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**Sent:** Tuesday, October 3, 2023 8:40 PM

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**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Letter of Support for ALL of the Locations of the Hubs

Hello all,

My name is Melissa Sheehan. I'm a woman with 20 years of living/lived experience with homelessness. I am writing today to share my support for these hubs, & all of the selected locations, & with the reasoning for that support.

First off, I will admit that I have had concerns for these hubs in the past. Especially as it pertains to the drug use being permitted. I had concerns based on the fact that current shelters allow drug use, & that has been problematic for them beyond belief.

However, recently, I have been talking with my fellow unhoused folks, especially women with & without children, who are active in addiction and/or constantly attempting to find an avenue to stabilize in order to continue on their path to recovery. Many have been stuck in addiction due to not having the necessary environments, supports, or services available to them, as well as being forced to be in the core to access any current services, such as shelter, social services, mental health, addictions, etc.

And those conversations have really worked to better educate & inform me, someone who already is quite well informed on the topic, the hubs plan, and the wide spectrum of the unhoused population, but is always striving to learn more and become better informed.

A lot of these conversations were with unhoused people I have known or met within the past 20 years of being street level. Many of these folks do not fit the stigma that the majority of us get painted with, that only a small minority of unhoused people actually "live up to" or match the description that stigma perpetuates.

A lot of these people I spoke with are in encampments, & were forced there due to the unsafe shelter systems that have become entirely toxic & unsafe to anyone, addict or otherwise.

As someone whose lived in the Salvation Army Centre of Hope for the entirety of 2022 up until 2023, I can attest to that feeling of not being safe or offered the proper amount of supports I needed as a low acuity person. But I also can attest to the lack of wraparound and appropriate level of supports & lack of safety and health measures for those who are in the high acuity population, especially women with or without children.

Many of these people have ended up in encampments because they don't have any other avenue to pursue, or any wraparound supports or services that can appropriately help them. And it was through these conversations about this unfortunate reality where I had brought up my concern about drug use being a part of the Hub plan.

Of course, many of the unhoused people I spoke with are able to respect my concerns and the validity of them, even if they disagree. They were able to share with me how these hubs, especially those away from the core, will be the first opportunity they have for proper wraparound supports and services and a safe shelter space in a long time. Some have not had that opportunity for as long as 10+ years. Some longer than that.

These concerns were also addressed and discussed with me by lead agencies & City representatives as well, but hearing the same from the unhoused people I have come to know as well really set those concerns aside, and helped me to better understand the role & reason for allowing drug use. I was also made aware that since some of the hubs will have people with their children, whether the adults are addicts or not, there are measures in place to prevent any kind of unnecessary exposure or access to those who will be using drugs on the premises.

I am glad to have had those opportunities and that trust in people to be able to share their own stories and how the role & reason of allowing drug use will actually be more of a benefit to them than a harm. Many of them recognize that they will still need to use for a short time after entering these hubs, as a means of allowing their bodies to prevent withdrawal symptoms while they pursue & access supports and services that will help them stabilize which many will take as their first step towards recovery or getting clean, for the sake of their children no less. Many women don't have access to their child(ren) due to their addiction & homelessness, so they too will benefit more than be harmed because of the permissible use of drugs on premises.

Many of them have expressed respect for these hubs and the supports and services offered, & many will do their very best to be a contributing, positive member of the community at whichever hub they end up at. They don't like the stigma attached to unhoused addicts, & they have and will continue to try to be the change & fight that stigma in being the opposite of it.

Now, I'm not one to accept "sob stories" & can usually tell when someone's pulling my leg or desperately attempting at a sympathy rant or conversation. I can attest to the fact that I have taken time to trust these individuals just as they have grown to trust me enough to be vulnerable & honest & real with one another.

So yes, while I still have those concerns, I am very much able to understand & see that these hubs will have more than appropriate measures in place that will limit, if not entirely eliminate, any chances of contributing to the issues present in these areas already.

I am happy that there will finally be an opportunity for many of my unhoused friends, who have tried everything to get & stay sober and clean while they've been unhoused, to have a proper environment to foster a more successful path towards a better life, sobriety & getting/staying clean.

The distance from the core for some of these hubs is a great thing, because it provides some distance & separation from the influences & environments that have kept these folks stuck & discouraged from pursuing a better path. You have zero clue how even someone like me, being in a toxic, unsafe, & unsupportive environment, with no appropriate supports or services, has & can really negatively impact someone as strong-willed as I am. And if that's the case for me, I can only imagine what it's like for someone whose been stuck in that environment for longer than I have.

