

# Notes for the ONPHA Walking Tour: Homelessness Ends Here

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*Joy Connelly, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

## **1:30 pm: Start – Sheraton Centre**

- Introductions
- Accessibility
- Tokens
- Route

## **1:45 pm: Toronto City Hall**

- The City of Toronto has been assigned responsibilities for both housing and homelessness.
- Affordable Housing Office oversees new development and related policies; Shelter, Support and Housing responsible for managing its own 10 shelters and funding 39 community-based shelters – around 4,500 beds in all; for its Streets to Homes Program; for funding for Housing Help centres and other supports for homeless people, and – the big part – for funding and overseeing Toronto's 100,000 social housing units—around 240 non-profit and co-op housing providers + TCHC, Canada's largest housing provider.
- A question that I'd like you to ponder as we walk, and would like to ask you again at the end of the tour. Last year the Shelter, Support and Housing Division spent \$676M on housing and homelessness – not counting new development, not counting capital. About half of it is City money, with the rest from federal or provincial governments.
- In 2016 it spent \$181M directly on homeless and housing first solutions. Yet the homeless count has barely budged since 2006. Why do you think that is, and what would it take to move the needle?

## **1:55 pm: Homelessness Memorial**

- Started in 1986 to commemorate those who are known to have died on Toronto streets. At the moment, it is the best count we have.
- As of 2016, 30 years later, there are 745 men and women on the list. 50 of them died in 2015 – the highest number since 2006, when 60 deaths were recorded. 27 in the first 8 months of 2016.
- The sign says:

*“Stop, pause and remember all these people and the many more who continue to struggle as they live on the streets. Then call your local city councillor, your MPP and your MP. Help solve the homeless disaster.”*

- This memorial has been of huge importance – first as a human and humane act -- recognizing, by name, the people who have died. Second, as a way to make visible the deaths that would otherwise be hidden – as a way of mobilizing public outrage at the lives lost. Third, it has been the only way to actually count homeless deaths. Now the City is looking at ways to create a count – but it was volunteers who thought of the idea and called on the City to act.

**Question** – do you have a way in your town or city to mark and record the death of homeless people?

#### **2:00 a.m. St. Michael's Hospital, Keenan Research Centre**

- We're standing across from St. Michael's Hospital Emergency Room. Homeless people go to emergency rooms **at triple the rate** of the general population. The same pattern is true for people who are precariously housed – an estimated **70,000+ people in Toronto**.
- In one study, **38% had been beaten up in the past year. 61% had a traumatic brain injury, over ¼ had trouble walking. 1/3 didn't get enough to eat.**
- **Is it any wonder 77% of homeless people had visited an emergency room in the past year, and ¼ had stayed in hospital?**
- On this walk, we will be visiting George Street, where the Seaton House men's shelter is. From that one postal code there were **over 2100** emergency room visits between 2009 – 2011. One of the highest rates of emergency room use in Canada. **936** arrived by ambulance. **214** were admitted.
- I'm pointing out St. Mike's as a symbol of the problem, but it's also a symbol of the solution. Behind me is the home of the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, where the Centre for Research on Inner City Health.

#### **2:15 p.m. Role of church workers**

- Downtown church workers were leaders in this neighbourhood in the 1970s. I think most of you will be familiar with the concept of "Housing First." Downtown churchworkers were 40 years ahead of the curve, and we are going to be seeing the fruits of some of their labours in a few minutes.
- Throughout this neighbourhood and across Toronto, faith groups have been leaders as advocates, as donors and as volunteers. The names of places we are passing today – St. Michael's, the Salvation Army, All Saints, Ecuhome, St. Jude's, the Christian Resource Centre – reflect this legacy.

- Many of you know that the membership of many mainstream denominations is aging, and their ranks have not been filled by young people.

**Question:** Who will be the advocates, the donors, and the volunteers 30 years from now. Where is the capacity for sustained, civic society leadership?

