are only using 100 of them.

Q2. Is 20 Milner Business Court still open as a hotel or is it reserved fully for the temporary shelter?

Response from Loretta Ramadhin: The hotel may choose to continue to rent some of their rooms to anyone who chooses to stay there as a hotel, but that would be the hotel's choice.

Q3. Is the December 31, 2021 a definite cut off to close the shelter? What happens if there is still a need?

Response from Loretta Ramadhin: Right now, the rooms are leased until December 31, 2021. If, in a few months, it's determined there is still a need or if Toronto Public Health is still recommending that physical distancing measures remain in place, we would negotiate with the hotel owner for an appropriate extension period. The pandemic is still an evolving situation, so we will have to wait a few more months before we can determine whether there will be a need or not.

Q4. How will the temporary shelter be taking new residents in the future?

Response from Nicole Williams: New residents will enter through our intake process. Anybody who requires a shelter bed can call 311, and they will be transferred to our Central Intake line, where one of our staff will do an assessment. If there's availability, and if it's the preference for a person to be at 20 Milner Business Court, that is how a new resident would be admitted. Residents will be brought over as well from the existing program (at 2685 Kingston Road).

Q5. Where can we see information regarding the expenses of the shelter?

Response from Loretta Ramadhin: I am not sure if we have this information up on the website, but I can tell you that pre-COVID-19 the average cost of a shelter bed was approximately \$110 per day per client. Right now, as a result of COVID-19, it's approximately \$220 per day per client. This amount includes all required supports, including lease cost, daily meals, staff, laundry, case management and so forth. We do not have detailed site-specific costs, mainly because the pandemic response continues to remain fluid and changes daily. As the situation evolves, the City adapts our operations as may be necessary to meet the client and community needs.

2. COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

Q6. Are shelter users required to take a COVID-19 test prior to moving to a physical distancing shelter?

Response from Nicole Williams: We do not force anyone to take a test. The women staying at the shelter are screened for COVID-19 symptoms and checked on their wellness at minimum twice per day. If anyone has symptoms or has come into contact—there are various questions that we ask that we have been given by Toronto Public Health--then we send someone for testing. We are looking into rapid testing options so that we can have quicker access to testing for women staying at the shelter. In summary, we don't require them to take a COVID-19 test; however, we do require screening for COVID-19, at which point if there were reasons to send someone for a COVID-19 test, then we would send them. Transportation is arranged for them because we have a system in place that provides transportation, and we would then be able to get their results. If there's isolation required, we have an isolation process as well.

Q7. Are visitors allowed in the shelter?

Response from Nicole Williams: No non-essential visitors are allowed at the shelter due to COVID-19 restrictions. In general, shelters do not usually take visitors too often.

It depends on the situation, mostly for everyone's safety and security, but especially during COVID-19, we are restricted to only clients, staff and essential visitors. That

would be maybe a healthcare provider, someone providing a service that's essential during this time. So, in general visitors are not allowed in the shelter.

Q8. How, during COVID-19, will the residents receive physical and mental health care?

Response from Nicole Williams: It is a huge part of the work that we do. There is definitely health care that is essential. If those supports are in person, that is still allowed and that still happens. For example, we have personal support workers that come in. We have nurses that may visit depending on the clients' needs. But then we also have become very creative during COVID-19, not just us, but the healthcare system as a whole. There are ways to offer supports of all kinds, some medical supports that are appropriate virtually, and we would be able to facilitate that. Staff have tablets that clients can use if required to help them connect with services that they need. All physical and mental health support services continue during COVID-19. It is a part of our work all of the time, and we do everything that we can to facilitate it.

3. HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Q9. Will the residents be looking for permanent housing in North Scarborough?

Response from Sharon Campbell: Yes, certainly, any time a client accesses our shelter services, our goal is to ensure that we provide them with the supports that they need to return to their community. That is really one of our first and foremost goals. In this situation, we would continue to support the clients to access permanent housing, and it could very well be within Scarborough. We try to support folks where they want to live. So, it could be in Scarborough, but it could also be Toronto, downtown. Some of our clients want to live close to family and friends, so we support them with that as well.

4. ONGOING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Q10. I live in the area and I am also a student at Centennial College. Is there any opportunity for partnership with Centennial College? I am a Social Services Worker student and glad to see this opening up for a population that needs it.

