

# *Cabbagetown Coalition*

Dear Residents,

Several members of the Cabbagetown Coalition\* attended the Community Forum on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020. It was sponsored by Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) and organised by the consultants, Joy Connelly and Joe Mihevc, hired by the City to facilitate the engagement process with Cabbagetown residents. The forum's objective was to share information and ensure that residents' concerns were heard, and to allow them to ask clarifying questions about what they had (and had not) learned to date. We were joined by about 150-200 Cabbagetown residents.

The Cabbagetown Coalition comprises a diverse group of residents and we each asked a range of questions of different people. We have pulled together a synopsis of our findings, which we thought those of you who were unable to attend would appreciate reading. Like many of you, our main concerns centre around the potential for safety, security, cleanliness and public order issues related to the proposed 24-hour Drop-in centre at 233 Carlton Street.

The event was held in the gym at the Cabbagetown Youth Centre. There were 12+ information tables staffed by City personnel, the City's Engagement Consultants, Shelter Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), the architects for 233 Carlton and several service providers. Our Councillor, Kristyn Wong-Tam was also there for much of the session.

## Attendees

### **City and SSHA**

There were many representatives from the City and SSHA present, including several managers. Being able to speak with these public servants involved with shelters and housing was valuable. Most everyone we spoke with was earnest and friendly. However, it became clear that the majority don't know Ward 13 well, nor do they understand the enormity of the issues that have happened and continue to be happening in Downtown East. Many were frankly shocked to hear some of the stories of peoples' lived experiences. When we brought up the fact that Ward 13 has 42% of all municipal shelter beds (24% of the total shelter capacity in the City), one SSHA staff person asked where we got this data. When we said it came from a City/SSHA report they were surprised, as they had never seen this information before. It's worrisome that public servants that work in locating and developing homeless services don't know more about existing services and don't seem to have direct exposure to the legitimate concerns that residents in Ward 13/Cabbagetown have about safety and security.

Additionally, and perhaps even more worrisome, is that many of the people we spoke to were ill-informed about anything happening outside of their own departments. Some freely admitted that there were too many silos, even within the SSHA itself. A fundamental tenet of the Downtown East Action Plan is the need to have complete wrap around support from all involved city divisions for all communities, the vulnerable, the residents and the businesses. This lack of collaboration and knowledge both within and between City departments will likely hamper the satisfactory resolution of the residents' concerns voiced at the Forum.

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One senior manager was asked directly to give an example of one successful shelter or respite program. Unfortunately, he could not name one. With the vast amount of funds being spent on behalf of Toronto taxpayers to address the City's homeless crisis. They need to do better.

## Service Providers

There were also several service providers present, including Dixon Hall, Fred Victor, Street Haven, Toronto Police Services, Toronto Public Library, University Health Network, etc. These organizations are staffed by caring and compassionate individuals who were happy to talk at length about what they do. They clearly want to help resolve the problems that were voiced, in any way they can. As the Cabbagetown Coalition has maintained from the start, we do not question the competence or value of these organizations and the services they provide. Our interactions with their representatives only served to confirm this position.

## Forum Findings

In the brochure sent out by the City to residents announcing the Forum, the discussions were organised around 5 themes:

1. Safety in 2021
2. What's a Resource Centre
3. Building Design
4. Community Engagement
5. Downtown East Action Plan

Our findings below have been organised under these same categories. However, we have incorporated the theme of Safety 2021 into each category, where appropriate, as this is a primary concern of the Cabbagetown Coalition.

## What's a Resource Centre?

We were able to learn a few more plans about the Women's Drop-in, Respite and Resource Centre. We recognize these plans may, at this stage, still be somewhat aspirational, as we did receive several conflicting responses to our questions. But here's what we understand:

- It is designed to accommodate 35 for overnight, no more
- It will serve meals to 60-100 people per day – a bit of a broad spread in the number, as multiple City/SSHA service people gave different responses.
- They will serve three meals a day (It's still not clear if they plan to use washable/reusable cutlery and plates or Styrofoam clamshells. Hopefully the former, to avoid a mess of food debris and Styrofoam containers outside the front of back of the building - as is the case at Margaret's respite)
- There will not be lineups on the sidewalk for meals or sleeping spaces, but nobody could explain in detail how this would actually be managed or where people would go if they were waiting.

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- The architects confirmed there will be security cameras and lights front and back, but it is not clear if and how they will be monitored and we heard no concrete responses about security outside the building, other than the fact that this is the purview of the Toronto Police Service.

Fred Victor also provided [an informative brochure](#) about Women's Drop in.

The City's consultants also provided an [updated version of the 233 Carlton Street fact sheet](#).