I was already feeling emotionally beaten down and worthless in a year of being in the COH, so I can only imagine how hopeless people who have been in that kind of environment for longer must feel. And that's why when opportunities like the hubs prop up, anyone will be as respectful and responsible as possible to honour the program, the neighbourhood, etc.

And delaying these hubs will only contribute to more of that feeling hopeless. Because there are not any other proper or appropriate or safe alternatives for those who would be accessing them to go while we delay the hubs, which could mean more people will probably fall deeper into addiction and deeper through the cracks.

This is a new model that I hope will be adopted or translated over to the shelter system when it's completed. And we need these hubs to go forward in order to have even a chance of that happening.

So now that that's out of the way, allow me to address some of the pushback I've seen from the neighbourhoods of both CMHA hub locations, including and up to the stigma-perpetuating statements & such of our own city council members. Namely, Ms. Rahman, who I have already opened a conversation with separately but will address some of her actions and words, and how that will only do more harm by delaying these hubs and not allowing them to continue.

Now, I'm one of the first to admit that I have and will continue to criticize decisions made by the City and Council at times when it comes to addressing homelessness. But I'm one of few who can also see it from the side of the City and Council and have a deeper understanding of all sides, and can move forward & still support their decisions even if I disagree with them.

But the levels that some of the opposition to these hubs have really taken the cake on how low they can go & how unnecessarily far with their claims & concerns they can go. Approaching family members of council and the mayor.... really? That's disheartening & disgusting.

Most, fortunately, have maintained themselves & have only shared their concerns on social media, or through letters on the agendas for meetings. But don't get me wrong: these approaches are no better.

Especially when they are brought up based on weak, stigmatizing, dehumanizing, misinformed, uninformed or in some cases, blatantly ignorant, selfish, & the worst form of NIMBYism possible.

Now, these stigma-perpetuating assumptions, based on no hard facts or truth, are constantly being disguised as concerns. And not ONCE do these people seem to bother to read the implementation plan, or speak to the people they're so concerned with/about to get their concerns addressed or questions answered prior. And then they say that they aren't being heard when they do. Well, sorry to burst these people's bubble, but if you're gonna come with "concerns" or questions based on nothing but preconceived notions, a lack of effort to inform yourself prior on the issue you're concerned or have questions about, or are simply concerned based on your own selfish and personal beliefs and opinions about how the hubs should be run, and who should be deserving of accessing them, and how the City has made a mistake, or that the hubs have somehow violated criteria in the plan, without actual valid proof for facts to back that up, of course no one worth their salt in these agencies or places are going to want to even converse or have a conversation with them, nor will they give their concerns or questions any kind of credibility or validation.

None of these concerns that I have seen or heard from people have any merit or have any basis in facts found in any kind of available communication or document. They don't know the people who will be accessing these hubs personally, so they can't say that they know they'll contribute to the problems in the area whatsoever with any facts to back that up. That's simply continuing to perpetuate the stigma unhoused people have faced for decades.

Not every unhoused individual is an addict, nor are they disrespectful or going to be the troublemakers that only a small portion of the overall population is. And to perpetuate that stigma as a guise to be concerned about a hub being located in their neighborhood is dehumanizing & disgusting, & is NIMBYISM at it's finest.

Most of the concerns about transit/daily life activities can be disproved by a simple opening of Google Maps or looking at an LTC system map. The location on Fanshawe Park Road for example, is 5 mins from a grocery store. 5 mins from a pharmacy. A short bus ride from the Y, Walmart, Tim Hortons, or a Library or community centre. These are all, also, on the same 1 bus route (the 19) that will take them both to and from these locations.

And yes, it's close to child care and stores, because some of the women will have children with them or visiting them at times. Do they not deserve that same access to child care or child services or supports?

Honestly people.

And the My Sister's Place being "too close" to Beal. Um, compared to their old location (the white building on King right across from Beal) I would say their current location is nowhere near "too close". That location also, if people would dig deeper into why that location was selected, is already a main support and service hub for many women in the core. So, why not offer a 24 hour respite bed hub for them? It's an extension of supports and services for women who wish to access them.

