

Community and Protective Services Committee

ATTENTION: Committee and Michael van Holst, City Councillor, Ward 1

RE: Concerns Recommendation related to June 30, 2021 Proposed Extension, Support Space Program/Warming Centre Program Hamilton Road Seniors Centre (525 Hamilton Rd)

Submitted by: Earl Richard Blaney
Resident Smith Street, Ward 1
April 18, 2021

RECCOMENDATION 1: The recommendation(s) prepared by Debbie Kramers (Manager Homeless prevention) submitted by Craig Cooper (Manager Homeless Prevention) and tabled by Kevin Dickins (Acting Managing Director Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home), should be recognized by the committee as an **incomplete record** due to omissions (intentional or otherwise) of the state of affairs and operations of the Warming Centre Program at Hamilton Road Seniors Centre (specifically located at 525 Hamilton Rd). As explained in part herewith.

RECCOMENDATION 2: The committee **does not endorse or approve the proposed recommendations** tabled by Kevin Dickins, Acting Managing Director Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home, report dated April 20, 2021, "Update - City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals".

RECCOMENDATION 3: That the Committee acknowledge the need for an open, objective, **community safety impact study be conducted**, to include the public participation by Londoners in the neighborhood impacted by the temporary Warming Centre Program at Hamilton Road Seniors Centre (specifically located at 525 Hamilton Rd). And further, that such a study be undertaken and adequately considered before any further support services, amended support services or extensions to existing services are provided at 525 Hamilton Rd beyond the end of April 2021.

Earl Richard Blaney (RCIC)
Resident of Smith Street, Ward 1
London, Ontario CA

Submitted to Chair and Members
Community and Protective Service Committee
City of London
via Michael van Holst
City Councillor, Ward 1,
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CC: sppc@london.ca

Dear Mr Michael van Holst, Chair and Committee Members,

On or about on December 01, 2020 Kevin Dickins, Acting Managing Director Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home ([resident of Exeter](#), Ontario) [made a series of recommendations](#) that were formally adopted by members of this Committee. Specifically, the purpose of those recommendations was as follows:

“The purpose of this report is to recommend approval for the implementation of an **urgent winter response** for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness in order **to provide lifesaving temporary measures.**”ⁱ

The overarching theme of those recommendations, [city of London messaging](#) and [media releases](#) related to this *Winter Response Program* focused squarely on providing a safe space for displaced persons to endure cold temperatures during the coldest parts of London’s winter.

“The response aims to meet individuals’ basic needs, ensure life saving measures are in place, increase connectivity and to provide a solution **to assist our most vulnerable Londoners to get out of the cold.**”ⁱⁱ

Among the new **temporary** day use facilities approved by this committee was a **Warming Centre** located at 525 Hamilton Road. At the time, residents of the neighborhood surrounding the 525 Hamilton Rd. location, took those recommendations as honest, open representations of good faith. The initiative was welcomed with compassion, understanding and support.

Large numbers of Londoners in this neighborhood **no longer share those sentiments.**

Incomplete Data Set Used to Make Recommendations:

In the report at issue, prepared by Debbie Kramers, submitted by Craig Cooper a section entitled “**Challenges Experienced**” was included at page 4 for committee consideration.ⁱⁱⁱ In that section the following omissions are of paramount concern;

No records provided of London Police Service (LPS) call and occurrence/attendance data compared year over year to the location of 525 Hamilton Road. Please note, my office has requested those statistics via MFIPA LPS request (confirmed receipt date April 12, 2021).

Concern: Why has Kevin Dickins not provided Committee with this important data set?

No records provided of frequency of “**needle sweeps**” of the neighbourhood surrounding the Warming Centre located at 525 Hamilton Road. In this neighborhood there are three schools, two of them are elementary schools, which sees high traffic of young, vulnerable minor students often walking to nearby schools unaccompanied by adults.

No records provided of “**needle counts**” of discarded, used, contaminated needles found in the neighbourhood surrounding the Warming Centre located at 525 Hamilton Road.

No records or mentions of concerns presented by community members in the neighbourhood surrounding the Warming Centre located at 525 Hamilton Road. I have personally called Ms Debbie Kramer (who prepared the submission for committee) on April 09, 2021 (11:49 am), expressing concerns about community safety, leaving a message on her unattended voice mail briefly expressing concerns related to community safety in the area and asking for a call back. **To date no call back has been received.**

No records provided of the number of calls related to “encampments” being established in the open space adjacent to the bicycle path at the end of Smith Street, which in my experience has seen a significant increase of communal living since the establishment of the Warming Centre located at 525 Hamilton Road.

Personal Concerns and Experiences:

I commute from my downtown office to my home on Smith Street and pass the Warming Centre Program Hamilton Road Seniors Centre (525 Hamilton Rd) at approximately 8 am and then again at 4:45 pm daily. Later in the evening, I also walk my dog around the area where the centre is located.

