

# **3 Park Home Ave. - Proposed Refugee Welcome Centre**

## **Community Information Session 2 - Summary**

July 27, 2022, 6:30 to 8:30pm

### **1.0 Overview**

On Wednesday, July 27, 2022, 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 3 Park Home Ave. as temporary housing for refugees.

The City has seen a steady increase in refugees seeking temporary accommodations since September 2021, primarily driven by the border reopening and easing of international travel restrictions. In the first half of 2022, an average of 55 new refugees per week have been accessing Toronto's shelter system and there are currently 1,700 refugee clients in shelters. Toronto continues to provide a safe haven for refugees and refugee claimants looking to build new lives for themselves and their families. Reasons for why people seek refugee status in Canada vary. Individuals may have fled their home countries, or were forced to flee, due to armed conflicts, political unrest, or persecution due to race, religion or political opinion.

The proposed program at 3 Park Home will provide safe shelter, as well as wrap-around supports aimed at helping refugees and refugee claimants find and secure permanent housing and build connection in the community. The supports provided will be based on individual needs, and may include help with the settlement process and case coordination with legal services, employment and education support, and referrals to healthcare and other community services. Recreation programs will be developed at the site to engage clients and youth.

This document summarizes responses to questions asked by members of the public during the community information session. Please note this summary is not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript.

### **1.1 Notification & Communications**

This session was advertised by the City of Toronto through flyers (digital and print). Approximately 5000 flyers were dropped at doorsteps in the immediate vicinity of 3 Park Home Ave and an additional 19,346 were sent by Canada post to nearby buildings. Additional notices were sent by email, promoted on the project website and through the local Councillor's office.

### **1.2 Meeting Attendance & Accessibility**

61 people joined online and/or called in by phone over the course of the information session. The meeting was streamed on Zoom with technical services provided by King Events. Jane Farrow of the Dept of Words & Deeds facilitated the information session.

The session was recorded and is available online with closed captioning for the public to access on the City of Toronto's YouTube channel.

## **2.0 Panelist Presentation**

### **2.1 Presenter Names & Titles**

- Jane Farrow, Community Engagement Facilitator
- Councillor John Filion, City Councillor– Willowdale (Ward 18)
- Loretta Ramadhin, Project Director, Capital Development Unit, SSHA
- Milton Barrera, Project Director Homelessness Initiatives & Prevention Services, SSHA
- Alison Folosea, Director, Transactions Services, Corporate Real Estate Management
- Dan Rutembesa, Senior Director of Shelter and Housing, Sojourn House

### **2.2 Presentation Outline**

- Land Acknowledgement, Zoonah Khalid, Programs Coordinator, Planning & Engagement SSHA
- Zoom details, presenter introductions, session purpose & agenda, *Jane Farrow*
- African Ancestral Acknowledgement, Suhal Ahmed, Manager, Planning & Engagement, SSHA
- Opening remarks, Councillor John Filion
- Zoom accessibility and online meeting code of conduct, *Jane Farrow*
- City of Toronto Refugee Services Overview, *Milton Barrera*
- Shelter siting process, shelter site selection criteria and 3 Park Home site details, *Loretta Ramadhin*
- Proposed lease agreement details, *Alison Folosea*
- Overview of the proposed program at 3 Park Home, *Milton Barrera*
- Refugee Programs, *Dan Rutembesa*
- Community engagement process and how to get in contact, *Jane Farrow*

## **3.0 Questions and Answers**

The Q & A box on the Zoom webinar received 86 comments/questions with some participants making more than one comment. This distillation of comments, questions and concerns cover what was asked during the information session, on live audio and through the Q&A chat box.

The key areas of feedback, concern and inquiry were:

### **3.1 Pressure on community resources and education system**

Several questions were raised regarding potential pressure being put on community resources and the education system, as a result of the new refugee welcome centre. Specifically, local recreational programs were identified as a community resource that

are currently overwhelmed; one participant asked if the City will provide additional resources to compensate for the increased number of residents accessing programs. Panelists explained that a partnership is being explored with Parks & Recreation and other local organizations to find programming opportunities both within the shelter and in the community. Staff acknowledged the need for capacity-building and community engagement to find a solution to this ongoing challenge.

