

New Shelter 2535 Gerrard St. E. E-Update

January 9, 2025

The following questions include those most frequently asked through feedback received since the first Community Bulletin was distributed in December 2024 (through emails to 2535gerrard@gmail.com, phone calls, and door-to-door canvassing in the community).

The Community Engagement Facilitation team, Third Party Public, has reviewed all feedback and consolidated the questions here. The City of Toronto has provided the answers to the questions.

The questions have been numbered for ease of reference only and are not intended to reflect an order of priority.

Regular Community Bulletins and E-Updates will continue to share community questions and City responses, along with other updates from community feedback and the City's work on this project.

ABOUT HOW THE SHELTER WORKS

1. How long does TSSS anticipate that people will stay at the shelter?

Clients typically stay in shelter until a housing or another suitable accommodation is available (see answer to question 2). 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.

2. How long does someone typically stay in the same TSSS shelter? Is it days or months?

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.

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

No, clients can stay at a shelter until they find other, permanent accommodations. All City of Toronto shelters 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. There are no requirements for clients to leave at any time of day.

4. What services will be provided inside the shelter and on the shelter property? Who will provide those services? And how effective are those services in helping people get out of the shelter system and into housing?

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 will be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 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. Between January and November 2024, more than 3,800 people moved from the shelter system into permanent housing.

ABOUT LEARNING FROM OTHER LOCATIONS

5. Many neighbours have seen media coverage and heard stories from friends related to negative experiences with other City shelters. What has the City learned from their experiences with other shelters and how are those lessons going to be applied here at 2535 Gerrard St. East.?

The housing and affordability crises, insufficient mental health supports, income supports that haven't kept pace with the rising cost of living, the drug toxicity crisis, and the record number of refugee claimants arriving in need of emergency shelter are all contributing to the strain on the emergency shelter system.

Between 2020 and 2024, the number of spaces in Toronto's shelter system has doubled. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City took extraordinary steps to ensure people experiencing homelessness were safe and the City leased and opened large temporary emergency shelter sites to ensure physical distancing was provided throughout the shelter system.

The shelter at 2535 Gerrard St. E. is part of the City's plan to build up to 20 new purpose-built shelters by 2033 that will improve shelter system stability and help respond to demand. The sites will also allow the City to move out of larger, temporary hotels achieving important cost savings and improve services for people experiencing homelessness.

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 better integrate into the community. New shelters will be developed in alignment with best practices outlined under 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.

6. Are there other City shelters located close to daycares? If so, what are the experiences at those shelters? What does the Children's Services Division of the City of Toronto think about this proximity? Are there other City shelters located close to schools? If so, what are the experiences at those shelters?

The City and its operating partners have significant experience in successfully operating homelessness services in close proximity to schools and childcare facilities. Shelters are located and successfully operated in residential neighbourhoods 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 Child Care Centre (run by Children's Services) with minimal community impact.

Information on shelters and other homelessness services, including locations, can be found on the City's website at www.toronto.ca/homelesshelps.

ABOUT ADEQUATE LONG-TERM RESOURCES

7. Many in the community are concerned about having new neighbours at the shelter who live with mental health and addictions challenges. There are concerns about behaviour that can be unpredictable and different than they currently encounter in the community.
 - a. What resources will be available at the shelter to support people living with mental health and addictions challenges?
 - b. How will the City ensure that this shelter receives the resources it needs over the long term to best support the relationship between the shelter and the surrounding community?

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. All team members are trained to respond to immediate non-police or non-EMS-related matters when made aware by the community. The site will also have access to a range of primary care services and mental health and harm reduction supports.

All shelters adhere to the City's 10-point harm reduction strategy. Harm reduction is an approach and set of strategies designed to

reduce substance-related harm without requiring abstinence. Staff are trained in harm reduction, overdose prevention, and recognition and response, including the use of naloxone and safe sharp disposal. The shelter will not offer an urgent public health needs site or a supervised consumption site. Shelter staff also work to support clients to determine their harm reduction needs with referrals to appropriate programs and services in the community.

ABOUT SITING

8. There is very infrequent bus service on Gerrard and limited support services in the neighbourhood. How important were those factors considered when the City selected this site?

When seeking sites for new shelter services for people experiencing homelessness, the City searches for buildings that are available, affordable, of a suitable size and close to important services for clients, such as transit. The shelter at 2535 Gerrard is located on a bus route, near the major street of Victoria Park Ave. and is under a 20-minute walk or 12-minute bus ride to Victoria Park station. Restaurants and groceries are also located within walking distance.

There is a limited amount of suitable sites for shelter use and the City does not limit shelters to major public transit routes or areas with existing support services. The shelter program will offer a number of embedded support services to support the health and well-being of individuals at the site.

9. The City of Toronto is responsible for zoning bylaws. If shelters are not permitted in certain areas (e.g., employment areas), has the City of Toronto considered using the power it has to change its own land use zoning to be able to locate shelters in employment areas away from residential areas?

Homelessness continues to be an emergency in Toronto. Although the City is currently providing accommodations to more than 11,000 people, approximately 200 are turned away each night

and there has been an increase in encampments across the city. Shelters are needed to help people in immediate crisis, as the City works to build more housing.

In November 2021, Toronto City Council adopted a report (Item - 2021.EC25.6) that authorized the City to enter into new or amend existing agreements with landlords in order to maintain or add new respite or shelter beds. This step was taken to allow the City to open or relocate shelter programs quickly to respond to shelter system pressures and ensure the City can provide critical shelter services and support to as many people as possible. This authority was reaffirmed in a report (Item - 2023.EC7.7), approved by City Council in November 2023.

Changing zoning is a lengthy and complex process that is weighed against other planning priorities and is not guaranteed to be approved. Given the current need and demand for shelter services, staff prioritized areas that already allowed municipal shelters. City Planning is also not supportive of changing employment zoned areas as they are necessary to be maintained for economic growth and stability.

ABOUT RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT INTEGRATION OF THE SHELTER

10. What resources are available from the City to support strong integration of this shelter into this community? For example:

a. Would resources be provided for security services?

The City is committed to the safety and security of clients, staff, and the broader community, and working together to ensure the success of the site. Staff are trained in de-escalation, conflict resolution, crisis prevention, intervention and management, and harm reduction services and support.

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 stakeholders to discuss issues of community safety through regular Community Liaisons Committee meetings (see question 11).

b. Would compensation be provided if negative impacts are experienced?

The City does not pay for or compensate people for security measures on private property. Vandalism and trespassing are crimes and should be reported to your local police division as the local police division will assign officers/patrols and activities based on information from the community. Community members can also report minor crimes and issues in the community at www.torontopolice.on.ca/core/.

c. Would strategies be used to ensure playgrounds do not become secondary sleeping areas for people who rely on the shelter?

Staff and outreach partners monitor and respond to encampments 24 hours a day, seven days a week, working to provide individuals living outside with information, services and supports, including referrals to indoor accommodations. Should a member of the community see someone living outside who may need support, please call 311 and outreach staff will be dispatched to the location. Shelters like the one being proposed at 2535 Gerrard St. E. will provide an additional place for individuals living outside to access important services and programs.

ABOUT SUPPORT

11. There are people in the community who want to know how best to support the shelter at 2535 Gerrard St. E.? What can people do to help successfully integrate the shelter and its clients into the local community?

As the shelter starts operations in early 2027, information will be shared on volunteer opportunities, donations needed, and other ways that community organizations can help support the operator and their clients. A Community Liaison Committee will be created, which will provide a forum for representatives from the local community to meet regularly with representatives from the operator to share information, ask questions, and work together to problem-solve community concerns.

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