

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IN TORONTO



Meeting Summary

4626 Kingston Road Community Meeting held on June 24, 2021

1. Welcome

The facilitator welcomed the community members to the community meeting for the proposed supportive homes at 4626 Kingston Road.

- Diana Bulley introduced herself as the independent facilitator hired by the City of Toronto to moderate the session. She proceeded to thank the group for joining and taking time from their busy schedules to learn about and discuss the project.
- The facilitator made a land acknowledgment.

The facilitator introduced the guidelines for respectful dialogue:

- We are here tonight to hear from everyone who wants to share their perspective in a safe and respectful way.
- Community meetings are meant to be safe spaces where people can listen and share.
- Discrimination or abusive language of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a warning, followed by removal from the event.

The facilitator shared the meeting agenda with the group.

The facilitator introduced Councillor Jennifer McKelvie and invited her to share her opening remarks with the community members:

- The City of Toronto's overall goal is to move away from motel shelters and move toward creating supportive homes. The Lido Motel has rented as many as 50 rooms; Maple Leaf Motel has rented 20 rooms; and the Plaza Motel has rented 22 rooms. These 92 rooms are temporary motel shelters that lack 24-hour supports. Supportive homes provide a real home for residents in need within a community. The Lido Motel is currently for sale with no plans for the City of Toronto to purchase it, which will allow us to close the site permanently.
- The Grand Motel has been purchased for this initiative, although construction has not yet begun.
- There are currently supportive homes in all neighbourhoods in Toronto. There will be 24-hour supports onsite. We look forward to learning more about how this project will support our most vulnerable residents. Thank you to everyone for attending.

The facilitator thanked the Councillor and invited Member of Parliament, Gary Anandasangaree, to provide remarks:

- MP Gary Anandasangaree made a land acknowledgment and offered his respects to the souls of the 751 children found in unmarked graves at a former residential school in Saskatchewan.

The MP offered his thanks to the City of Toronto for being the driver in creating so many affordable and supportive homes and further noted:

- The City of Toronto has unilaterally been working on creating supportive homes for decades without full partnership from the federal government. Now, the Rapid Housing initiative is a 1-billion-dollar fund that is meant to build around 4,700 units across Canada and currently we are at about 3,000 that have been confirmed. This initiative is meant to create new homes in a short period of time so that the City of Toronto can prioritize its need for affordable, supportive homes using. The City of Toronto is overseeing a number of rapid housing projects across the City and we thank Mayor Tory for his leadership.
- I am here to support the City's efforts and I believe it is essential to ensure all of us in Canada have a roof over our heads, but more importantly, to have the supports along with that.

The facilitator invited Mayor John Tory to provide opening remarks:

- These new supportive homes we are constructing across Toronto would not be possible without the Rapid Housing Initiative. The federal government has helped with capital funding and the Provincial government will help to provide funding to operate these units. This partnership stems from a desire to do things differently going forward and Jennifer will make sure that the interests of her constituents are protected.
- Shelters put a roof over heads and offer a bed to sleep in, however this is a temporary fix with really no supports provided. Expanding the shelter system in Toronto is no longer the correct choice. We are changing the model and tonight we look forward to sharing the information about supportive homes and where people will be living. These are homes that we are building. Instance after instance the residents who live there have become good neighbours in a short period of time and it creates the experience that we want to see in Toronto.
- Thank you all for attending and thank you to the City staff for their hard work.

2. Taking Collective Action on Homelessness

Abi Bond, Executive Director of the Housing Secretariat, thanked the group for attending the session and stated:

- This is an important initiative because this program and building are focused on collective action to address homelessness in our city, which has been significantly worsened by the pandemic.
- Homelessness is an extremely complex challenge that cannot be solved by a single agency. We need the collective action of the City of Toronto, community groups, housing providers, health partners and community members working together.

Abi shared information on homelessness in Toronto.

- There are more than 7,800 people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. They are seniors, single moms and people with mental and physical health challenges.
- They are sleeping outside, on couches, in vehicles, in parks, and in shelters. There are many ways into homelessness, but there is only one way out of homelessness.
- Part of the City of Toronto's 10-year HousingTO Action Plan is to find homes with supports for everyone who needs them.

