

Community Bulletin #1 – 68 Sheppard Ave. W.

January 2025

This bulletin provides updates to community members interested in learning about the planned new shelter at 68 Sheppard Ave. W. My name is Joe Mihevc and I have been retained by City of Toronto as a third-party consultant to support the engagement process at 68 Sheppard Ave. W. You are receiving this bulletin because you previously indicated an interest in receiving project updates. If you no longer wish to receive these updates, please let us know by emailing 68sheppard@gmail.com.

Thank you to those of you who joined us at the Community Open House on December 17, 2024 to share your questions, concerns, and support for the new shelter. This bulletin will provide updates about the shelter and also answer questions that City staff heard via email and throughout the evening, including questions sent to Councillor Cheng's office.

Welcome to new people who have signed up to receive the Community Bulletins for the project. We encourage you to share the Bulletin broadly, to ensure that as many community members as possible are informed and up-to-date on this project.

We recognize that you may have additional questions or concerns about the new shelter site that haven't been addressed in this bulletin. We are still early in the shelter development process and will share all new information and updates as soon as they are confirmed. The aim of this bulletin is to provide up-to-date information on the new shelter, and what the community can expect going forward.

This Community Bulletin, as well as other information is available on the [City project webpage](#) for those that want quick and easy access to all relevant information on this project.

SHELTER LOCATION AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

We heard many questions at the Community Open House and through emails regarding the selection of this particular location. The location for the new shelter to be built at 68 Sheppard Ave. W. was chosen following an extensive selection process done by City staff. In 2017, City Council delegated authority to City staff to find and select new locations for shelters. City Council also approved a new community engagement process for opening new shelters. While developing new shelters is a priority for City Council, no elected official was involved in choosing the location of any of the six recently announced sites.

The following includes those most frequently questions asked about the shelter location and decision-making process.

Why are new shelters needed?

The City's shelter system is currently full. Demand for shelter space continues to increase due to inflated costs of living, insufficient affordable housing supply, inadequate wage and income supports, and an increase in the number of refugee claimants arriving in Toronto.

The City is currently providing shelter to approximately 12,000 people experiencing homelessness both within the shelter system and outside of the system in bridging hotels. Even with this work, on average, close to 200 people are turned away each night because demand is currently far greater than the system can accommodate.

The Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS) is a 10-year plan to improve shelter system stability, achieve cost savings, and be more responsive to the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The focus of this strategy is on transitioning from an emergency COVID-19 response to a long-term proactive approach to shelter infrastructure, including building shelters that support the recovery and stability of the shelter system.

A main pillar of this 10-year strategy is building up to 20 permanent, purpose-built shelters across the city with a focus on expanding outside of the downtown core where there are gaps in available services. The goal is to have purpose-built shelters in all wards across the city. You can learn more about the strategy here

(<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/8c9e-HSCISinside231011spreadAODA.pdf>)

What criteria did the City use to select a new shelter site?

To be considered as a potential new shelter service, sites must meet applicable zoning and shelter by-law requirements, be close to transit and resources, and meet minimum sizing requirements. There are a limited number of available areas in Toronto that meet the size, budget and zoning requirements needed to be a municipal shelter. Shelters are not allowed in areas zoned exclusively for employment or industrial uses and are typically located in residential areas, often close to libraries, schools, community centres and health care services.

The new shelter at 68 Sheppard Ave. W. is part of the first six of 20 new purpose-built shelter sites planned citywide. City staff assessed over 100 sites across Toronto to determine if they met the City's criteria for shelter use. Staff completed an extensive due diligence process to ensure 68 Sheppard Ave. W. was suitable for shelter use. In order to meet City Council deadlines and respond to increasing demand for homelessness

services, staff are moving forward with all viable shelter locations that meet the City's criteria.

What process was followed to apply the criteria?

The City's Corporate Real Estate Management Division, CreateTO and Toronto Shelter and Support Services work closely together to identify potential sites for shelter use. This includes assessing underutilized City assets and market listings. As new sites/locations are identified, an evaluation process is completed. The steps taken for this site are listed below:

- *Site Identification:* Toronto Parking Authority (TPA) worked with CreateTO to review its assets to determine which ones were surplus to operational needs.
- *Desktop Evaluation Review:* Staff completed due diligence of the site to determine the best use. This included but is not limited to assessing the size of the lot, zoning, estimated development costs, access to transportation, and availability of other community resources in the area.
- *Initial site visit:* Staff visited the site to further investigate the suitability for shelter use and the feasibility of the development. Staff also assessed the surrounding neighbourhood around the property to identify key stakeholders.
- *Pre-development due diligence:* Before development moves forward, additional assessments will be completed, including completion of Environmental Site Assessment (ESA)

Through this exercise, it was determined that the best potential use of this City lot at 68 Sheppard Ave. W. would be to use as Municipal shelter. To date, four (4) surplus TPA lots were identified for future shelter development.

