

Summary of the Virtual Information Session:

The City of Toronto held a virtual information session on March 6, 2025, from 7-9 pm, to discuss plans to open a youth shelter at 1615 Dufferin Street. Approximately 150 members of the public attended the session. The session was facilitated by Bruce Davis and Yasmin Yusuf of Public Progress, with remarks by Ward 9 Councillor Alejandra Bravo and presentations by City of Toronto staff:

- Loretta Ramadhin, Director, Infrastructure Planning and Development, Toronto Shelter & Support Services Division;
- Alison Folosea, Director, Transaction Services, Corporate Real Estate Management Division;
- Lorraine Clarke, Manager, Operations and Support Services, Homelessness Prevention Support Services, Toronto Shelter & Support Services Division;
- Suhal Ahmed, Manager, Planning and Engagement, Infrastructure Planning and Development, Toronto Shelter & Support Services Division.

A copy of the slide presentation for the session can be found at this link:

<https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/96b2-1615-Dufferin-Virtual-Info-Session-FINAL-AODA.pdf>

A video recording of the session can be found at this link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oJUL_CXliw

Presentations:

Alejandra Bravo welcomed participants to the session and at the end of the evening provided summary comments and a request for further follow-up.

Loretta Ramadhin provided an overview of the City of Toronto's shelter system, including the demand for services, the City's success in moving clients into permanent housing and the resolution of encampments in Ward 9. Ramadhin also outlined the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS), which would see 20 new shelters created across Toronto by 2033.

Alison Folosea outlined the process by which the City identifies privately-owned or City-owned sites for new shelters, including the key criteria that are used and a two-step process for evaluating the suitability of sites. Folosea highlighted an extensive real estate due diligence process undertaken for 156 privately owned sites and 40 City owned sites that included a desktop analysis followed by market value and on-site due diligence. Folosea outlined the challenges in finding a suitable shelter location and why 1615 Dufferin was chosen.

Lorraine Clarke outlined the general plan for the youth shelter at 1615 Dufferin Street with an opening anticipated in 2027. She identified how the current shelter model focuses on a housing first approach with clients staying in shelters until suitable alternative accommodation are secured (approximately 6 months). In addition, the new model highlights smaller shelters with fewer beds per room with no bunks to enhance privacy and comfort. Communal spaces like dining and program rooms are embedded in the design of the space to create a more home-like atmosphere. This current shelter will be moving away from congregate setting where individual had to leave in the morning and return later to re-queue, making it difficult for people to work, go to appointments or rest and feel secure in their space. She also described the supports available for shelter clients including housing case management, on-site programming, health care, and counselling.

Suhal Ahmed described the need to involve the community to support the success of the new shelter and how engagement facilitators provide information and develop local partnerships.

Key Themes:

Need for Shelter Services

The City emphasized the urgent need for youth shelters due to the increasing number of individuals experiencing homelessness and the lack of available shelter spaces.

Community Integration

A significant focus was placed on integrating the shelter into the community and ensuring it operates as a “good neighbour”.

Community Engagement

The importance of community engagement and addressing the concerns of local residents and businesses was discussed.

Some of the Concerns Raised by Participants:

Community Safety and security

A primary concern was the safety and security of the neighbourhood, as well as the safety of the shelter residents.

- Participants expressed apprehension about the safety and security of the neighbourhood, particularly given the shelter's proximity to schools.
- There were questions about the potential for increased crime or disturbances and how the City and shelter operators would manage such issues.
- Specific concerns were raised about drug use and related issues,

such as public drug use and the potential impact on the community.

Panel Responses to Participants Concerns on Safety and Security

- The City states its commitment to the safety and security of clients, staff, and the broader community, emphasizing that shelters are successfully located in various residential neighborhoods across Toronto.
- The City collaborates with service operators to develop ongoing community safety measures and is committed to working with community stakeholders, including the Toronto Police, to address any safety-related issues.
- The City clarifies that the shelter is not a consumption site but has harm reduction policies in place to support clients while ensuring safety. These policies include healthcare support services and aim to minimize substance-related harm without requiring abstinence.