From the onset of spring, I have noticed a dramatic deterioration in the conditions of the neighbourhood as a result of the crowds of persons who are drawn to the centre and whom now members of our community, of all ages, are faced with the challenges and risks of daily interaction. Aside from the large number of needles I have personally found (well over 20 to date), collected and discarded on my walks around the location, the other main concern is the risk of safety posed by some visitors to the centre.

I have personally witnessed two assaults the first occurring on March 15, and the second occurring about two weeks later – both were violent confrontations occurring on the property of the Hamilton Road Seniors Centre, both involved persons that appeared to be attendees of this program physically assaulting one another.

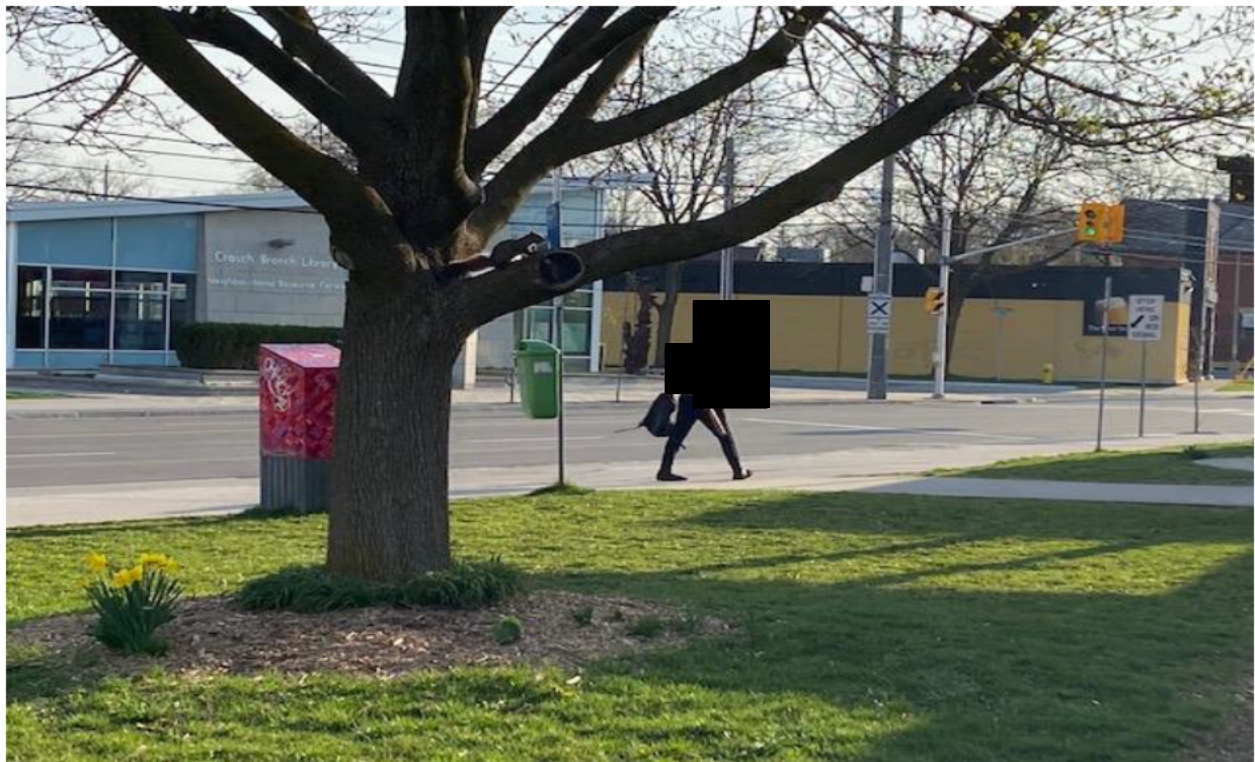
I have personally witnessed the use of drugs on the property of Hamilton Road Seniors Centre, in particular the smoking of (what I assume to be) methamphetamine from tin or aluminum material with the use of straws (or similar). This drug use is occurring freely and openly. I have also witnessed people pass out in the parking lot of 525 Hamilton Rd with open alcohol containers. I have also witnessed a man shouting obscenities and openly carrying a weapon trying to enter the facility after normal operation hours – see attached photo taken on or about on April 16, 2021. All of this despite the noticeable increase of police attendance to the location at issue.

Since the onset of Spring, my car which is parked in my driveway between the centre at 525 Hamilton Rd and the bicycle paths at the end of Smith Street has been broken into twice. Further, neighbors have reported persons traveling between the centre at 525 Hamilton Rd and the encampments being established along the bicycle path areas at end of Smith St, having ended up in a state of trespass in their backyards. My wife also has reported being verbally threatened (death threat) by one such migrant.

