

Placer Court

Virtual Community Feedback Session Summary

October 6, 2021, 6:30 to 8:30pm.

1.0 Overview

On Wednesday, October 6, 2021, the City of Toronto's Shelter, Support & Housing Administration (SSHA) Division hosted an online session to share information and answer questions about the construction and use of 101 Placer Court as a new shelter for people experiencing homelessness.

In response to increased demand for shelter services, City Council directed Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to expand the number of permanent new shelter beds in Toronto by 1,000. In 2020, this funding was changed to include both housing and shelter projects and renamed to Housing & Shelter Infrastructure Development (HSID) project.

The shelter will be operated by Homes First Society and includes up to 87 beds for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Capacity is reduced to 58 beds to operate in accordance with COVID-19 infection, prevention and control measure, including physical distancing.

This document summarizes responses to questions asked by members of the public prior to and during the community information session. Questions ahead of the meeting were received by the Community Engagement Facilitator via email and phone.

1.1 Notification and Communications

The session was advertised by the City through flyers in English and Traditional Chinese. A total of 2,947 flyers were mailed to postal addresses within 500m radius of 101 Placer Court, and within a 1km radius on the western boundary. The session was also promoted on the project website and through the local Councillor's office.

1.2 Virtual Public Meeting

Approximately 20 people joined online and/or called in by phone over the course of the public information session using the WebEx platform. Jane Farrow of the Dept of Words & Deeds facilitated the information session. Sneha Mandhan of the Dept of Words & Deeds took notes and prepared this summary. The summary is not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript.

The session was recorded and is online with closed captioning for the public to access. Presentation slide deck can also be viewed on project webpage at <http://www.toronto.ca/ShelterExpansionSites> (click on “101 Placer Court”).

The meeting was facilitated by Community Engagement Facilitator, Jane Farrow and included the following:

- Jane Farrow, Community Engagement Facilitator, Department of Words & Deeds, opened the meeting and introduced Bob Wang, 3rd party interpreter hired by the City to interpret the session from English to Mandarin
- Ryan Evershed, Manager – Community Engagement, Homes First, introduced himself and acknowledged the land that the meeting was being held on.
- Ailee Galicia, Site Manager – 101 Placer Court, Homes First, introduced herself and offered the African Ancestral Acknowledgement.
- Shelley Carroll, Councillor for Ward 17, welcomed people to the session and gave opening remarks.
- Jane Farrow outlined the accessibility notes for the WebEx platform, the online meeting code of conduct, and the protocol for asking questions during the Q&A period of the meeting.
- Tracy Campbell, Manager, Infrastructure Planning and Development, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), City of Toronto, gave an overview of the City of Toronto's shelter services.
- Ryan Evershed provided an overview of the services provided by Homes First, and the shelter program at 101 Placer Court.
- Jane Farrow described the community engagement process for the project and highlighted the ways in which the community can share their perspectives and have their questions answered, and opened the floor to questions.
- Q&A Session – Bob Wang provided translation into Mandarin for all questions and responses, including Cllr. Carroll's remarks, with support from Maggie Chi, Senior Advisor, Cllr. Shelley Carroll's office
- Cllr. Shelley Carroll provided closing remarks.

The following panelists were available to answer questions from the public:

- Officer Christopher Chan, Neighbourhood Community Officer, Toronto Police Services, 33 Division
- Michael Lyster, Director of Housing and Shelters, Homes First
- Ailee Galicia, Site Manager, Homes First
- Suhail Ahmad, Manager, Planning and Engagement, Infrastructure Planning and Developed, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration

1.3 Getting in touch:

If you have questions, comments or feedback about the new shelter at 101 Placer Court, contact the community engagement team by email at clc.101placercourt@gmail.com

2.0 Q&A Session Summary

During the session, 17 questions were received in advance of the meeting through email, three questions were asked live during the info session and five questions were asked through the WebEx Q&A chat box.