Who was involved in the decision to select the 68 Sheppard Ave. W. site?

City Council [delegated authority](#) to staff to approve and develop new locations for shelters and 24-hour respite sites. This ensures that the City can work quickly to respond to pressures within the shelter system and ensure that as many people as possible can access critical shelter services and support. This means that the decision to approve new shelter sites is not made by City Councillors or the Mayor. This helps to accelerate and depoliticize the shelter development process, which is consistent with a human-rights based approach to housing and related services for vulnerable residents. This approach also supports the [City of Toronto's commitment to housing as a human right](#) and the Housing First model that recognizes that individuals without stable places to stay are less likely to effectively address health, economic, and social challenges and successfully move forward with their lives.

How was this site selected? What about the current Green P parking lot?

In 2023, the Toronto Parking Authority determined the parking lot at 68 Sheppard Ave. W. to be surplus to operational needs, and thereby no longer required. CreateTO, an agency that manages City real estate holdings, then conducted a thorough evaluation and determined the lot would be best used as a shelter location. This helps reduce costs associated with developing new shelters, as there is no acquisition cost for City-owned properties. Cost-savings will also be achieved over the long term, as purpose-built shelter spaces are significantly cheaper to maintain and operate than continuously leasing temporary sites for shelter use.

What is the anticipated timeline for this project?

The shelter is estimated to open between 2028 and 2030. As directed by City Council, staff continue to explore rapid construction techniques to ensure these sites are built as quickly as possible while achieving positive outcomes for all shelter users, staff, visitors and the surrounding community. The planning and design of the building will be undertaken with the new operator once they are selected.

Why is this location so close to schools, daycares, and senior's centres?

The City and its operating partners have significant experience in successfully operating homelessness services close to schools and childcare facilities. Shelters are located and successfully operated in residential neighborhoods throughout the city of Toronto near other community services such as daycares, schools, libraries, community centers, and health care services. Shelters are not allowed in areas zoned only for employment or industrial use (Zoning By-law 569-2013). This means the majority of shelters are in areas zoned for residential or mixed residential use. An example is Fort York Residence at 38 Bathurst St., a shelter serving men that is co-located with a Childcare Centre (run by Children's Services) with positive community impacts.

Information on shelters and other homelessness services, including locations, can be found on the City's website at www.toronto.ca/homelesshelps. For a detailed map of Schools and Childcare services see Appendix.

OPERATIONS AND SERVICES PROVIDED

Shelter programs offer a wide range of services to help people experiencing homelessness improve their well-being, and find and keep stable housing. The following questions provide more information on shelter operations and the services that will be provided at 68 Sheppard Ave. W.

Who will be the service provider for this shelter?

The program is expected to support approximately 80 people. At this time, the City is working to confirm a service provider.

What services will be provided at 68 Sheppard Ave. W.?

Services are provided by the shelter operator and include:

- three meals and snacks each day,
- access to laundry services, restrooms and showers,
- case management for all clients, with a focus on helping them secure permanent housing, and
- wrap-around supports, including crisis management, referrals for income support, access to primary and mental health care, recreational, social, employment and academic programming.

Program details are being finalized and partner agencies may be brought into the shelter to provide the wrap-around supports as required.

The site, which will be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, will be pet-friendly, ensuring pets and owners can stay together. It will also include an enclosed outdoor area to provide clients with a private, open-air gathering space.

This comprehensive approach and service has resulted in numerous success stories where people and families have moved into permanent housing, regained stability, and started rebuilding their lives. In 2024, more than 4,300 people moved from the shelter system into permanent housing.

The number of people experiencing homelessness continues to outpace the number of people transitioning out of homelessness and into permanent housing. This is why the City remains committed to collaborating with other levels of government and partner agencies to ensure an adequate housing supply and access to essential supports, such as income supports.

How long does the City anticipate that people will stay at the shelter?

Toronto's shelter system operates on a Housing First principle. The length of a client's stay in the shelter varies depending on their unique circumstances and their housing case plan. Due to challenges in the availability of affordable housing options, more than 50 per cent of shelter users are staying up to a year as they work to secure permanent housing.

New clients are only referred to a shelter when a space becomes vacant. People access shelters through Central Intake, a City-operated, 24/7 phone-based service that refers people experiencing homelessness to emergency shelter and other overnight accommodation. Central Intake also provides information about other homelessness services.

What is the typical rhythm of activity anticipated for this shelter? For example, will people be required to leave every morning at 8 a.m. and then line up to be allowed back in later in the day?

No, clients can stay at a shelter until they find other, more permanent accommodations. There are no requirements for clients to leave at any time of day. All shelter locations are staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Staff provide programming to support their health and well-being, and Counsellors and Case Managers work with clients to work toward their education, employment and housing goals.