Response from Nicole Williams: Yes, Centennial College offers a program that actually does a lot of work on shelter services, and I know that there's existing relationships with Centennial College. To talk about it more in depth, please email us. I want to thank you for your enthusiasm.

Q11. Is there an opportunity for me to participate as a community member? Will you have community meetings to address issues or bring partnership?

Response from Nicole Williams: At this time, there is no committed Community Liaison Committee due to the short-term nature of the program. However, we plan on meeting with local stakeholders, and developing those partnerships. I am also already connected with the Community Police Liaison Committee, and I am going to attend those on the shelter's behalf. We also have an open-door kind of policy. If there are issues, if you want to have a discussion about partnerships, if you want to have discussions about certain topics or learn more information, we are always available to answer those questions and look forward to connecting.

Q12. I really welcome the shelter into the neighbourhood and would like to help out. Is there a way to donate or volunteer with the shelter?

Response to both from Nicole Williams: The best way to reach out is to email us at SWS@toronto.ca. Each situation may be different, so we just want to make sure all the protocols are followed, whether it's donations, volunteering or placements. There are some restrictions when it comes to COVID-19 on who can visit a shelter, and there are some restrictions on what donations a shelter can take. I think because of ever-changing rules with COVID-19, it's best to connect via email.

NEXT STEPS

Shelter residents began moving into 20 Milner Business Court the week of May 17th. The site is expected to remain operational through the duration of the lease until at least December 2021.

The presentation and recording of the event were posted to the City web page: www.toronto.ca/physicaldistancingsites

Shelter, Support & Housing Administration is committed to community engagement. City Staff are available to the public for ongoing questions, concerns and engagement inquiries.

APPENDIX 1: COUNCILLOR LAI'S REMARKS

OPENING REMARKS:

Good evening, everyone.

I really appreciate all of you joining us tonight for this virtual public consultation on the temporary women's shelter at 20 Milner Business Court in our ward. I want to thank City staff for organizing and I thank the consultants for chairing tonight's session.

As your local Councillor, I've always believed in caring for the vulnerable and for those who are less fortunate. It has become apparent throughout this pandemic that more and more people need our help. Opening a temporary shelter during this unprecedented time brings a sense of community to all of us. I'm here to listen, to hear your comments and questions. I'm particularly pleased that we have simultaneous translation for tonight's meeting in Cantonese and Mandarin. This meeting is part of a communication process where staff reach out to discuss the shelter and receive your feedback. Through my weekly email newsletter and on social media channels, I have shared information about tonight's meeting and distributed the Frequently Asked Questions Flyer. We will hear from staff who will make presentations on the shelter, and then there will be opportunities for your input, including a Question & Answer session to answer all the questions that you might have.

I want to thank you again for taking time out of your schedule to be with us, and I look forward to listening and hearing your comments. Thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS:

I just wanted to thank everyone again for your participation. I heard a lot of good input, and for those of you who really wanted to help, my office is always open for you to reach out to, and we'll be very happy to relay all these messages back to SSHA (Shelter Support and Housing, City of Toronto).

I'd like to really appreciate, Sharon and your team from SSHA for your hard work putting this together, as well as the Community Engagement Facilitators team. We really appreciate all your hard work and pulling through this in such a short time.

Let's welcome all our new temporary neighbours with open arms, and we will get through this together, and everybody get vaccinated and stay safe.

Thank you.

APPENDIX 2: PROCESS USED FOR SELECTION OF QUESTIONS DURING THE QUESTION & ANSWER PERIOD

The Community Engagement Facilitators utilized the following process for the Q&A Period:

- Outlined up front that they, as the hosts, with the support of SSHA (Shelter Support and Housing Administration) staff would monitor and address questions raised using the various methods of participation. They also described how they would rotate between live questions (video and phone in) including those raised via the interpreters, questions received in advance, and those typed in the Q&A box. The Engagement Facilitators also reviewed how to virtually “raise your hand” in order to ask a question at various points in the session.
- In most cases, other than the questions received via email before the session, questions were addressed in the order in which they were received. The participants and their questions/feedback were not screened in advance and participants were free to share any question or feedback they wished.
- Every question posed was addressed by the appropriate panelist(s). The Community Engagement Facilitators noted that they would continue to respond to questions raised through email and phone for the following month.
- Councillor Lai also invited participants to forward any questions about how to support the work of the shelter to her office, to be shared back to SSHA.