

April 18, 2021

Dear Chair and Members, Community and Protective Services Committee,

I am a resident of Smith Street and would like to **oppose the proposal** for extending the winter support space program to June 30, 2021 at 525 Hamilton Road tabled in the report entitled "Update- City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals" dated April 20, 2021 prepared by Debbie Kramers (Manager Homeless Prevention), submitted by Craig Cooper (Manager Homeless Prevention) and recommended by Kevin Dickins (Acting Director Housing, Social Services and Dearness Home).

As a resident of the area, I have several concerns with the continued use of the Hamilton Rd Senior's Center at 525 Hamilton Road for unsheltered homelessness as outlined below:

- **Proximity to several schools**
 - i. There are 3 schools in the area:
 - (a) **Trafalgar Public School**- 919 Trafalgar St. is 160 meters or a 2-minute walk from 525 Hamilton Rd. This school has approximately 150 students from kindergarten to grade 8.
 - (b) **Lester B. Pearson School of Arts**- 795 Trafalgar St. is 450 meters or a 6-minute walk from 525 Hamilton Rd. This school has approximately 280 students from grades 4-8.
 - (c) **B. Davison Secondary School**- 785 Trafalgar St. is 550 meters or a 7-minute walk from 525 Hamilton Rd.

- **Lack of consultation with residents, community partners and businesses in the area**
 - ii. The decision to use the Hamilton Road Senior's Center as a temporary warming space was made rapidly (as described in the report "City of London 2020-2021 Winter Response Program for Unsheltered Individuals" dated December 1, 2020 on p. 3 under the title "Procurement"). The space began operation on December 21, 2020.
 - iii. Residents in the area were not given an opportunity to raise concerns or ask questions about the intended use of the space. In the "Housing Stability Action Plan for the City of London 2019-2024" the approved guiding document for homeless prevention was developed in consultation with Londoners. Conversely, residents and businesses in the area surrounding the Hamilton Road Senior's Center were not given that opportunity.
 - iv. **Voicemails** from residents left for city employees specifically Debbie Kramers (Manager, Homelessness Program) with concerns and inquiries about 525 Hamilton Rd **have not been returned** to date (voicemail left April 8, 2021).

- **Contradicts the "Hamilton Road Community Improvement Plan"**
 - i. The Hamilton Road Community Improvement Plan ("Plan") dated March 27, 2018 is aimed at "creating a family friendly environment at all times in all seasons". This plan highlighted 12 areas of improvement including crime prevention, safety, general cleanliness and enhancing Hamilton Road's identity with a general improvement category of a safer neighborhood for all (p. 15).

- (a) Under the category of “Safe Neighborhood for All” on p. 27 of this report some of the concerns identified were: the lack of needle bins, drug use in public spaces and parks/neighborhoods feeling unsafe at night.
- (b) In the few months since the opening of the warming space at the Hamilton Rd Senior’s Center, neighbors in the area report picking up **150 needles** from the streets near the center, **drug use** behind and in front of the center has been witnessed by several residents in the area, and **encampments** have been popping up in the areas near the center (at the end of Smith Street and in the fields behind Lester B. Pearson School and B. Davidson Secondary School) resulting in residents feeling **unsafe** in the neighborhood.
- (c) The Plan also identified the importance of strengthening the community (p. 31) and pointed to the “**lack of voice to City Hall** that speaks for the whole community”. This issue remains a problem with input from residents and businesses not being considered or sought by the city employees making the recommendations for use of the space at Hamilton Rd Senior’s Center. Further, phone calls made to city employees responsible for drafting the proposal before the committee have been ignored.
- (d) Lastly, the Plan on p.98 highlighted that **crime is a threat** to the successful revitalization of a neighborhood. Since the Hamilton Rd Senior’s Center has been implemented as a warming space, incidents requiring a police response, car break-ins, trespassing and municipal law enforcement have increased. The number of police occurrences or issues at 525 Hamilton Rd have not been included in the proposal requesting an extension before the committee today.

- **Safety concerns**

- ii. On April 7, 2021 I was threatened while walking my dog near my home by a woman who appeared to be under the influence of drugs. She threatened to “shoot me like she did the last one” if I didn’t leave the area. The incident occurred approximately 7:30 p.m. I tried to call the after hours MLEO phone number and was unable to find the phone number and got a machine when I tried to call the non-emergency police line.
- iii. On April 8, 2021 I called MLEO to report garbage, shopping carts and signs of encampments in the fields near the Dillabough Community Garden. Several bags of garbage were removed from the area.
- iv. On April 18, 2021, I called MLEO to report another encampment in the field behind Lester B. Pearson School near the baseball diamond.
- v. Since January 2021 my car has been broken into a few times.

To summarize, I **strongly oppose the request to extend the use at 525 Hamilton Rd**. The initial request proposed to this committee was for a **temporary** location to help those in need during our coldest months. That goal has been achieved.

Questions for the Committee to consider:

When this location was recommended on December 1, 2020 the need for an urgent and rapid response due to the onset of winter was cited as reasons for settling on the 525 Hamilton Rd location.

1. In the last 6 months, what steps have been undertaken to examine and evaluate other available locations?

Due to the concerns highlighted above, this location is not a good option for continued use. Critics of this view may raise concerns cover the “NIMBY” (not in my backyard) argument; however, it is not as simple as that. The issue is that there are many locations which would better serve those in need without putting children and residents in harm’s way. Locations not in close proximity to schools, for example, should be considered if more time is needed to find shelter for those using this space.

Further, other temporary locations (Talbot Street Church) have ceased operating as a warming space as of March 19, 2021.

2. Why was the Talbot Street Church space closed and Civic Administration seeks to have the location at 525 Hamilton Rd extended?

The report before committee also indicates under section 2.2 on p. 15 that the location at 652 Elizabeth Street would no longer be operational by shifting the winter response to a more focused transitional supportive housing model.

3. Why was this decision made in relation to the Elizabeth Street location and not Hamilton Rd?

I sincerely hope the committee will take into consideration the concerns outlined in this letter, the lack of a complete report provided by the proposal submitted by Managers of Homeless Prevention for the City of London, and the questions I have raised before making any decision regarding the extension of using 525 Hamilton Rd beyond April 30, 2021.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Angela Oakey".

Angela Oakey

Concerned Resident