It is important also to remember that people using shelter services are equal residents of the city. They can move around communities and use amenities such as parks and public benches. And like all residents, shelter residents are also expected to conduct themselves according to the rules/laws and by-laws. They may leave the shelter for a variety of reasons including employment, education and accessing services in the community.

What is the difference between purpose-built shelter and other emergency shelter?

The City's approach for the new shelters is to create purpose-built spaces that will be thoughtfully designed and well-operated. Purpose-built means that the City is building the site specifically for shelter use. In the past the city has been reliant on leasing sites that are turnkey ready that meet shelter requirements but may not be optimized for shelter use.

The new sites will be smaller, serving approximately 80 people, which will allow them to be more responsive to the needs of shelter clients and help them to better integrate into the community. New shelters will align with best practices outlined in the Shelter Design and Technical Guidelines. In addition to being smaller, sites will be designed to be more welcoming, inclusive, accessible, and pet-friendly. Sites will also provide a range of programs to meet the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness. Together, these measures will lead to more positive outcomes for clients, staff and the community.

Visit [Shelter Design & Technical Guidelines](#) to learn more about new design for purpose-built shelters.

What does harm reduction mean?

Harm reduction is an approach and set of strategies designed to reduce substance related harm and stigma. Harm reduction is a key aspect of TSSS' Housing First approach, which focuses on the provision of housing and supports with no preconditions or 'readiness' requirements for the person to accept treatment for any physical, mental health or substance use issues. Staff are trained in harm reduction, overdose prevention, and recognition and response, including the use of naloxone and safe sharp disposal. Shelter staff will also work to support clients to determine their harm reduction needs, with referrals to appropriate programs and services in the community. The

shelter at 68 Sheppard Ave. W. will not offer an urgent public health needs site or a supervised consumption site.

What other medical and crisis supports will be provided at the shelter?

68 Sheppard Ave. W. will have access to a range of primary care services and mental health and harm reduction supports. New sites will be designed to include spaces for medical staff to provide care on site. All team members are trained to respond to immediate non-police or non-EMS-related matters.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Another main concern we heard in relation to the shelter was community safety. The following answers questions to frequently asked questions on this topic.

What safety measures will be in place?

The City is committed to the safety and security of clients and staff, and works with a variety of partners, including the Toronto Police Services, to ensure the safety of the broader community and the success of the site.

The site will be staffed 24/7 by individuals who are trained in case management for housing and support, harm reduction services, de-escalation, conflict resolution, crisis prevention, and intervention and management. The building will be equipped with access control and video surveillance systems and will be thoughtfully designed with safety features in mind. The City will work closely with the operator to develop safety measures and good neighbour policies for this site. We will work closely with community and our partner agencies and play a role in supporting community safety initiatives. The site will host regular Community Liaison Committees and connect that feedback to improvements at the site level as well as share the feedback with partner agencies so that they can respond as needed.

If there are incidents that occur outside of the shelter, staff are committed to working with the Toronto Police Services, community organizations and with city divisions to address these appropriately. A “Who to Call” sheet will be available closer to site opening with the appropriate contacts and will be made available for the community.

Is any research data available for any positive or negative impacts of shelters on the neighbourhood community? In particular, what are the impacts on community safety and property value?

No research in Toronto or other cities has shown a consistent or direct link between the presence of a homeless shelter and declining property values. In fact, property values in Toronto are driven by much larger factors such as market demand, housing supply, interest rates, and neighborhood amenities. As part of our commitment to the successful integration of shelters in the surrounding neighborhoods, we emphasize shelter management and programming aligned with the Toronto Shelter Standards, community

engagement with open communication and addressing concerns, and the long-term community benefits of combating homelessness and providing essential services.

Do we collect crime data around the other shelter locations opened previously in other parts of the city?

The City is not aware of any links between purpose-built shelter and crime in the neighbourhood. The Toronto Police Service does collect crime reporting dashboards. For specific details on crime data around previously opened shelter locations, it would be best to contact the Toronto Police Service or visit <https://www.tps.ca/data-maps/data-analytics/>

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While site selection is not subject to community consultation, the City of Toronto knows that successful shelters have strong community engagement and are good neighbours. The City is committed to engaging the community to support the program's success – both for the individuals who will be staying there and the surrounding community.

To support community integration, the City and Joe Mihevc will continue to meet with local stakeholders on a regular basis. This includes both large information-sharing gatherings and smaller, focused stakeholder meetings with community members and organizations for open, solution-focused dialogue and discussion.

As the shelter starts operations, information will be shared on volunteer opportunities, donations needed and other ways community organizations can help support the operator and clients. A Community Liaison Committee will be created, to provide a forum for representatives from the local community to meet regularly with representatives from the City and operator to share information, ask questions, and work together to problem-solve community concerns.