Topics:

1. Safety, security and site selection
2. Programs and operations within 101 Placer Court
3. Ways the community could support the shelter service

2.1 Safety, security and site selection

A few people had questions and concerns about community safety and security, especially about the process of site selection for this shelter.

Q: As a resident of the neighbourhood for over thirty years, when were the residents consulted? This neighbourhood is a quiet neighbourhood with many young children and a primary school nearby. Who made the decision about site selection?

Response from Tracy Campbell, SSHA: Shelters are one of the many municipal services that the City provides, in line with day care centres, libraries, and community centres. Staff are authorized by City Council to site new shelters based on several requirements, including building suitability, availability, proximity to transit and other services, and meeting of zoning requirements and bylaws. Once we have ensured that the zoning and bylaw requirements are met, we reach out to local Councillors and engage residents, including through hosting community information sessions.

Response from Councillor Carroll: Regarding who makes the decision, it is important for people to understand that there are two pressures on the shelter system – one is the growing need for shelters to help people who are experiencing homelessness, and the other is that one of the city's biggest shelters in the downtown core was closed down. This is why City Council delegated the authority to our shelter and housing staff to find 1000 new shelter beds across the City. When the SSHA staff find a building that they think is suitable, they send out a form to the local Councillor's office to ask if there is anything they should know about the site, including any potential concerns. My process is to drive to the site right away, look at where it is – in this case, 101 Placer Court is located at the edge of an office park and on the other side of the highway from any residential community – and what would make this site healthy for a shelter, including access to transit and the highway, and it being large enough to accommodate the supports that get people back on their feet. Based on these considerations, I signed off on this location for a shelter.

One of the other reasons that Council delegated authority to City staff to go ahead and purchase locations for shelters is that they have done exhaustive work to identify what

makes a healthy and better shelter and this has recently gone unacknowledged due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have identified that smaller shelters that are spread across the city are better – they allow for more support services for a smaller group of residents, which leads to a much healthier shelter in a much healthier community.

That being said, while staff have the delegated authority to site the shelter, I will very much be part of the community engagement and outreach going forward and will be actively involved in ensuring the health of the community when the shelter is operating, including collaborating with service agencies, Toronto Police Services, and Homes First to ensure the health of the shelter and the community.

Q: The shelter is close to public schools and over on the other side of where the shelter is to be located there are residential homes. I am really concerned about the safety of the community. How will you keep us safe?

Response from Ryan Evershed, Homes First: Firstly, we really take feedback, questions and concerns from the community very seriously at our organization. The feedback we get really dictates how we set up policies and how we connect with our residents to respond quickly to reduce the negative activities that are concerning to the local communities. For example, if there is trespassing happening and we can prove that it is by one of our residents, we can come up with a disciplinary action for them.

Additionally, at Homes First we pride ourselves on our close working relationships with local police divisions, and we are confident that our relationship with the 33rd division of the Toronto Police Services will allow us to respond to and pivot per the feedback we are receiving.

In terms of the proximity to schools, we understand those concerns and we will not say that any shelter resident poses a threat and uses any substances in public spaces – most of our other shelters are close to some residential area. In all of our shelters, harm reduction supports are in place – we provide supports for people to use indoors and dispose any supplies they are using safely within the shelter.

Lastly, we really do take pride in our relationships with community. We try to be as transparent as possible regarding any drug use or negative activity. Open communication is very important – we want to work with you to reduce that kind of activity, if it occurs.

Response from Officer Christopher Chan, 33 Division, TPS: One of the most important things is the good working relationship we at Division 33 have with the shelter. We have heard a lot of concerns about safety – the biggest thing is that if you feel unsafe, you either report it or seek out an officer in the neighbourhood office. You can either call 911 or our non-emergency number 416-808-2222 to speak about your concern. I stress the importance of reporting because reporting allows us to track your concerns and through

that tracking we are able to identify the times and areas that need the division's attention the most, and we can allocate resources accordingly. If community members don't report incidents, we don't have the data to allocate resources based on community needs.