3. Pathways to Homelessness

Abi stated that people who are at risk, or who are experiencing homelessness, are not all the same.

- There are many reasons why a person could become homeless including:
 - Poverty
 - Discrimination
 - Lack of affordable housing
 - Impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples
 - Traumatic events
 - Family violence and abuse
 - Mental health issues
 - Addiction issues
 - Other physical and health issues
 - They experience barriers accessing public systems
 - They age out of the foster care system with nowhere to go
- The City of Toronto maintains that adequate housing is essential to a person's dignity and worth and that all residents should have an equal opportunity to thrive and develop to their full potential.

4. Increasing the Supply of Supportive Housing

Identified as a priority in the HousingTO Action Plan, homes with supports provide people in need with good quality, safe, affordable and permanent homes.

In December 2020, City Council approved a staff report which outlines a plan for the City to deliver a minimum of 1,248 supportive homes in 2021, subject to availability of operating funding for support services.

These projects aim to provide a rapid, dignified response to connect people experiencing homelessness with affordable homes and support services. To provide this rapid response, the City uses either innovative modular construction on City-owned land or acquires existing buildings (such as hotels or motels) that need renovations.

5. Creating New Homes with Supports at 4626 Kingston Road

The City of Toronto has purchased the site at 4626 Kingston Road to create new homes with 24/7 on-site supports for residents through the renovation of the existing motel and the proposal to add modular housing to the site.

- Starting in July there will be renovations of the existing motel to create approximately 21 new homes.
- The proposal also includes adding a new five-storey building using modular construction. This would create approximately 62 additional new homes to the site.

In total, 83 homes would be created through the renovation and redevelopment of this site. All 83 homes proposed for the site will have 24/7 onsite supports for residents.

The new homes will be:

- Dedicated to seniors, women, Indigenous residents, racialized people, people with disabilities and other people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- Rental studio apartments with a bathroom and a kitchen.
- The building includes amenities such as shared laundry, a commercial kitchen, a dining area, a communal area.

6. About Supportive Housing

Abi stated that supportive homes are permanent rental homes with support services.

- Each person in supportive housing requires a unique combination of services and programs to support their health and wellbeing. In the building, trained support workers partner with each resident to develop a customized plan to meet their personal and housing goals.
- Some supports are offered inside the building while others are offered in the local community. The kinds of supports people can be connected to include:
 - Health and wellness services
 - Medical care
 - Mental health care
 - Substance use services (if required)
 - Meals and/or access to food security programs
 - Education and training or employment opportunities
 - Life skills training and support
 - Programs to reconnect to culture
 - Help accessing income assistance or setting up a bank account
 - Laundry

7. How Supportive Housing Works

All supportive housing programs in these homes are managed by non-profit housing operators that bring professional building management experience and expertise providing customized supports tailored to meet the unique needs of each resident.

All residents in these homes have made a choice to live there, pay rent, and are able to access the supports provided by non-profit housing operators, health care professionals and other community-based programs.

- In addition to caring for the residents, the non-profit operator is also responsible for taking care of the building and the property. In our experience, many non-profits organize neighbourhood “Clean Teams,” where residents volunteer to help care for the local area.

Abi stated that the City will select an experienced non-profit housing operator to manage the building at 4626 Kingston Road. based on a number of criteria including, but not limited to:

- Effective in working and communicating with the Councillor and local community
- Experience managing affordable and supportive homes
- Strong track record in tenant engagement/communications
- Experience working with a range of tenants, including marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Abi also stated that:

- We do not expect a change in community safety in the neighbourhood as a result of the new homes proposed for this site.
- A not-for-profit operator will be responsible for making sure any community concerns are addressed, the residents are looked after and that there is open dialogue between the local Councillor, community members and the residents.

The facilitator opened the conversation to the community members to contribute any comments or concerns about what they had heard. The questions and comments are below.

Question: *When this supportive housing is built, what will the screening process be for residents? How do you choose who stays in these homes? I am concerned about people with addictions coming to this building because we have nearby schools.*

Instead of creating a whole building for community homes, what about creating job opportunities, recreation centres, or gardening centres, or libraries that can offer people spaces to gather, learn new skills, and find employment? That could help people to get out of addictions and into a better place. I worry we need balance and to support the people that are already living in the neighbourhood.

