

From: Susan Whiting

Sent: Thursday, September 28, 2023 7:05 PM

To: Council Agenda <councilagenda@london.ca>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] re: Proposed Location of Homeless Hub on Fanshawe Park Road West

Please note: I am sending this letter with consent to having it shared at public council

City of London
300 Dufferin Avenue,
London, ON,
N6B 1Z2

Attention: All City Councillors

Re: Opposition to Proposed Homelessness Hub at 705 Fanshawe Park Road

Good evening Councillors,

While we may not have penned this letter, we are choosing to forward it to you for consideration as we fully agree with each and every point made by Melissa and want you to know that as members of this community, we are very concerned about the location of the proposed homeless hub. Please consider Melissa's position on this and know that many neighbours and members of the community, including us, fully agree with each and every statement. Furthermore, our position with the proposed location of this hub is punctuated by the fact that our extended family owns and operates the Black Pearl Pub. This is a locally owned and operated place of community within itself and our society that is just now recovering from the impact that Covid had on so many businesses, many of them being forced to close. The Black Pearl did not close - it survived. As did its owners, employees and clientele and they are all now finally thriving again. To propose the likely closure of a community gathering place is, quite frankly, absurd, especially given the number of empty and abandoned buildings within the city. Please reconsider this. Please know that we do not disagree with change needing to happen to help those needing it and we recognize the efforts that are being made to address this situation. We have listened to the Craig Needles podcast in response to a previous email that we sent to the Mayor's office to ensure we are educated on the changes that are being proposed. Again, we support the work being done, we just cannot condone or support the proposed location of this specific location. It was mentioned specifically in this podcast that our Mayor, Josh Morgan felt our community was reacting in fear and misinformation. We personally take offense to his statements as residents of this area. We are not asking that you reconsider this location due to fear or misinformation on our part, we are asking that you consider an alternate location in any area of the city, including ours, to ensure that a local, thriving business is not shut down at the city's hands. How can this possibly be justified???

As a long time Londoner and Ward 7 constituent, we are writing today to put forth our opposition to the proposed homeless hub at 705 Fanshawe Park Road. As representatives of the City of London, residents and key decision-makers on council, we ask that you consider our concerns and those of our neighbours and community. Our reasons for opposing the hub are as follows:

1. Re-zoning - The original plans for the first 3-5 hubs required that the new locations would not need rezoning. The proposed location is not zoned to accommodate a homelessness hub. Why is council circumventing its own guidelines and making an exception for this particular location? To the public, this may bring the integrity of council and its members into question, which is obviously not ideal when such a contentious issue is at play.
2. Safety and Security of Area Residents and Businesses- In the Report To Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee, July 24th, 2023, the location criteria was to ensure, ".....a feeling of safety and security within this new system for all Londoners, including individuals being served, business owners and customers, and community members in neighbourhoods". As was made obvious in the meeting that was held on September 25th, residents in the area of the proposed hub feel very uncertain about the details of this hub. Originally it was intended to house women transitioning to more permanent housing. Now it is possibly going to be used for respite and short-term housing. As per the London's Health And Homelessness Response: Proposed Hubs Implementation Plan, July 2023, each hub will support a No Wrong Door policy. The hub at this location has been repeatedly touted as, "a transitional hub for 20 women". According to the city's own aforementioned documents, there is a distinct possibility that this location will host other homeless individuals on its property. One example of this concern can be seen at My Sister's Place, located at 566 Dundas Street. This location is often the home of encampments which serve as an unorganized extended hub. As you can see, decisions for this location have changed often and the city has not been completely forthcoming and transparent about the realistic future of this location. This, as you can imagine, leaves area residents uneasy and feeling ironically insecure about the future of their neighbourhood. I request that council table any further decisions regarding this location

until area residents have ample time to both understand the updated role of this hub and to allow for public consultation with regard to the changes that have recently been unilaterally made.

3. The Black Pearl Pub and Area Businesses - The existing business at 705 Fanshawe Park Road houses The Black Pearl Pub. This is a thriving business that has been at this location for decades. As was mentioned in the Community Engagement Results, published July 14th, 2023, Section 3.0, Criteria For Where Hubs Should Not Be Located, residents clearly responded, "Hubs should be away from where they may have a negative impact on business operations." As you are aware, the proposed hub at this location will cause the forced and unanticipated closing of this business. It is short-sighted and, quite frankly, unfair of the city to cause a family-owned, local business to close or relocate (at great expense to the business owner). In the Hubs Presentation Slide dated August 30th - September 7th, one of the slides posed the question, "Why is this moving so fast?" One of the reasons given was, "businesses are closing". How is it that the city recognizes that businesses are closing but sees fit to force the closing of a business to meet the city's goals? Why is the city allowing yet another business to close as a casualty of this process? Why is the city putting other businesses along the Fanshawe corridor in jeopardy of closing? London's unemployment rate is 5.6% and it seems council is not concerned with driving that number up as more and more hubs are opened.

4. Child and Youth Safety and Security - As per the location criteria of London's Health And Homelessness Response: Proposed Hub Implementation Plan, hubs should not be in close proximity to elementary schools or daycare centres. In essence, hubs should not be near child-centric centres within the community. The proposed location is next door (170 metres) from the Thames Valley Children's Centre location that services children with autism. This location is also next door (within 110 metres) to a children's toy store, notably, Mastermind Toys. Long & McQuade, a business that offers music lessons to children, is also in close proximity (150 metres) to the proposed hub. As was mentioned in the Health And Homelessness Movement For Change document sent via email on September 21st, 2023, open drug use will not be forbidden at any hub, "A low barrier and harm reduction approach recognizes that some people will use drugs and so practices need to be in place to ensure this happens in the safest possible way." We can all agree that there is never an appropriate situation wherein a child should be exposed to, or witness, illicit drug use. Location criteria were included in the guidelines for a reason - to limit exposure of vulnerable segments of the population. Please keep our children safe and allow them the right to access services and businesses in a safe and secure manner.

5. Lack of Previous Data - During the pandemic many of London's homeless were placed in hotels at a considerable cost to taxpayers. Does the city have any analytical data on how this measure alleviated the homelessness crisis? Were those individuals housed in hotels able to move on to more permanent housing? Were any of those individuals who might have been addicted and receiving help while living in, what could be considered transitional, housing successful in overcoming addiction and finding permanent housing and employment? One would think it prudent of the city to have data to follow the success or failure of those measures implemented during the pandemic since public funds were used to house these individuals. If there was no data collected, how can the public be assured that the city will be collecting proper and complete empirical data thus measuring the success or failure of this plan so that the plan can be expanded or rolled back?

Councillors, I ask you to take into account my concerns and the concerns of my neighbours and community at large. I trust that you will represent all the residents of this fine city in a proportionate and equitable manner.

Should you have any questions or concerns please feel free to reach out to us directly via email.

Thank you,

Concerned Residents,

Susan and George Whiting