Lack of Community Input and Engagement

Some participants expressed frustration about the lack of community involvement in the decision-making process regarding the shelter's location.

- Participants challenged the City's definition of "community engagement," arguing that it seemed to occur only after the decision to purchase the property was finalized.
- A significant concern was the perceived lack of community involvement in the decision to locate the shelter in their neighbourhood.
- There were requests for specific examples of how community concerns would be addressed and what mechanisms exist for ongoing dialogue between the community and the shelter operators.

Panel Responses to Participants Concerns on Lack of Community Input and Engagement

- The City is focused on proactive engagement, sharing information, and fostering collaboration with local partners to ensure that community concerns are heard and addressed.
- The City clarified the community engagement process emphasizing that community engagement starts once a site has been identified and secured, focusing on operational and integration considerations.
- The engagement process is centered on ensuring the shelter's successful operation within the community, rather than the selection of the site itself.
- The City indicates that community feedback will be used to update programming and plans for the shelter site.

Stigma and Prejudice

Worries were brought up by participants about negative assumptions and stigmatization of the youth who will be using the shelter.

- Some participants expressed concern about the negative assumptions and stigma associated with the youth who would be staying at the shelter, as well as misunderstandings about harm reduction.

Panel responses to Stigma and Prejudice

- The City mentioned their committed to creating inclusive, respectful, and supportive environments for all individuals, including young people experiencing homelessness.

Purchase of the Property

Some participants questioned how the property was purchased, the price the City paid for the property, and the decision to use a former healthcare building for a new shelter.

- One participant highlighted that the purchased property previously served the community's healthcare needs, raising concerns about taking away a valuable resource.
- A question was raised about potential conflicts of interest among municipal government officials and the property seller.

Panel responses to Purchase of the Property

- The City intends to renovate the existing property, preserving as much of the current structure as possible, rather than constructing a new building.
- The City confirmed there was no conflict of interest in the purchase of the site. The City has been public about the fact that they are in the market for opportunities around acquisitions and do get unsolicited offers around potential sites. The site was brought to the City through the owner's broker.
- The City knows that a change of use is disruptive and they worked very hard with the property owner to ensure the tenants had as much time as they needed to relocate, but the City cannot control when an owner has determined they want to sell a property.
- The City confirmed that all of their transactions must be at market value and they did appraisals to be able to support the analysis and purchase price of the property.

Overview of the Support for the Project:

While the meeting focused heavily on addressing concerns, there were also several expressions of support for the youth shelter project. Some key points from participants voicing their support included:

Recognition of Need

Several participants acknowledged the urgent need for youth shelter services and the challenges faced by young people experiencing homelessness. They highlighted the difficulties of turning people away from existing shelters and the risks faced by youth without stable housing.

Appreciation for the Project

Some residents explicitly stated their strong support for the project and its goals. They viewed the shelter as an essential service and appreciated the focus on providing support to vulnerable and marginalized youth.

Emphasis on Community Responsibility

Participants spoke to a sense of community responsibility in supporting youth and helping them get on their feet.

Positive Impact on the Community

One participant suggested the shelter's location near services like the library and schools could be a positive integration for the youth.

Panel Response to Support of Project

- To the residents who want to get involved the City encourages residents to engage with community engagement facilitators and continue to provide feedback to make the shelter successful for the community and future residents.

Overall, some residents raised concerns about safety, location, community engagement and property acquisition. Others expressed strong support for the shelter and emphasized the importance of youth-specific services. The City values all feedback and is committed to working with the community to ensure the shelter is successful and responsive to local needs.

This report has been prepared by Public Progress Community Engagement Facilitators for the 1615 Dufferin Street Project on 22 April 2025.