

On January 11th, 2019, members of Project Comfort met with Mary-Ann Beddard, the Director of Service Planning, Development and Infrastructure for the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (hereinafter SSHA) within the City of Toronto. The purpose of the meeting was to gain further insight into the role of the SSHA and to explain Project Comfort's role and efforts at community engagement.

The Director communicated that she is close to achieving the target of adding one thousand additional beds to the Toronto Shelter System, since that was tasked to her approximately one year ago. Note: there is a difference between respite centers and homeless shelters as the former are meant to be temporary in nature and do not have the same facilities or amenities that are seen in permanent shelters.

The Director described a significant and recent change in how the City approaches the establishment of a respite center or shelter. Formerly the process to determine the location of a proposed respite or shelter involved a recommendation to city council, which then voted on the recommendation. Viewed largely as discriminatory and unsatisfactory by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), the process was changed. The responsibility for choosing the location now rests solely within the discretion of the SSHA.

The discretion is not arbitrary however. The SSHA, in exercising the discretion considers a number of factors in determining an appropriate location for a respite center or a shelter. Considerations of need, location of resources and urgency of establishing shelters in a particular area are considered important.

The discretion of the SSHA is not without hindrances either. The impact of condo development in the downtown area, more specifically in the eastern part of the core has proven a challenge for the SSHA.

In addition to the responsibility of choosing an appropriate location for a respite center or a shelter, the SSHA also engages the community through outreach programs and events aimed to not only educate community members about the need for respites and shelters, but also to receive feedback from the community, which forms part of the consideration process in determining appropriate locations.

It was agreed that Project Comfort can play a very fruitful role in these community outreach and education efforts, and has done so successfully in the Liberty Village and Fort York areas through events, programs and outreach. Further Project Comfort's representatives expressed that such programs should not only involve government, and local residents, but it should also include local businesses as well. It was suggested that Project Comfort engage with the Office of Partnership in the City of Toronto for this purpose.

In discussing the Community Liaison Committee's role (hereinafter CLC), Project Comfort noted that these committees are formed for permanent shelters and not respite centers. Project Comfort noted additionally that although respite centers are meant to be temporary in nature, evidence suggests that they are being used well beyond what would be considered temporary. As such, it was suggested that a CLC be established for respite centers as well.

In addition to providing invaluable insight into the SSHA's role, a working relationship was formed with Project Comfort. Although a future meeting time was not discussed, Project Comfort is pleased with its reception by the SSHA, and hopes to continue its activities and mandate of integrating respite centers and shelters into the broader community.