

From: MaryAnn Hodge
Sent: Monday, October 2, 2023 9:58 PM
To: Council Agenda <councilagenda@london.ca>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] 16th Special Meeting of City Council on October 05, 2023

To: London City Council
Re: [Health and Homelessness Whole of Community System Response RFP 2023-199 Hubs Implementation Plan Results](#)

As a resident of London, living in the downtown area, I have seen firsthand the growing need for supportive housing in London. I consider these hubs to be high-support housing. The longer people are unhoused, the more severe and multi-faceted become their problems.

As a supporter of Indwell, I am well aware of how a lack of stable housing affects one's mental health. As I am sure you are aware, Indwell is a successful model of supportive housing, taking people who are homeless and creating communities where they can flourish. London has seen a reduction in the total number of 'affordable' housing as existing units affordable for people with low incomes, become re-developed into luxury apartments, but no new low income housing is built. Homeowners can downsize. Where do you go when you are already on the bottom tier of the rental market? How can you recover once you lose your housing?

Process: I applaud City Council for taking their time to make this a well-thought out response. The Whole of Community System Response is a great example of getting all the stakeholders involved to work together. I have attended several of the opportunities for residents to attend townhalls where the plan has been explained. I too am surprised at the cost for implementation.

But - as a sewer, one of my favourite expressions is "a stitch in time, saves nine". Unfortunately, as a society we have let homelessness become a crisis, and now the costs have become much greater. Clearly, this plan is expensive. As a member of First-St. Andrew's United Church, who has provided a winter shelter response for the past two years, I can attest that this model is not sustainable. Providing a shelter bed does nothing to integrate people back into society. I have seen, again through my involvement with Indwell, that providing wrap around services and supporting people is a successful model. I would expect that people who enter these transitional rooms may one day transition into an Indwell facility. The costs from other services like hospital emergency rooms and first responders can be much greater!

Speed: Homelessness is a crisis, and I applaud your desire to respond accordingly. The provincial government has given London Strong Mayor powers to accelerate zoning changes that would address housing issues. We are hearing lots of talk about repurposing commercial spaces for housing. This is apparently a feasible option for this building. Homeless people are dying at unprecedented rates. This facility can be operational within 6 months! It is time for action!

Location: No where in London can you build a hub where all the required services are nearby. That was the whole premise for creating these hubs – to bring services to the people. Hopefully, these locations will also have access to green spaces – which not only help alleviate mental stress but improve health outcomes as well. With a shelter system, people are asked to leave during the day, I don't think this is the case with the transitional rooms – resulting is less people loitering on the streets.

Compassion: I have known people, people like you and me, who for one reason or another, end up homeless. They are people. They are Londoners too. There are about 2,000 unhoused people in London. Only 20 will be housed at the Wonderland Road facility. Only those who have been assessed as being good candidates for this facility will be there. There may be children included. They should not be walled off, hidden out of sight, behind solid fencing.

Nobody wants to see people become homeless, yet here we are. Taxpayers who live in the downtown core pay the same tax rates as those at Fanshawe Park and Wonderland Road, yet they disproportionately experience the effects of the surge in homelessness. We have a Whole of Community recommendation. We, as a city, should be prepared for a Whole of Community support for this plan. The city has done a great job to develop a comprehensive plan. Funding is available from provincial programs and our own citizens who have stepped up to donate millions of dollars. We can no longer ignore or delay.

I urge you to vote in favour of the 3 hubs presented for approval, including the rezoning necessary.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Hodge

I consent for my letter to appear on the public agenda