**2:20 p.m. 88 Shuter Site**

- I read recently on a real estate blog “The Downtown East submarket is one of the hottest markets for condos now in the GTA. – 20 developments underway East of Yonge and west of DVP totally 7,000 units.”
- We are standing in front of 88 Shuter – Proposed: 3 buildings, with 54, 33 and 29 storey condos and 1,181 units, prices start at \$250,000 for a 377 SF unit. Also, a boutique hotel, grocery store, food hall, mews, café, restaurants, retail. Across the street – a 32 storey building with 251 units, preserving the ground floor fascade. You can see other developments - Centrecourt Developments, Brookfield Multiplex. Sold out – Units range from 390 square feet to 775 square feet.

**Question:** is this a good thing, or a bad thing? Two voices:

- For many downtown activists – the downtown eastside is the traditional home and gathering place for people who are homeless, or on the edge of homelessness, or just plain poor. This is where the services are, and have been for generations. And even if this particular building is not displacing any affordable housing, when this neighbourhood becomes “the ultimate in urban living” and “hip Queen East,” how long will the un-hip be welcomed in the mews, in the shops, in the parks. How long will rooming houses like the ones we’re going to pass keep on providing rooms at \$500/apiece.
- Bay Area Renters Federation in San Francisco. Guerrilla group, mainly young people, who go out to public meetings and fight in favour of new development, and the more the better. They’re suing suburbs for not building enough. Their target group is not people who would qualify for social or supportive housing. Their target is young people and newcomers to San Francisco, many in the tech industry, who can’t afford the sky-high rents. And as for those \$500/month rooms – and that IS the going rooming house rent – they are paying as much or more per square foot than the new high end renters.

## **2:30 pm: Corner, Shuter and Jarvis**

We get to see 4 responses to homelessness, all without taking another step.

### **The Good Neighbours Club:**

- Developed in the 1930s designed as a home away from home for men over 50
- Have a crisis outreach service. On site, breakfasts and lunches for a loonie, nursing care – no OHIP required, counseling, laundry, showers, recreational activities – all kinds of things.
- A crucial service – mail and phone service. Very hard to get a home, or any public service, if you can't be contacted.

### **Next, Homes First:**

- Opened in 1984, and now home to 77 men and women.
- A breakthrough development – Toronto's first large-scale permanent housing designed specifically for people who had been homeless. Until the late 1970s, no conceptualization of homelessness as a "thing." Before then, getting and keeping a home was often conditional on participating in some sort of support or therapeutic program. To qualify, you might need to have a specific mental health diagnosis, or need a specific support. If you graduated from needing that support, or no longer wanted to participate in the program, you'd lose your home!
- Homes First's idea was open to anyone who had experienced homelessness, and that each individual would choose his or her own supports, without fear of eviction. Today, Homes First operates 2 shelters and 13 housing sites for 550 seniors, families and adult singles.
- The other big idea was to include tenants in the creation of their home. It was designed as "stacked rooming houses" – 9 people per floor -- drawing on the model that many of the people they served would have been familiar with. Future tenants met many times to set the rules, and self-select their own groupings. Homes First continues to make community engagement a priority. They also operate an employment program to help tenants prepare for getting a job, with partnerships with organizations like Fresh Start to hire tenants.
- 90 Shuter has evolved since it was founded. They have learned that this form of housing works best for older people – particularly men – who enjoy the company of each other, and so this group has become this building's specialty. It has proven to be a natural fit with the Good Neighbours Club. To support this aging population, health services have been a priority. There is a PSW on-site 5 days a week, and a part-time nurse to provide direct supports, and also enable tenants to access other services that need a medical referral.

### **Hazelburn Co-op:**

- Co-ops were not typically developed as a solution to homelessness. They were designed as mixed-income housing owned and operated by the people who live there. But many – and Hazelburn is one of them – play a role in homelessness prevention.
- Before it was built, the co-op entered into agreements with Interval House, Jessie's Centre for Teenagers and what was then known as the Metro Toronto Association for the Mentally Retarded – now the Toronto Association for Community Living to house referrals from them.
- For these organizations, it was an affordable way to house their people without having to actually create housing.
- Model used everywhere, in non-profit housing and co-op housing.