Joe Mihevc can be reached at 68sheppard@gmail.com. A summary of the most frequently asked new questions will be addressed in future Community Bulletins.

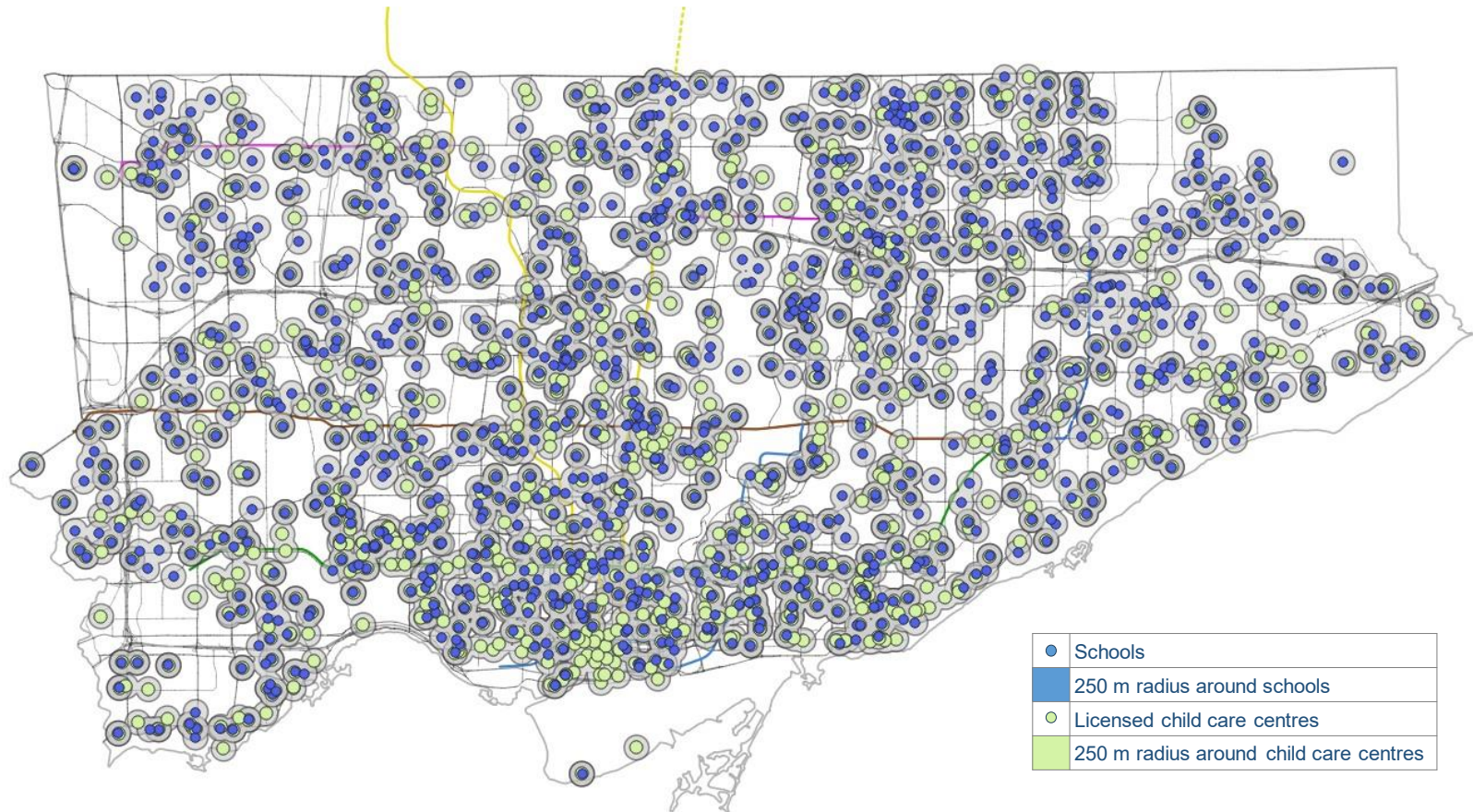
Here is how you can keep up-to-date and be a part of the community-building efforts going forward:

- 1) Sign-up for the Community Bulletins: If you would like to receive these periodic Bulletins, you can sign up by sending an email to 68sheppard@gmail.com.
- 2) Share the Bulletin to your friends, neighbours, resident's association.
- 3) Check out the [City Webpage for the 68 Sheppard Ave. W. shelter](#) which is specific to this project.

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Third Party Community Engagement Facilitator

Appendix

Licensed Child Care Centres & School Locations



Note: The dataset for Licensed Child Care Centres is sourced from the City of Toronto Open Data Portal (<https://open.toronto.ca/dataset/licensed-child-care-centres/>)

Note: The dataset for Schools is sourced from the City of Toronto Open Data Portal (<https://open.toronto.ca/dataset/school-locations-all-types/>)