And again, the women who will be accessing that will not be those who fit the negative stigma that many have perpetuated under the guise of "concerns". Maybe these people should visit My Sister's Place and see for themselves how valuable of a location that is now, and will be with a hub, for many women.

Most of these concerns are based on assumptions of that stigma, and the fact that Councillor Rahman entertains and supports perpetuation of that stigma by giving these people even minor validity is a shame.

This city has a commitment to be a safe place for women and girls. When did public outcry revoke that or trump that commitment? Because it seems councillor Rahman is willing to forgo that commitment for the sake of feeding mostly blatantly misinformed or uninformed people more information and delaying services and supports for women and girls.

And concerns about the businesses and owners around the Fanshawe Park Road location. Honestly, did these people miss when the owner of the business said publicly he will and is relocating willingly?

And those business owners probably did participate in the Business part of the implementation plan & planning table. But no one ever asked them that themselves, just more misleading, misinformed, assumptions.

I mean, my goodness. They could have reached out to these business owners themselves for crying out loud.

These hubs do not need to be delayed for 3 months for the sake of most of these opposition members to be provided with more information. Even after that, most won't be satisfied and will still want the location changed. This is a regular thing with everything the City does. NIMBYism is alive and well.

We can move forward with the hubs while allowing opportunity for more conversations and information to be available. Though this information has been readily available for months, minus the locations, and I'm sure leading agencies have been willing and able to answer any questions for quite a while now.

RFPs are not up for location debate by anyone in the public ever. I don't recall any RFP or development that in the same process released the desired location, and somehow was forced to move locations due to community feedback. So what makes this time around different?

Honestly, this opposition is so unnecessary & foolish & misguided. Anyone I've spoken to that has opposed this (including one's who have shared their concerns publicly) has ever been able to provide me any kind of validity or facts behind their "concerns". They've just perpetuated the stigma around unhoused folks & listed off reasons they feel or believe it shouldn't be located in their neighbourhood.

And the thought that councillor Rahman is even entertaining these folks' stigma, assumption, NIMBY, selfish feelings & opinions horribly disguised as "concerns", instead of standing up for those who are on the receiving end of that perpetuated stigma and NIMBYism, especially women, and telling these people they are incorrect, way off base, & have no valid proof or facts to justify their concerns, as a woman, is disgusting.

Instead, she's wanting to DELAY these hubs until she can get them the information through staff, which takes a lot longer than it would if these people would reach out to these agencies and city representatives themselves. To satisfy a small portion of those in her ward who oppose it, with nothing to warrant or justify it other than because people are insulted that they couldn't dictate or control where this hub goes.

In 3 months, if we delay these hubs, what are the consequences to the women who could be accessing that hub? They're forced to stay on the street, or in toxic unsafe shelters. And in 3 months, after all of the efforts of giving these people information, what's to happen when they still oppose it and want to change the location? We will have punished vulnerable women by forcing them to remain in unsafe environments without the opportunity they have now at stabilization.

You don't need 3 months of a delay to spoon feed information to people who haven't been concerned enough to get themselves better informed. Isn't that their responsibility as a member of the community? To do some work themselves to get better informed in order to share with others?

We can have these hubs be on the go, & have a conversation about concerns simultaneously. This isn't appropriate for an either or scenario.

These people have opposed the location from the get go. They will in 3 months too. Because if none of these weak attempts at concerns isn't NIMBYism, I don't know what is. And 20 years of being on the receiving end of the stigma attached to the NIMBYism shown here.... yeah I'm very confident it's NIMBYism.

Especially when it wasn't such a concern during the campaign or recently until the location was announced as in their neighbourhood. And the weak excuses that have followed have tried to disguise the NIMBYism but anyone with common sense can see right through it for what it is.

So please, don't push back these hubs for the simple reason of trying to satisfy these minorities of the population who oppose it. Because you will never satisfy everyone, and if we wait 3 months to find that out the hard way, we are all doomed and foolish.

I'm all for giving people more information. But I'm not about to support postponing an essential service and supports for the sake of that, when that information is, has and will be available even with the hubs in operation.

Please consider what I've said here, as it's based on facts, and lived experience, in your decision, & please don't delay these hubs any longer. Allow them to go forward. Please. Women's lives are at stake here.

Thank you for your time and consideration to this matter. You have my consent to add this to the public agenda for the October 5th Council meeting.

Sincerely,

Melissa Sheehan