

Permission to circulate and attach to agenda

I am writing to express my support for London's HUBS plan. I am a past member of the London Homeless Coalition, a past Community Advocate at a regional shelter for families fleeing intimate partner violence, and I currently practice as a Registered Social Worker, living in Ward 7, in close proximity to the proposed NW Hub location on Fanshawe Park Road West.

As a lifelong London citizen, I am dismayed by the harmful and inflammatory rhetoric leveled against both the organizations providing these much-needed hubs and essential services, as well as the people who require them. There are members of this community, including some who hold leadership positions within your midst, who continue to use appalling, offensive, stigmatizing tactics to spread fear, to perpetuate harmful myths¹ about those who are most marginalized in our community. These tactics serve only to further dehumanize those who are simply trying to survive within a system that I'm sure we can all agree is not sufficient to meet their needs.

These tactics continue to put the most vulnerable members of our community at greater risk of harm. The prevalent narrative used by those who continue to promote and reinforce stigmatizing attitudes, is one of coercive treatment for addiction, and punitive measures/criminalization for homelessness. It is inhumane to criminalize people for living a reality that is a direct result of systemic, societal, and policy failures at every level of government.²

In a recent article published by Invisible People³, it was noted that "the surrounding people, not the conditions, make homelessness hard. Hatred against unhoused people rages on..." The article noted that according to experts and advocates within the sector, "criminalizing homelessness is fueling the fires of hatred, and fostering lethal consequences."

"The political rhetoric that goes along with criminalization, especially right now during our current political climate, contributes to a cultural view of homeless people as less than or other, or both...this contributes to a view that homeless people are dangerous, which is incorrect. It also contributes to a view of homeless people as disposable, which, in turn, increases violence against them."

¹ For more on the most prevalent myths about people who are homeless, see "Myths about Homelessness." *Calgary Homeless Foundation*.
<https://www.calgaryhomeless.com/discover-learn/learn-about-homelessness/homelessness-in-calgary/myths-about-homelessness/>

² For the real and primary causes of homelessness, see "Causes of Homelessness." *Homeless Hub*.
<https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/causes-homelessness>

³ Criminalizing Homelessness is Fueling the Fires of Hatred and Fostering Lethal Consequences
<https://invisiblepeople.tv/how-criminalization-is-contributing-to-homeless-deaths/>

In all the years I have lived in this city, I have never seen an entire sector come together with such determined, passionate vision to create this innovative plan. This has been an arduous process and I trust and value the knowledge and expertise of all those involved. I believe that we must move forward ethically and with care. All people deserve housing. All people deserve access to robust wrap-around services. All people deserve to be seen as whole people. The hubs are the start of a long-overdue movement to acknowledge the people in our city who have, for far too long, been suffering, and sleeping, on our streets. Finally, the hubs plan aligns with Canada's National Housing Strategy⁴, which calls for "advancing the right to housing," "seeking...input from voices who know first-hand what it's like not to have a home," and "creating livable communities."

As @mattixv on Twitter so clearly notes, "there is a difference between not wanting people to be homeless and not wanting to have to see people who are homeless." It is time to ask ourselves which of these very different positions we want to espouse? I am writing today to say that the hub at 705 Fanshawe Park Road West, which will serve women and children, should be given the green light. To not go ahead with this project will paint a picture of a city and its citizens that is not aligned with the London that I would like us to be - one that leads by compassion, evidence, and community, instead of fear, misinformation, and rhetorical violence.

With respect,

Cheryl Wituik, RSW, BA
Ward 7 Resident

⁴ For more on Canada's National Housing Strategy, see "What is the Strategy?" <https://www.placetocallhome.ca/what-is-the-strategy>