Answer from Abi Bond:

- We have a very robust coordinated access process which we work on with colleagues in the City. In order to choose the right housing operator, we are clear in our lease agreement about our expectations of how the building should be managed. Regarding tenants, through the application process we get an understanding of the needs of each tenant and ensure there is a balance of needs that the staff can meet and manage.
- The approach we take is that housing is the first step. It is hard to volunteer or take a course if you do not have a place to live, shower or eat breakfast. We will be looking for operators with good connections to the local community and opportunities.

Question: *Where have all these supports been for people living in the motel system? We were told social services are available there to help them but it has been a very negative experience. Will there be support for the community when we run into problems?*

Why is a building like this not put in a neighbourhood that is not so congested already? I don't understand why this particular location was selected.

If there are issues, can we contact your office to get support or assistance?

Answer from Abi Bond:

- It requires a number of factors to make these buildings successful - location, housing provider and design of the building to name a few. It is very important to staff that we see a full range of housing options across the whole city and that we see supportive, and affordable homes in every community. We see many housing providers operating successful supportive homes all across the city.
- We chose this particular location because the site was for sale, there will be neighbours adjacent to this building soon and condos are being constructed. In relation to additional supports we will offer, the operator that we pick will have a strong track record of success. We require our operators to ensure there is 24/7 telephone and email to contact the building and connect with on-site staff.

Answer from Councillor McKelvie:

- I understand your frustration with the Lido Motel and I strongly believe the 24-hour supports are what will make this housing successful compared to the experience with the Lido Motel.

Comment: *I think this is a wonderful idea. I know the motels in this area have been a problem because they are short-term shelters and I think providing a home for people will make a world of difference. I look forward to this site in the neighbourhood.*

Question: *I work in social services and am familiar with what you are doing with modular homes. I believe there should be some sort of impact assessment done. I would like to see supports developed before people go in, because when the services lag behind that is when you start to see problems. Look at services in the community, not just at the site. I'm aware that in the lease it is not mandatory that people use supports. May I suggest going right to the front line and asking people where we are lacking?*

Answer from Abi Bond:

- In relation to tailoring supports to the residents, there is information that the operator will have about residents before they move in so they can prepare supports on an individual basis. When we open buildings, we ensure people are moved in on a phased-in basis to ensure staff and the operator can get to know residents one-on-one.

The facilitator introduced Kevin Hutchinson, from Montgomery Sisam Architects, to provide information about the modular housing.

8. Proposed Site Plan

The City has purchased the motel on the north end of the site will be renovated to create approximately 21 supportive homes.

The motel administration building is planned to be demolished as part of this proposal.

The proposal also includes the addition of a modular building which would be 20m wide, 35m deep and approximately 5-storeys tall with 62 units.

On the west side of the site, a new driveway is proposed to provide access to the hotel building.

9. Building Modular Housing

Kevin Hutchinson stated that:

- Modular housing is not new in the construction industry. Modular homes are an innovative and cost-effective way to build small-scale housing.
- The studio apartments are built off-site, prefabricated, and then transported to the site. This allows for a reduced amount of construction time at the actual site. Construction is done within a factory where the elements, such as rain or hail, cannot impact the product so we generally see a higher quality of build.
- Construction would be about 8-10 months with most of that taking place off-site.
- Each studio apartment would have a private washroom and kitchen, modest sleeping area, living area, dining area and furniture such as a bed, dresser, table and chairs.
- The exterior of the building would include green space, outdoor amenity space, fencing and lighting.

10. Planning Review and Approval Process

Kerri Voumvakis, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Policy and Analysis in City Planning, explained the various steps that would need to take place prior to the proposed site being approved and constructed.

- This proposal requires:
 - Relief from the zoning by-law
 - Site Plan approval
- The Site Plan Application review process for modular housing will follow the City's standard practices, guidelines and procedures. Site Plan Review includes items such as: Design and Materials, Landscaping, Site Servicing, Fire and Life Safety, Waste Management, Traffic and Transportation and Amenity Space.

- On September 21, the Planning and Housing Committee will consider a staff report recommending Council endorse a request in principle to the province to make a Minister's Zoning Order (MZO) to address any necessary zoning changes. Council will consider this report on September 30, 2021.
- An MZO enables the Minister to regulate land use on specific lands and has been used to expedite time-sensitive projects.

