

October 1, 2023

To: London City Council

Re: Health and Homelessness Whole of Community System Response RFP 2023-199 Hubs Implementation Plan Results

16th Special Meeting of City Council on October 05, 2023

I consent for my letter to appear on the public agenda.

I am writing in support of the current plan to roll out Hubs throughout London to address Health and Homelessness in our City. I especially wish to write in favour of the proposed Hub at 705 Fanshawe Park Road West. I am a resident of Ward 6, but my house borders on Ward 7 and I live only five minutes from the proposed Hub site. I regularly frequent the businesses in the vicinity. For that reason, given current opposition to the proposal, I feel it necessary to voice my approval for this Hub location.

First, I commend the City for approaching Health and Homelessness in this novel manner. We are clearly witnessing a crisis in London, with 2000 unhoused in London, in addition to mental health and addiction issues. Services are stretched to their limits as the problem continues to grow, leaving many slipping through the cracks and vulnerable. Concerns have been raised that these Hubs may not work, but without attempting them we will not know what brings success, and what needs adjusting. Adaptive management is key to any policy; the City and its partners can learn from mistakes and improve. Doing nothing is simply not an option and will not help those in need, especially as we approach winter.

Second, we have a tremendous opportunity with these Hubs to service the most marginalized, in partnership with outstanding organizations, which have demonstrated substantial success in helping those in need. We are lucky to have Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), Atlohsa Family Healing Services and the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) offer their expertise and put forth proposals for their respective Hubs. I fear that if they face too much pushback from citizens and some policymakers, other highly qualified groups will be dissuaded from putting forth similar, much-needed proposals. Moreover, we could lose critical funding from the province and the federal government if we are seen to drag our feet and poorly manage the opportunities before us.

Third, among complaints put forward are those that highlight the high cost of the beds or spots in the programs given the small number they will serve and the scale of our homelessness, addictions, and mental health crisis. However, the opportunity cost of not providing care to the most marginalized and vulnerable is significantly higher, whether it is the cost to London Police Services, our healthcare system, etc. London has received a very generous donation, and many Londoners chipped in on the campaign to raise more funds. The cost might be high, but now is the time for innovation and creativity. Furthermore, the numbers flowing through these Hubs is not static. Many people will pass through, receiving help, which will add up to hundreds served.

Fourth, many of the objections appear based on fear and/or a lack of information. I am personally not afraid of twenty transitional beds at the Lighthouse on Fanshawe for women, female-identifying persons, and children. They are not criminals, as has been suggested, but neighbours who need our support. This motel was already an underutilized space, that is perfect to transform into a Hub. Many of the residents that will come need the opportunity to escape the downtown core where they face increased risk of violence and greater proximity to triggers. They will have a safe place to stay, close to the benefits of nature and relative quiet, allowing them greater possibility of success.

I recognize that many people have not had experience with addictions and homelessness, whether themselves, a friend or a family member. When someone close to you struggles, your perception changes. A close family member of mine experienced all the very darkest trials we

hear about in the news. Hers is not my story to tell but I do want to say that without the support that she received from various organizations, especially after the birth of her first child, she likely would not be alive today and her child would have experienced significant trauma, potentially recreating the cycle of homelessness and addiction. Instead, she is now a very successful medical professional, who volunteers endless hours to better her community and give back. The transformation is miraculous, and I know that other organizations, like YOU, similarly have people they have served, who they believed in, who were able to build fulfilling and purposeful lives.

We must not think of these Hubs as burdens to be borne by certain neighbourhoods. Neither should we look at residents as dangerous criminals, but rather as individuals that just need the tools and support necessary to realize their tremendous potential. With these Hubs, London and its partners can re-write the future of many people. I have had the opportunity to hear Londoners' concerns; the vast majority believe homelessness and addictions are the single greatest challenge to our city. Therefore, we need a whole-city response and that means spreading services throughout London and seizing new opportunities. I urge you to approve the Hubs for the good of our community, and in particular, to approve the zoning change at 705 Fanshawe to allow the CMHA Hub to go forward.

Sincerely,  
Carol Dyck