



**Bathurst Quay Neighbourhood Association Meeting
Wednesday, October 11, 2023
7:00 - 9:00 p.m. on zoom**

Next meeting is Wednesday, Nov 8, 2023

Present: Joan Prowse, Bev Thorpe, Maureen Callaghan, Diane Jameson, Ingrid van der Zande, Jacqueline McLaughlin, Karen Langill, Brian Gotteil, Phei Phei Oon, Daiana Ferrari (MP Vuong's office), Natasha Francis, Bushra Mir

Invited guests: Scott Purches, Justin Storey, PC Sarah Robertson, Matthew Hoy, PC Ty Rowles, Ryan Evershed, Brett Wolfson

The meeting focused on the safe injection site issue at the local shelter because of concerns raised by the community. The issue of having the safe injection site at 545 Lakeshore Blvd is a big safety concern. Over the summer our reps have had numerous reports from building residents about break-ins and erratic behaviour from, what we can only assume to be people on drugs, and the increased presence of drug dealers in the neighbourhood which are frightening people, especially seniors and families with young children. The shelter was meant for women and families and we have noticed a marked increase in crime and disturbances since the safe injection centre was added two years ago, without public consultation.

Thanks to Brian Gotteil for summarizing the discussion below and providing the contact numbers at the end.

Here is the meeting summary:

In April 2023, a safe drug injection site opened at the existing Homes First shelter at 545 Lakeshore Blvd. W. The location raises concerns: it's close to the Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre (WNC), schools, Little Norway Park, and entrances to several residential buildings. Residents have reported increased violence and security incidents, people using outside the WNC and in the park, and more impaired individuals in the neighbourhood.

To learn more about the situation and what we can all do to increase safety while supporting those in need, the BQNA invited representatives from Homes First and the Toronto Police Service 14 Division to our meeting on October 11, 2023. What we learned was both useful and

reassuring – and you can join our next meeting on Wednesday November 8 at 7 p.m. to learn more from Toronto Public Health and the City’s Housing, Shelter and Housing Administration department.

Purpose of the safe injection site

Homes First explained that the safe injection site is meant to reduce drug use in the surrounding community. Known as an “Urgent Public Health Need” site, the location was chosen by public health authorities because shelter residents *already* were using at alarming rates, with one of the highest overdose rates of any shelter in the city. Much of that use was already happening in the community. So the safe injection site was set up to move the *existing* use out of the community and into the shelter.

What you should know about the site

We learned this key information from Homes First:

- The location was mandated by Toronto Public Health.
- The safe injection site is only for residents of Homes First’s shelter – it is not a public site – so it shouldn’t attract additional drug users to the area
- As the Homes First team develops stronger relationships with its residents, their ability to bring their drug use into the shelter (instead of the community) should improve.
- But users who aren’t shelter residents can’t access the site and may continue using in the community
- Homes First staff supervise users inside the shelter so they don’t overdose, but can’t stop people from leaving the shelter afterward, as long as its safe for them to do so.
- More than half the residents at 545 Lakeshore are refugees, who are not the user population
- The capacity of the shelter increased after the pandemic when some shelters closed
- The third floor of the shelter is now open to accommodate male residents. Originally the shelter was for women and couples only

We also heard from 14 Division and from the executive director of the WNC:

- Police have been actively supporting our neighbourhood and have visited every tent/encampment to provide supports
- Police and the WNC both feel they have a good working relationship with each other and the shelter
- The WNC believes they have good emergency protocols, are able to enforce their code of conduct (including no drug use on their premises), and their staff are equipped to deal with these issues

What we can do

While this information is reassuring, there are still high drug use rates among the shelter population, and that is reflected in some of the safety concerns our community has noticed.

Based on the conversation, here are some things you can do to support those in need while also preserving safety:

- **Call 911** if someone is in immediate danger (including overdosing) or a crime is being committed
- To report a non-emergency crime to police (e.g., theft or property damage), **call 416-808-2222 or visit <https://www.tps.ca/services/online-reporting/>**
- If someone seems to be in a mental health crisis, **call 211 for the Toronto Community Crisis Service**. They will dispatch trained teams of mental health crisis workers who can:
 - intervene in non-emergency situations
 - interrupt disruptive behaviour
 - conduct wellness checks
 - connect people with services
- Consider **carrying a naloxone kit** which are available for free at certain pharmacies. Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre offers a 1 hour training program on how to recognize an opioid overdose and the use of naloxone to reverse it.

At a broader community level, the WNC has offered to host a community safety audit and suggested a nighttime safety walk. We will discuss that more with them.

We'll also look into things we can do as a community to help the refugee population living in the shelter – stay tuned!

Other Action Items:

ACTION.

- We need to revive the idea of community safety audits. Bushra will work on organizing a safety walk for night time walking concerns.
- Natasha at Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre has offered space to regularly meet and discuss these and other safety issues.
- We should get the Good Neighbour Policy from Ryan Evershed, at the shelter.

Next meeting is Wed Nov 8, 2023 by zoom. Toronto Public Health and the City's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will be invited guests.