## Community Engagement

### A Faulty Process

Many City and SSHA staff, including Gordon Tanner, Project Director, Homelessness Initiatives, openly admitted that the way the 233 Carlton Street project was communicated to the community was faulty in many ways. Most of them also understood that this has caused a great deal of distrust in the neighbourhood and that this distrust extends to people questioning whether they will do anything positive with the feedback they received from this session. Members of the Cabbagetown Coalition made a concerted effort to ensure City and SSHA staff understand the need to prove us wrong, by:

1. Providing rapid and complete feedback on their Forum findings
2. Committing publicly and in writing to address the concerns raised
3. Seeing this commitment through with sustainable action and funding

## Building Design

### 233 Carlton Street Zoning Variances

As you may already know, there is a Committee of Adjustment (C of A) hearing planned to deal with three zoning variances associated with 233 Carlton:

1. **Density** - They want to turn the basement at 233 Carlton from a storage area to offices, which means the building will be able to accommodate more people than in its current configuration, so there is a density variance
2. **Parking** - The required minimum number of parking spaces for the office use for this building is 2 spaces. The City wants to do away with this requirement as the existing building sitting tight against the property line and they want deliveries and garbage collection to happen in Doctor O Lane. So there is parking variance.
3. **Rooftop Patio** - The architects' plans that were originally submitted to the C of A have since been revised, as they have added a roof top patio. This adds a third variance.

While City and SSHA staff have characterized these as minor variances, various people from the City, the SSHA, the engagement consultants, and even Councillor Wong Tam's office, have discouraged residents from raising objections with the C of A. It's not entirely clear why they are doing this. Maybe it's driven, in part, by the fact that the criteria laid out by the City for selecting respite locations under Delegated Authority stipulate that any buildings selected should not have any zoning variances that need approval.

SSHA staff responsible for the building renovations informed us that if there is an issue with getting approval for the density zoning variance, they will simply move ahead with the refurbishment of the above ground floors and address the basement at a later stage. In case of any delays, they already have plans to split the work into two tenders – one for the above ground floors and one for the basement. This level of forward planning also seems to indicate concerns about the outcome of the C of A. They also informed us that if there is an issue with the parking variance they will just forge ahead anyway and manage all deliveries and garbage removal from front of the building on Carlton Street.

You can find out more about the C of A process [on this City web page](#).

## Downtown East Action Plan

The [Downtown East Action Plan](#) was developed to address a number of complex challenges in the area of Bloor to Front, Bay to the DVP) related to poverty, homelessness, housing, community safety, mental health and substance use, particularly opioid related overdoses. It was approved by Council in July 2019. This extensive publicly funded analysis and program was supplemented with a [November 2019 report](#) (handed out at the Forum) regarding the urgent need for revitalization of the Dundas and Sherbourne neighbourhood. Based on our conversations at the forum it appears to the Cabbagetown Coalition that the efforts of the Downtown East Action Plan to highlight the already grave situation in this area were largely ignored when made a decision to lease yet another facility in Ward 13, which already houses the majority of shelter beds in the City.

The Staff representing the Downtown East Action Plan are trying to take a more horizontal view of thing, to ensure all related departments are brought into discussions and plans related to new services in our neighbourhood. (e.g. the Police - who are currently being kept abreast of developments via a [Community Policing Liaison Committee \(CPLC\)](#))

## Is There Any Upside at this Stage?

This Forum was scheduled in line with the City's [new approach to community engagement](#) – which is now being done much closer to the identification of a facility vs. its planned opening date. This is potentially positive, for two reasons:

1. It provides the City with the runway it will need to address the concerns raised by residents about security, safety, cleanliness and public order.
2. it provides ancillary service providers – e.g. police, waste disposal, etc. – advanced notice that this facility is coming, allowing them time to budget for increased service delivery.

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It remains to be seen whether any of the concerns raised will be addressed. The content and tone of the City report on their Forum findings will hopefully provide a clearer view into the City's true intentions in this regard.

## Next Steps

The Cabbagetown Coalition will continue to meet with the City, the SSHA and their engagement consultants to ensure that they demonstrate a solid understanding of all the concerns raised, both before during and after Forum. We will keep the pressure up to ensure that they are acting on these concerns and putting in place the necessary infrastructure to minimize safety, security, cleanliness and public order issues.

The next public meeting is 10 February, 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm at Central Neighbourhood house – This is an information meeting about the building in advance of the Committee of Adjustment (C of A) hearing. The City has produced a [leaflet explaining the meeting objectives](#).

It's important that any concerns related to these variances should be voiced at this session and we encourage residents to attend to learn more and have their concerns registered. Residents can also submit letters to the C of A stating any concerns they may have (with the three variances, which are the only items the C of A will focus on). The Cabbagetown Coalition will be providing additional support and advice to residents and businesses on the relevant zoning issues.

The C of A hearing is currently scheduled to take place on 26 February, although this might change given the architect had not yet submitted the amended plan to the C of A when the Forum took place.

The Cabbagetown Coalition will endeavour to keep residents informed of progress. You can sign-up for updates at [info@cabbagetowncoalition.ca](mailto:info@cabbagetowncoalition.ca) and most importantly the CC is you, and working on behalf of the community, so please contact us to help and to have your voice heard. Thank-you.

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**\*What is the Cabbagetown Coalition?** The Cabbagetown Coalition is a grassroots group of Cabbagetown residents, businesses and residents' associations, focused on addressing potential safety and security concerns related to the proposed drop-in and respite centre at 233 Carlton Street, learning from residents' lived experiences in Cabbagetown South and Winchester Park. Reach us and sign-up for news and updates at [www.cabbagetowncoalition.ca](http://www.cabbagetowncoalition.ca)