Response from Councillor Carroll: I just want to share that further south in the ward we have had to host an emergency shelter in order to accommodate residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have established a very good partnership with Division 33 which has been very helpful in any emergency circumstances. One other group of partners we haven't mentioned tonight that we are hoping will come along are the faith-based organizations who have facilities in the business park that 101 Placer Court is located in, and which are based on the values that we help those who can't help themselves.

Response from Tracy Campbell, SSHA: To add to what other panel members have said, I have worked in the shelter system for over 20 years and per my practical experience, all shelters have been located in residential areas, some have been near schools and some have even shared lots with child care centres. I understand people's hesitations and concerns and these can be brought up not only with the CLC, but also with the shelter staff. Often, building a good relationship with shelter staff and understanding the types of programs and services offered at the shelter go a long way in mitigating some of those concerns. Many of the same factors that make neighbourhoods appealing to you – proximity to schools, transit, services – are also what we look for when siting shelters.

In terms of Councillor involvement, we want Councillors to be on board – it is helpful for our siting process if they are. However, a Councillor's office's opposition will not block the siting of a shelter. There are many factors that contribute to that decision including negotiating with the landlord to make sure the building is affordable. Prior to shelter openings, these are common concerns and it is good that the community is voicing them. Typically, when the shelter actually opens, the community often embraces the shelter. After the concerns have been addressed and resolved with shelter staff, shelters typically don't have any issues integrating into the neighbourhood.

Response from Councillor Carroll: The Council as a whole and Mayor Tory made a commitment to the community that we have to address homelessness and the crisis of housing affordability. We have a housing crisis that is thrusting people into poverty. The pressure on the system is very great which has led the City Council and Mayor Tory to delegate authority to City staff to locate shelters that are distributed across the city fairly and to meet the deadline to get people off the streets before the winter.

Q: We are concerned that the community is small and the impact will be large – there are needles and drug use near churches and mosques. Who will be held responsible if things go badly in a shelter?

Response from Tracy Campbell, SSHA: There is a collective responsibility with these concerns. SSHA works very closely with shelter providers who work closely with the Councillor and local communities via the CLC. The CLC is the venue through which concerns are brought up and responded to within a timely fashion. There are several ways that you can get in touch not only with shelter staff but also with the local police division and SSHA staff as well.

These are real and appropriate concerns and the best way to work together is to have that strong relationship. I would like people to keep in mind that people accessing shelter supports are part of our community and, like us, they do need support and services. We are here to provide that. Additionally, Homes First is a very experienced shelter provider. They have a great reputation in the sector and I am confident that you will be able to resolve any issues that might come up.

Q: Which is the next closest shelter to 101 Placer Court?

Response from Michael Lyster, Homes First: I believe it is 5800 Yonge St which is in the Willowdale area in North York.

Response from Tracy Campbell, SSHA: You can see in the map in the presentation that there is a concentration of shelters in some neighbourhoods. Our goal is to have shelters in every neighbourhood so that people can get supports and services close by in their local neighbourhoods where they have lived and are familiar with services, and to reduce the need for them to travel long distances to access supports.

Correction to response above regarding closest shelter to 101 Placer court. Closest two shelter programs are 55 Hallcrown Place and 185 Yorkland Blvd.

2.2 Programs and operations within 101 Placer Court

Several people had questions about the day-to-day operations at the shelter, including the ways in which potential shelter residents could access services, and opportunities for volunteering.

Q: What might a resident's day look like? Are they required to go out of the shelter for a certain part of the day? Is there a curfew? Do residents have a choice to stay at the shelter during the day for support services, education, safety? Will some of the shelter residents have jobs?

Answer from Ryan Evershed, Homes First: A typical day for a shelter resident looks very similar to any other person's day. Over the course of the day, residents come down to the common dining room for meals, which are often the most active times at the shelter. Through the day, residents will often check in with their case workers and go out to attend to their own appointments and personal social agendas. Residents can come and go as they please during the day. The expected program curfew at 101 Placer Court is midnight from Mondays to Thursdays, and 1am on Fridays and Saturdays. Typically, a

dedicated smoke break is allowed during curfew hours. Many shelter residents have jobs – some work 9-5 jobs and some work night shifts. Some residents have their own cars and some commute to their jobs.

