

DIRKA U. PROUT

London, ON

October 4, 2023

Mayor Josh Morgan and other members of council

Via email to councilagenda@london.ca

**Re: Hub at 705 Fanshawe Park Road West
Council Meeting of October 5, 2023**

Dear Council,

I am writing in support of the hub for women and women-identified persons to be situated at 705 Fanshawe Park Road West. Please vote to maintain this hub.

The hubs are supporting high acuity individuals who are the most marginalized. This particular hub will serve the most underserved subset of this population: women and women-identified persons. The Fanshawe Park hub will not bring homelessness to the neighbouring community. The hub is not a shelter. Properly managed, it will not cause nearby businesses to close or be a danger to children, elders or other residents.

Prior to the start of the pandemic, I read reports of pregnant women on the streets of London. This past winter, while gathering signatures for the London Regional Social Forum's petition to declare the housing crisis an emergency in London, we were told of homeless families with children living in a City park. This means things are dire for women and their families. Any delays in providing service to this highly marginalized group will be a travesty.

Women typically exhaust every option prior to being forced onto the streets. The most common reason women, girls and trans women leave their homes is violence from their intimate partners or other family members. In Canada, women's services and shelters for gender based violence are underfunded. There are far fewer homeless shelters that are dedicated to women and even fewer that specialize in dealing with gender diverse people. This situation became much worse with the onset of the pandemic. I fear that if this hub is deferred, that deliberations could become so protracted that we will lose sight of the urgency for this most vulnerable population. Consider that London's women's and family shelters have long been at capacity and have waitlists. Some of the homeless women may be mothers and a delay past May 2024 may cause further separation from their children and further entrenchment of harms that perpetuate intergenerational poverty.

Detractors may say you are bringing homelessness to our pristine community. Homeless people who are tired of constantly dismantled encampments and violence in the downtown may already be living within the idyllic ravines of Fox Hollow. Studies have shown on average 75% of homeless people remain in their community of origin. Further in the case of women, gender based violence has no class limits.

There is the related concern of hubs in general being a revolving door for participants. While conventional shelters do not have people occupying the space during the day and their homeless population may well be transient, the hubs provide transitional housing. Hub participants will remain there with 24/7 supports while they recover from past trauma, heal, prepare for employment and moving into permanent housing. Hub populations are expected to be stable over time with no adhoc intakes.

Some members of the public have expressed fear of violence being inflicted particularly on seniors or other harms on children. This fear is unfounded. Data shows that homeless people are no more violent than those that are housed. Further crime rates for women across all age groups are 1/3 of that of men. It

is far more likely that homeless women and gender diverse persons have been victims of multiple instances of violence. They are in urgent need of protection. This hub will utilize a gendered and trauma-informed approach.

The onsite restaurant Black Pearl may have to relocate. They have reportedly indicated a willingness to voluntarily do so. As a women owned business, they are likely familiar with how societal ills like gender based violence, sexism and the gender pay gap to name a few harm women and can result in women's poverty and eventual homelessness. They can be a valuable ally and it is hoped that CMHA and the City can facilitate to make their move as seamless as possible.

There are fears of other nearby businesses closing. Studies for shelters show that nuisance problems rarely extend more than 400 metres from a shelter. Again, I note this is transitional housing with a stable population. Since the hubs plan mandates provision of security, the community impact will be far less than the average shelter operation. I would note that CMHA is an experienced provider of both shelter and mental health services. The Hubs Implementation Plan requires all providers to adhere to consistent standard of care, de-escalation training and community engagement. Security and nuisance problems can be warded off with early and regular dialogue with the local business, community reps, CMHA, the Ward Councillors and the City's hubs implementation team. This dialogue should also inform Council's deliberations on this and future hubs without the need for any motion for deferral.

Others claim to be concerned about the potential for on-site drug use as part of the hub's low barrier approach. The requirement for one to be clean before entering the shelter is often a barrier for homeless people. Further the nature of opiate addiction is such that abstinence programs do not work. In order to prevent overdose deaths and transmission of deadly diseases like HIV and hepatitis B, it is important that harm reduction techniques be employed. This is a mandatory feature of each hub apart from hub staff having the required training, representatives from the appropriate supporting agencies will be available to assist. Best practices require measures such as needle sweeps and a community hotline for used needles. I expect these measures will be employed along with needle drop boxes that are already in public parks and facilities.

Some say the costs of the hubs are excessive. Homelessness is very costly. Its cost is measured in lost lives and human potential. Considering that 21% of single mothers in Canada raise their children in poverty, not addressing the root cause and allowing women's homelessness to continue perpetuates intergenerational poverty and hopelessness. A 2017 study reported the average annual cost each homeless person with mental illness in Canada is \$53,000 per person and can rise to \$340,000 per person. This includes shelter, policing, health and justice system costs. Housing first approaches that employ harm reduction can reduce those costs significantly. At the public information sessions, we were told there will be feedback loops built into the Hub Implementation Plan. As more hubs come on line, there will be opportunities to use this feedback to lower costs and improve service.

As these hubs are being rolled out, I expect the City will work quickly and steadfastly along with higher levels of government to address the root causes of homelessness and get more co-op, transition and social housing built in this city. Homelessness is complex and has a long history of policy failures and lack of political will. The hubs by themselves will not solve homelessness; nor were they expected to. They are necessary step to break the hold of the streets and move away from trauma for woefully underserved populations like women.

Under the City's *Safe Cities London Action Plan*, Council is obligated to make London a place where women, girls, nonbinary and trans individuals and GBV survivors can participate safely in public life. This includes those experiencing homelessness. Please vote to keep the hub at 705 Fanshawe Park Road West.

Sincerely,

Darla U. Prout