11. Timeline

Kerri Voumvakis, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Policy and Analysis in City Planning, reviewed the timeline for the proposed supportive housing site.

- July 2021: Renovations are expected to begin on the motel
- September 21, 2021: Planning and Housing Committee meeting to consider MZO request in principle
- September 30, 2021: City Council meeting
- Tenants are expected to move in gradually between December 2021 and mid-2022

The facilitator began another round of discussion where community members had the opportunity to ask questions or provide feedback. The questions and comments are below.

Question: *It is hard for us to allow this to go into the community without us having any prior notice or knowledge of the proposal. The government was able to purchase this land without any consultation. We are not included.*

Who is representing the police department in this meeting? Why does it seem that our neighbourhood is targeted for affordable housing and shelters?

Answer from Abi Bond:

- A major focus of staff is to see supportive housing delivered across the city. Every neighbourhood needs it and we have done a lot of consultation through the development of the HousingTO 10-year Action Plan. The City received funding from the federal government under the Rapid Housing Initiative and then we looked for opportunities that would be suitable both through acquisitions of existing buildings and opportunities to build modular housing. We are currently at the stage where we discuss the design and development of the building, so we do not have a police representative for this meeting.

Answer from Mayor Tory:

- Many of the properties that we are devoting to development of affordable and supportive housing are City-owned. I have been to meetings all across Toronto and supportive homes are being proposed for many neighbourhoods. We have an obligation to look after these people who are in need of support.

Answer from Kerri Voumvakis:

- Just as with any other housing development, no steps are being missed in the process and nothing is being overlooked.

[NOTE]: Link for further details of supportive housing locations across Toronto: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/housing-shelter/affordable-housing-developments/map-of-affordable-housing-locations/>

Question: *Why are we cluttering so much affordable housing into one area? There are many children and students in the area, because of that, I do not think it is a good idea to add more. I have personally already seen many issues occurring in our area with this type of housing.*

Our neighbourhood also needs opportunities to enrich the lives of the people that are already living there.

Answer from Abi Bond:

- We had an opportunity to acquire this site and other properties/ sites in various locations across the city. We feel supportive homes really add to community safety and our city. It is an important solution to homelessness and everyone coming to this building will have different backgrounds and experiences. It is important we do not stigmatize people who have experienced, or are experiencing, homelessness and assume they will be violent or commit crimes.

Answer from Mayor Tory:

- In my honest view, this situation is going to be a net improvement. You are describing the motels and shelters that just put a roof over people's heads temporarily. The supports at this building would provide housing, improve mental health and help people to find jobs. Where I have visited similar supportive housing buildings, there are three people in the building at night to ensure 24/7 supports are provided. The residents are meant to stay here long-term and to call this home. This will not be transient housing like you have seen in other places.

Question: *This neighbourhood has poor opportunities for jobs and poor infrastructure. These people will struggle. Do you plan to build better infrastructure and more community centres, more doctors' offices and more bus routes?*

Answer from Abi Bond:

- Sometimes these types of discussions prompt feedback about what the local community wants to see in their area. We are happy to take that feedback and work with the Councillor's office to see what additional information we can provide.

Answer from Councillor McKelvie:

- We will be having an engagement meeting so that we can reimagine what the industrial zone could look like in the 21st century. We are aware transit is a problem and we know higher order transit brings jobs and opportunities. Toronto City Council has announced they will fund \$1.3 billion to help with that issue. Heron Park Community Centre is an asset to the community along with the Pan Am Centre is open to the public and free of charge. There are also opportunities to leverage Section 37 and Section 42 invest into the community.

Comment: *We feel hopeless with the Heron Park sports pad because we reached out to staff at Parks, Forestry and Recreation for new nets and lighting system, but never received a response. This perpetuates why people feel jaded when you say you are going to bring in a project with these supports.*

[NOTE]: Councillor's office to follow up with resident after the meeting

12. Meeting Ends

The facilitator thanked the community members for providing valuable feedback to inform the supportive housing site proposal.

- She proceeded to share the contact information for the Community Liaison and for Councillor McKelvie.

[MEETING ENDS]