Q: What kind of support might the shelter welcome from volunteers who live in the community? What types of programs are usually appreciated?

Answer from Ryan Evershed, Homes First: There are a number of volunteer opportunities – they typically depend on the wants and needs of residents. The general opportunities are for program volunteers interested in running activities, facilitating community clean-ups, and organizing community events. Those kinds of opportunities are really helpful. Programs that are recreational and fun and can build life skills and wellness are the most appreciated. Volunteer opportunities can be in-person or virtual. For the former, proof of double COVID-19 vaccination is required.

Q: Can Homeless people arrive at 101 Placer Court 24 hours a day every day? What happens if a person arrives at night after all the available beds are taken? Do you expect the same clients to return to the shelter night after night? Is there a maximum number of nights that an individual can stay at the Placer Court Shelter?

Response from Ryan Evershed, Homes First: There is no time limit for how long people can stay; as long as they are being respectful, following the rules, and engaging with the program in a respectful way, they can stay for as long as they want or need. Unless there have been some other accommodations put in place, e.g. for people working overnight, generally residents cannot come in and go out during curfew hours. Most residents will be referred from central intake or other service agencies in the city or from other Homes First shelter locations in the city. If people walk up to our building in need of our services, and if we have space available, we can do intake at any time of day. In the case that we don't have a bed available, our staff will make calls to check for beds in another shelter in the area.

Q: How much one-on-one interaction time would a client have per day with a professional case management staff member?

Response from Ailee Galicia, Homes First: Case workers will be on site Mondays to Fridays between 9am and 5pm, and on one weekday every week from 12pm to 8pm. Therefore, residents will have access to case workers within those hours. Additionally, staff will be available on site 24x7 so there is always someone available at site to engage with.

Response from Ryan Evershed, Homes First: Residents can also make appointments with their case workers to help them with making and managing appointments outside of the shelter as well.

Q: What personal supplies are provided for the clients, and how much do they need to go out and find stores to buy their own personal items such as cigarettes, chewing gum, or candy bars etc.? Do they have access to those items within the shelter? How much difficulty do they have to get the things that they would like for their own personal use?

Response from Ryan Evershed, Homes First: Meals and snacks are provided at the shelter. We do have candy and junk food as incentives for some of our programs. Toiletries and hygiene products are also provided to both male- and female-identifying clients. We have been lucky in receiving great donation support which supports clothing and toiletries for the residents. People do have to provide personal items, like cigarettes, for themselves. Other things that we like to make available are art supplies, stationery items, and things like games purchased through our program budget money for recreational activities. We welcome donations for those items as well. We also have PPE (including masks, gloves, sanitizers, and first aid supplies) available on site for use by residents.

Response from Michael Lyster, Homes First: The basics are provided to residents. For other things, our residents are like most other people – they have some income which they use to purchase personal items that we don't provide.

3.0 Next Steps

The new shelter at 101 Placer Court is expected to open in early December, 2021.

Following the public meeting the presentation and recording of the event were posted to the City web page: <http://www.toronto.ca/ShelterExpansionSites> (click on "101 Placer Court").

If you would like to receive ongoing updates about the project, please email clc.101placercourt@gmail.com and request your name be added to the email distribution list.

A Community Liaison Committee may be established with membership and input from the existing organizations in the area. The CLC could include representatives of residents, businesses, and community organizations who are interested in identifying and problem-solving concerns and challenges related to the shelter. The CLC would work in collaboration with shelter operators and City staff to promote the success of the shelter in the community. Please contact Jane Farrow, Community Engagement Facilitator, at clc.101placercourt@gmail.com if you are interested in finding out more about establishing a CLC for the upcoming shelter at 101 Placer Court.