### **Harbour Light:**

- the newest building, although the Salvation Army was among the first to be active in the downtown has been around a long time.
- The new building includes a church, immigrant and refugee program, residential addictions treatment program for 36 men, transitional housing – 98 RGI bachelor apartment – 2 floors for women, 4 for men.

### **2:50 pm: PACE, corner of Jarvis and Dundas**

- Inclusionary zoning – has many merits but is not generally a solution for homeless people.
- E.g. Artscape at PACE, Corner of Dundas and Jarvis.
- Negotiated through Section 37, creating 14 apartments for artists
- Bachelor apartment – 395 SF. \$233,160. Artscape mortgage reduces amount paid by purchaser to \$98,750 + property taxes plus condo fees - \$191/month.

### **Benefits of Inclusionary Zoning**

- required across the board – not a negotiation with each individual councillor
- Less public subsidies – PACE required subsidies through the City's Home Ownership Assistance Program.
- More units – this 387 unit building has 14 units. Less than 4%. Inclusionary zoning typically yields 10 – 20% affordable housing units. At a 10% level, developments planned or in the works in this neighbourhood would create 700 new affordable units.

### **3:00 p.m: Corner of George and Dundas**

#### **Filmore Hotel**

- Next time you pass by a tavern, look up! You will probably see affordable rental housing. That's because it used to be the law – any tavern needed to provide accommodation. Toronto has a main streets development policy. That's a good thing. But it means that all of these old hotels above taverns are at risk.
- Example: Broadview Hotel – up to 60 people displaced. However, those who did not leave immediately received \$400/month housing allowances (stacked on \$479 ODSP shelter allowances), help relocating and supports for one year through a partnership with WoodGreen, the City and the developer. The developer paid WoodGreen to hire two housing support workers; the City contributed the housing allowances.
- Lesson: the need to get in early. Once tenants leave, they lose their legal rights as tenants, and are almost impossible to trace.

#### **Seaton House redevelopment**

- After much deliberation, the City of Toronto is moving forward on the redevelopment of Seaton House. The proposal: to replace the 634-bed men's shelter, the old schoolhouse shelter to the north, and renovate the heritage houses, to create a 378 bed long-term care home, 130 units of assisted living, 21 units of supportive housing, a 100-bed men's shelter, and a community hub.
- The redevelopment is controversial, but I'm all for it. Why? Because it calls a spade a spade. Seaton House is a temporary shelter for some, but for most it is a permanent home, and it is assisted living for the MANY older men who have lived here, sometimes for years.
- And although service agencies – and there are many – have done their darndest to make Seaton House a real home, you can't paper over that it's a shelter in a building never designed as a shelter.
- It's time to return shelters to their rightful role as gateways to homes, not homes in themselves. The only question is, "how to manage the transition?"
- The solution – construction of new shelters throughout the City, 200 housing allowances to move into private rental. The creation of 15 new shelters. And the creation of new supportive housing.
- There are risks – although so far the worst fears have not been realized. Many have feared that new shelters would be in the fringes of the city where there is no transit and no services. But one of the shelters is right now being proposed in my neighbourhood – Leslieville – a transit rich, service rich neighbourhood and not my idea of the edge of the world. If they keep that up, they'll be doing well.

#### **291 George Street**

- Being permanently housed is just the first step.
- A case in point: 291 George, occupied mostly by former Seaton House residents: **132** singles with individual case managers, but no in-building supports. It was a building that fundamentally didn't work – **15%** of the units were vacant, **250** calls per year to TCHC's community safety unit, **40%** of units with major clutter issues, **40** calls to police for violent incidents within a 5 month period.
- Introduction of increased security and two on-site staff: a supportive housing worker from Houselink Community Homes and a community development worker from Fred Victor. The results after 6 months:
  - Police report Violent calls for service down 56%
  - Calls to TCHC's own community safety unit down 64%
  - Serious bedbugs, clutter and housekeeping down to zero, although mild case persisted
  - 24 people connected to a family doctor
  - 50%+ of tenants involved in some way
  - evictions NOT reduced – needed but 131 interventions to keep people from losing their home – not filling out forms, falling into arrears, housekeeping

