

HomeComing's response to Proposed New Engagement and Planning Process for Emergency Shelters

Good afternoon Councillors, my name is Paul Dowling and I am here this afternoon on behalf of the HomeComing Community Choice Coalition, an organization that works to ensure that people marginalized by poverty or disability can live in the neighbourhood of their choice without discrimination.

We are very pleased that we were given the opportunity to participate in the consultation convened by Councillor Bailao and Councillor Fletcher and City staff as they were developing the report and recommendations that are here before you today.

We shared with the Councillors, City staff and their consultant our concerns about the process that is currently followed by the City to engage with the community about the location of shelters for homeless people.

While the development of shelters for homeless people is protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code, this form of residential use has been subject to a more rigorous approval process than is normal for other forms of housing.

We have expressed our concern that the current approach to community engagement has provided forums in which people who oppose the location of the shelter have been able to voice their opposition in a way which can be described as disrespectful, threatening and discriminatory.

HomeComing is supportive of the recommendations being made by City staff here today to create a new and improved community engagement process and to use that process for the new shelters that are currently under development.

We are pleased to see that the proposed process specifies that the purpose of community engagement is not about approval of the site but about how participants can support and improve the proposed shelter.

We are pleased to see that engagement activities will be based on respectful dialogue and non-threatening language. That people will be supported to articulate their concerns in a constructive manner so that solutions can be identified. And that people with lived experience and other vulnerable people will have a safe space to express their ideas and needs.

We are pleased to see that the proposed process will provide a wide range of ways for City staff to hear from local communities and elected officials about ways to enhance the proposed shelter.

And we are particularly pleased to see that the recommendations include public education to raise awareness about homelessness and about the benefits of a service model which supports homeless people to achieve permanent housing.

We see these recommendations as a very positive step forward.

We look forward to seeing the impact of the enhanced community engagement process. The true tests of the success of the process will be:

- whether homeless people have more places to stay

and

- whether the community engagement process produces ideas that lead to better shelters

Thank you to Councillor Bailao and Councillor Fletcher for your leadership on this issue.

Thank you to your consultant Bruce Davis for an excellent consultation process and report!

And thank you to City staff for your very constructive recommendations.