I have personally entered the facility at 525 Hamilton Rd and observed guests who have appeared to be under the heavy influence of drugs, and I do have further (but as of yet unsubstantiated) suspicions and concerns that staff of Impact London may be allowing or willfully ignoring drug use on site.

Photo taken (on or about on) April 09, 2021

Man wielding baseball bat, screaming obscenities and threats, **with baseball bat** attempts entry at back and front of Warming Centre located at 525 Hamilton Road




I would also add that the fact that increased crime and drug use are directly connected with this type of homeless service centre system is **well acknowledged** by even the persons who are administering this program (see below).

<https://www.impactlondon.net/about-us>

impactlondon.net/about-us

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Amy Watling
Founder, Executive Director, CEO

When I was 14 years old, I struggled with my self image, self worth and my self confidence. The expectations on who we were supposed to be when we were young, on top of the bullying threw my mind into a downward spiral. I veered off into an out-casted group of friends that experimented with prescription pills to which I continued to attempt to impress them, by also consuming them frequently. I slowly fell into the depths of addiction and moved out of my family home by my 15th year. By 16, I entered into the shelter system, where the need to impress my peers sunk me deeper into my addiction. I got to the point where I would do anything to obtain what I needed to bolster my addiction, whether it was committing crime or working on the street corner. This behavior continued until I was 24, and by that time I was 92 lbs, exhausted but ready for a change. I had a family friend assist me in travelling to Calgary Alberta, where I had a friend that was willing to provide a safe space for me to recover. I attended workshops and groups that assisted me in living a better life and support with transitioning back into employment. I came back to Ontario in my 2nd year of sobriety and decided to go back to school. I initially wanted to go into the field of social work but didn't know if I would truly be prepared for that yet, so, I attended and completed a course for cosmetology and hairstyling. It was fun for a while, but after pursuing a volunteer hairstyling position within a homeless shelter and connecting with the clients there, I knew that I was ready to take that path in helping the community. I then started to pursue opportunities in the community that I qualified for, while attending post secondary school for addictions and mental health online. Those opportunities were fruitful, but never stuck as I always stuck out like a sore thumb of liability due to my past. I just wanted an opportunity where my past became my biggest asset and not my detriment. So, I took the big move in starting Impact London, an organization that aimed to use the skills of people in recovery by assisting and supporting others that are still struggling. Where individuals that have little to no experience working in the community, could learn to professionally use their expertise by shadowing other staff on the job and engaging in online learning. By attending different city meetings and community gatherings, Impact London became more known and familiar. We had our first successful fundraiser and met with different city council members, that made our existence become even louder. After bringing a plan for change to the City of London, they started to open their eyes on the benefits of lived experience and peer support. So, in early 2020, the City of London, reached out to us to have Impact London assist them in their fight against Covid-19. We were given the opportunity to operate an isolation space that assists individuals that are living within the shelter system or living unsheltered, in receiving their Covid-19 test and a place for them to remain safe and supported while waiting for their results. As of today, we still operate the isolation space 24/7, my staff spend everyday connecting with these individuals and using their experience to inspire them while they are within our space. When clients are being discharged, we have used our combine efforts in referring them to certain organizations that could better support them in either their recovery or closer to housing efforts. Some clients have had the eligibility to stay with us and become a transitional client. Those clients stay with us until they are referred into other programs or until housing is achieved. Beneath everything that myself and my staff do with our clients, our biggest accomplishment is the connections we make while supporting our clients. We continue to inspire, relate and support in a way that nobody else can. I am so proud of my team and am exciting to see where this opportunity takes us! Today I am 7 years sober and I cant imagine being anywhere else!

*“By 16, I entered into the shelter system, where the need to impress my peers **sunk me deeper into my addiction**. I got to the point where I would do anything to obtain what I needed to bolster my addiction, whether it was **committing crime or working on the street corner**.”*

However, when entering the facility personally, to respectfully raise preliminary concerns about this issue, I was met with hostilities and expletives from staff who informed me “after five pm they are not our problem”.

In conclusion, it is my impression that there is a distinct lack of objective concern for community safety for the residents and children living in Ward 1.

I believe that this should be obvious by the extent of the omissions in the report prepared by Debbie Kramers and subsequently submitted by Craig Cooper for your consideration today. The fact that Mr Kevin Dickins is recommending committee action in this context – is completely unacceptable to myself as well as numerous other residents of the impacted neighborhood. I would go as far as to say, under these circumstances, the recommendations set before you by Mr Kevin Dickins are not rooted in objectivity nor reality and that the contents of the report (which have laid the roots for the recommendations to be considered by your Committee here today) provide a woefully incomplete picture of the impact on local residents, I would only hope not intentionally so.

Earl Blaney
Resident Smith Street, Ward 1

ⁱ [City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals \(CPSC: December 1, 2021\)](#) page 1.

ⁱⁱ [Ibid.](#), page 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Update – City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program For Unsheltered Individuals](#) (page 4)