### **3:20 p.m.      76 Pembroke**

- Note quiet of street – a mix of high-end ownership, high and low-end rental, a shelter, rooming houses
- Ecuhome became owners of 76 Pembroke in 2009, originally the Markeen Hotel in the 1880s. A heritage hotel and now home to 60 people. New walls, ceilings, electrical, plumbing, kitchens, bathrooms, laundry rooms on each floor. Ground floor wheelchair accessible.
- The power of beauty.

### **3:45 pm      Dundas and Sherbourne**

- Bradley Court - 280 Dundas East. \$750/month for bachelors apartments, furnished or unfurnished, v. small kitchen with 2 burner stove (small fridge in living room), bathroom with tub, closet. Marketed as student housing.
- All Saints - Note affordable housing built on church parking lot. With the coming of driverless cars, un-needed parking lots could be an opportunity for new affordable housing development.

### **3:50 pm      St. Jude's Milan Street**

- This is a peaceful street today, but it is the scene of an historic skirmish. St. Jude's had been providing supportive housing for people with mental health challenges in this neighbourhood for many years. When the site of an old dairy became available about 15 years ago, they looked forward to expanding their services.

- And that was the beginning of a multi-year battle. People who now lived in homes – also built on the dairy site – called for an environmental assessment of the St. Jude’s site – although no such assessment had been conducted on their own properties. There were delays, followed by City Council approval. Neighbours appealed that decision at the OMB. I attended that meeting. I hear about fears there would be traffic jams in the laneway, the street would become dangerous, that the neighbourhood was not good enough for people with mental health challenges. The OMB refused the appeal. In 2005 St. Jude’s opened 30 new homes, and some neighbours who were the staunchest opponents became St. Jude supporters.
- A happy ending. But here’s the issue. The environmental assessment, the delays, the OMB appeal cost St. Jude \$13,000 per unit. That’s \$13,000 of public money spent, not in providing services, not into the building, not in creating more homes, but in addressing unfounded fears. Something to think about.

#### **4: pm          Parliament and Dundas**

- The building you see before you was developed by Mainstay Housing in partnership with CAMH for people with high support needs who were leaving hospital.
- But like many of the buildings we’ve seen, it too adapted to meet new needs. Mainstay was approached by the Royal Canadian Legion. They were concerned about homeless veterans – according to the City’s latest street count about 7% of all homeless people are veterans – who were missing out on their entitlements because they had no address. Many of these men had mental illnesses, but they didn’t identify themselves as mentally ill. They DID identify themselves as veterans.
- So what you are seeing is supportive veterans housing. The Legion is Mainstays funder in fact and underwrites support staffing costs and Veterans Affairs provide clinical services for mental illness and PTSD. The Legion also provides funding for furnishings and programs supports for people with PTSD, addictions and other mental health issues, and assisted with outreach to identify tenants.
- The success – veterans who had been on the street for an average of 7 years are now housed. The Legion stays connected through its own volunteers, and is building connections with Moss Park Armouries we passed earlier.

#### **4:10 pm          CRC - 40 Oak Street**

- 87 deeply affordable units – 39 bachelors, 43 one bedroom and 5 two-bedroom
- Built under Affordable Housing Initiatives Program – but would not have been deeply affordable housing without the contribution of the United Church’s contribution of \$1.5 Million
- integrated supportive management provided by Houselink. CRC provides Tenant Services Co-ordinator - to develop community and share information



- RGI subsidies provided by TCHC for its own tenants relocated through the revitalization. These subsidies will stay with 40 Oak. Rents in remaining units are set at OW/ODSP shelter allowance
- 5 support/referral agreements and three head leases with mental health agencies
- part of a multi-service hub including a Community Food Centre, drop-in, clothing program, social enterprise initiatives, etc.