Some participants commented on the school system's capacity to accommodate an influx of students, and asked how both currently-enrolled and new students will be supported. Councillor Filion shared that conversations are being had with the school board and City Staff, and an update will be provided when they have more information on the approach. Dan Rutembesa shared his experience at Sojourn House regarding this topic; he said they offer an on-site homework club, that the local schools are very responsive, have felt prepared, and that there has been little to no disruption to the system/process at other refugee sites.

### **3.2 On-site services and wrap-around supports**

Many questions arose about the specific on-site services provided for refugees, as well as additional wrap-around supports, including healthcare and mental health support. One individual expressed concern around the quick timeline of the project and how the community will know that the refugees are receiving the support they need. The panelists recognized the tight timeline and noted the shelter opening may need to be pushed back till later in the fall. In response to a question about food/meals, Councilor Filion explained that most meals will be provided by the hotel kitchen, though city staff are exploring ways to involve local business in the food and meal provisioning. Dan Rutembesa spoke about the refugee support agencies involved in Sojourn House, which offer doctor visits, medical registration, and interpreter services.

### **3.3 Terms of the lease agreement and site plan**

Many individuals had questions about the terms of the lease agreement as well as the details of the site plan and proposal. Several people raised concerns about the length of the lease (5 years), suggesting it is too long. Some inquired about the motivation of 3 Park Home Ave. to pursue this lease agreement and how they are benefiting. Alison Folosea responded to most questions related to the lease. She explained 3 Park Home Ave. has expressed interest in a partnership with the City for some time and that the site has undergone significant market testing and appraisals. A final decision on the lease agreement will be made in the Council meeting on August 15th.

One person asked the panelists to confirm the number of refugees that would be accessing the shelter; it was confirmed by Milton Barrera that 600-700 claimants, *including* children, would be seeking support. There were several questions about the selection of Toronto vs. other areas. Milton Barrera noted that Toronto is well-known and is in close proximity to Pearson Airport. Milton also reiterated that many refugees arrive in Toronto, then move to other regions that have shorter wait lists like Windsor, London and North Bay.

### **3.4 Neighbourhood safety & security**

Many people expressed worries that the neighbourhood would suffer in terms of safety and security. The City staff expressed their plan to work with the service provider to create a safety plan for this site and to evaluate if/what security is needed or appropriate for the welcome centre. Councillor Filion stated that he does not believe there will be a security problem at this site.

### **3.5 Future use of the hotel**

People were very keen to be assured that the refugee housing would not be converted into a homeless shelter, referring to a previous conversion at 5800 Yonge St. Loretta Ramadhin explained the reason that particular site was converted into a homeless shelter was directly in response to Covid-19 and the immediate need to provide physical distancing spaces in the shelter system. There are no plans to use 3 Park Home Ave. as a site for non-refugees.

### **3.6 Community support and engagement**

Some participants asked how they can support/contribute to this project and how they will know about opportunities to do so. One individual spoke live on the phone-in feature and identified themselves as a recent refugee from Ukraine. They expressed their gratitude and thanks to the panelists and City for the work they are doing on this project, and shared about their challenging experience arriving into a foreign country.

## **4.0 Next Steps**

A Community Liaison Committee (CLC) 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 project. The CLC would work in collaboration with shelter operators and City staff to promote the success of the project in the community. Please contact Jane Farrow, Community Engagement Facilitator, at [3parkhomeave@gmail.com](mailto:3parkhomeave@gmail.com) if you are interested in finding out more about establishing a CLC for the upcoming refugee welcome centre project at 3 Park Home Ave.

If you have any questions, comments or feedback about the proposal for temporary refugee housing at 3 Park Home Ave., contact the community engagement team by email at [3parkhomeave@gmail.com](mailto:3parkhomeave@gmail.com).