

Waterfront Shelter Community Liaison Committee Meeting– May 26, 2020 via Zoom

The meeting was convened by Ryan Evershed of Homes First.

1. Update from 545 Lakeshore Boulevard – Homes First

Most programming is on pause due to the pandemic. Some good donations have been received. The clients are now settling down under the new situation of wearing masks and physical distancing. Lots of hand sanitizer is available. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the volunteers take part in needle patrols around the area, including Little Norway Park, the Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre (WNC) grounds and the Esso gas station. People in the encampment at Little Norway Park have been clearing up their garbage, and few needles were found there.

Homes First and Dixon Hall are operating hotel rooms. A whole women's shelter was moved into 545 in the basement. There are about 50 beds per floor serving 200 clients. Most shelters now have increased spacing.

Over 160 people were tested at the Willowdale Welcome Centre, but no-one needed to go to hospital and all cleared. Also 80 were tested at nearby Strong House and all came back negative.

All clients are health checked three times a day and can be taken to a test centre and on to isolation if found positive. Staff also must self-test prior to coming to work.

Call or email the shelter if there are problems with clients, such as some congregating at the WNC.

Nikki – 647-455-0124; Denise – 365-688-1257

2. Update from 701 Fleet Street – Fred Victor

Capacity has been reduced from 100 to 50 to allow for wider spacing of the cots. Clients are keeping clean. PPE inventory is checked three times a week to ensure staff have access. There is extra cleaning of touch points including overnight. There have been some great donations such as home baked cookies, and lunches for staff. Also billboards were funded thanking front line workers.

Clients are health screened on intake. There is community engagement with the campers and street people, such as checking in, needle collection and snack distribution. Health Associates carried out testing a few weeks ago. Some people just drop in to use the washrooms and showers, and there has been additional help from the City. Calls to 911 are down, but in this hot weather there have been a few calls for heat distress related to alcohol use. PPE supplies are now more reliable, and there are good stocks. N95 masks are used for people with symptoms. Otherwise clients and cleaners get cloth masks and staff have full PPE

3. Update from Streets to Homes by Scott McKean

They are working on the encampments. There are broad City-wide issues of housing, by-laws and public health and safety. They are working in the community as well as with the campers, under Tracey Cook (Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure and Development Services). Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) has been doing great work like putting people in hotels. Over 1800 people have been moved to ensure safe spacing. THC units have enabled 600 to move to permanent housing. 157 have moved indoors from the camps. Multiple agencies are involved in getting people moved.

At the start of the pandemic the focus was on taking care of the campers, so removal of encampments was paused. The City provided portable washrooms and showers at some locations. It was essential to keep the shelter system running under the wider spacing needs. Now they are moving on the engage with the campers to get them moved inside.

Two apartment buildings have been rented in the short term for the campers and long time homeless clients. Residents get three meals a day and other supports. The campers are offered a variety of places to go.

Inter-divisional teams are going out to do audits and wellness checks, and address community concerns. Moving people and cleaning up the camps is one exercise.

4. Update from Toronto Police Service 14 Division (TPS)

TPS is seeing seasonal crime changes but the volume is less than usual. They are providing support for SSHA as business as usual. The provision of bathrooms and portapotties has been helpful. At Lamport Stadium the washrooms will be open from 7 to 3 every day.

TPS is doing regular patrols, and recognizes that tent take-over is a problem.

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5. Questions and Comments

Scott expressed thank to all shelter workers. Street to Homes is looking to hear how they can provide support over the summer. They are building Now-here-village from repurposed shipping containers to provide housing. The place needs board members.

Gloria spoke about problems at the Windward Co-op since the camp was set up in Little Norway Park. It is costing money to fix things that are broken and stolen. Some tents are on private property. The residents are fearful and the children can't play in the park. Young women are being followed home. The residents have donated food and want to help, but it is difficult. Arcadia Co-op at 680 Queens Quay has the same issues.

Scott replied that they are moving people out of the encampment. On Wednesday there will be a visit from a staff team who will conduct a CPTED safety survey. The plan is to move people out and prevent reoccupation. Police and the City have concerns as well. As housing units come on line they will move people.

Michael Lyster of Homes First added that they are aware of the problems around Windward. Some people are just more comfortable outside. Clients are concerned about infection indoors. At 545 the curfew has been tightened to prevent congregating in the parking lot. However, some problem people may not be shelter clients. There are health and safety issues with people using multiple locations, so they are reducing the penalties for violations of the rules. They try not to just discharge clients, as even violent people can be moved if housing is found, although some people refuse to go. Unfortunately the \$2000 CERB is funding alcohol and drug use leading to poor behaviour.

Nichole commented that shelter staff have to clean up the mess.

Cassandra noted that with regard to the camps at York Park and under the Gardiner, concerned residents can call 311 to connect with outreach staff.

Q: What are we doing for the safety of those people who won't move? Can they get PPE?

A: Agencies don't provide PPE to asymptomatic clients. If they have symptoms they are tested and moved to isolation if positive. Agencies do provide education and the City has opened location for sanitation for street people.

MPP Chris Glover advised that he had participated in a similar Zoom meeting earlier with St Felix. He expressed thanks to front line workers and the community. He said that there needs to be a public health focus on gun violence, and that these issues are the result of all three levels of government not dealing with housing. The Province should restore \$1.6 million cut from the housing Ministry and declare a state of emergency for housing. He felt that the solution to everything is affordable housing with supports. He has been delivering packages to people in encampments for the past two months and knows the stories. He commented that Seeds of Hope is looking for donations of old smart phones.

Rhonda of Fort York NA thanked Nikki for her response.

The representative for **BQNA** informed the meeting that they will be holding a press conference on June 4 at 10 am in Little Norway Park to highlight the fact that the Province has not distributed housing funding provided by the Federal Government. Chris Glover will be there. The event is to draw attention to a class action law suit against the City over housing, being heard on June 8.

Chris Glover added that the Federal Canada Housing Strategy has provided \$100 million and the Province is to match this. However, none of the funding is adequate. Cities deliver services but have no source of funds for housing. Even the steps being taken now are not followed up by the Province.

Lara Samuel of the Bentway asked if she should call 311 to get problems at the site addressed.

A: Yes, they can contact street outreach teams 24/7.

Q: Regarding illegal activities by homeless people, can we do anything?

A: It's all about getting housing. Few people turn it down, but there is reluctance to use shelters.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for late June TBA.