



ST. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association Community Meeting

Held on Wednesday, March 31, 2021 from 7 – 9:15 p.m.,

Following the SLNA Annual General Meeting

Hosted on the Zoom Videoconferencing Platform

JAMII – Year in Review

Isorine Marc thanked the SLNA for their support of JAMII, a charitable Arts organization, and gave an overview of their activities throughout 2020. Some highlights were working with 91 artists throughout the year, organizing 101 workshops throughout that period, with an average of 166 audience participants. Some workshops were held on line, some in person, and JAMII produced 34 public events throughout the year. JAMII is the proud recipient of the prestigious Community Arts Award for 2020, awarded by the Toronto Arts Foundation.

Isorine showed photos of performances that were held throughout 2020 and early 2021, and there will be a Photo Exhibition entitled “Looks Like Us” to be held in April/May, with a live-stream opening held this upcoming Saturday. 13 young women were asked to be part of this creative process in choosing the images for the exhibition, and youth participant/curator Huda was invited to share the very moving Artist Statement prepared by this group with us during the SLNA Community Meeting.

Keynote Presentation - Homelessness in Toronto

Updates were presented by Joe Mihevc, Community Liaison, and Ryan Evershed from Homes First, who specifically addressed the status of transitioning clients into the shelter during the first month of its operation at 45 The Esplanade. Ryan, as the Manager of Community Engagement and Client Programming for Homes First, presented a recently developed video. Homes First has been providing supportive housing and shelter for 35 years to all populations, including the ones with the fewest options in Toronto. It currently operates 131 Rent-Geared-To-Income buildings, 5 shelters, 2 warming centres and 1 respite.

45 The Esplanade is one of three temporary emergency hotel programs. The first guests arrived on February 26, 2021. It is a pet-friendly building, day-to-day support is provided, case management support, life skills, job readiness and housing help. The key focus is outreach. There are 134 residents at this point, the intake program is slow and staggered which allows for immediate meetings with clients, building rapport and it has proven to be successful. A new Community Engagement Coordinator has just been hired and will supervise all the programs as well as acting as the point person for donations. Ryan thanked everybody for donations received. Ryan made the point that the hotel programs are a stepping stone towards independent living rather than shelter living.

Joe Mihevc presented several slides. Housing is getting tighter and tighter, and Toronto's shelter system provides more than 6,000 spaces and more than 2,300 spaces in new temporary shelters and hotel programs. Challenges in the shelter system have been exacerbated due to covid-19 as well as the opioid crises. A lot of the services are located downtown, but the city has moved a number of services outside the core. There has been an overall reduction of shelter capacity in the downtown wards, even with the addition of temporary hotel programs. Spadina-Fort York has seen the number of shelter beds decrease, and additional relocations and bed closures are planned for both Wards 10 and 13. The City's goal is to open new shelters in neighbourhoods all across Toronto so that people can stay within their communities. Those sites will be in close proximity to community services (such as libraries, public parks, pharmacies and health care services), and of course close to public transportation.

During the pandemic the city also looked for sites that are turn-key ready, with minimal retrofits required; sites of suitable size to meet physical distancing guidelines and for sites that are available, accessible and affordable.

-3-

The Community Engagement Actions currently underway are the hiring of a Community Engagement Facilitator; Tracking of community concerns; the February 18th Information Session; ongoing Electronic Community Bulletins; Community Safety Planning and Audits and the creation and facilitation of a Community Liaison Committee (CLC) which began in March. The Advisory group is made up of representatives of community organizations such as resident associations and BIAs and meets regularly with Homes First and the Community Engagement Facilitator.

Sign up to receive email bulletins and updates at clc.45theesplanade@gmail.com

During the question period Stewart asked if there has been any evidence of success in moving people out of encampments and Ryan responded that Street to Homes who are doing direct referrals are in charge of the numbers in this regard and they specifically targeted encampments. There are approx. 130 guests at 45 The Esplanade at this point, with more expected in the near future.

Don James reported, in regards to community policing, that he attended a workshop on community safety and well-being which was on hold due to covid-19 and will now be reactivated. It encompasses four areas: community trauma, community violence, victimization and community justice, culminating in a “culture of prevention”. 51 Division can provide details on this.

Donna Patterson posed the question of “what are the chances of success of ultimately finding affordable housing for the current 45 The Esplanade guests, which is likely the ultimate goal?” to both Joe and Ryan. Ryan responded to the question that this is an ongoing struggle, and some individuals have been on a waitlist for close to a decade. A few people from 45 The Esplanade have been able to be housed. In many cases it is not just a matter of finding affordable housing but also specifically finding supportive housing with access to ongoing community services. He made the points that all levels of government need to be involved in this process. Joe added that the social housing waiting list numbers 100,000 in the City of Toronto, and individuals putting their name on the waiting list may be on there for the next 15 years. The list for social housing with support (i.e. a social worker assists the client) presently numbers 20,000. Joe described this as a

challenge for the next generation. Agencies such as Homes First and the Fred Victor Mission, as an example, actually employ “housing help workers” who try to find housing for their clients against incredible odds.

-4-

Mary MacDonald raised the question of the 45 The Esplanade lease with Novotel which runs until December 31 and does not stipulate an extension. This being the case, where would people go at that point? Joe and Ryan responded that nobody really knows at this point how this is going to develop. Vaccinations will of course be further along, but there are many other considerations. Ryan pointed out that 45 The Esplanade is a Social Distancing Site.

COMMUNITY UPDATES

Suze Morrison – Toronto Centre

MPP Suze Morrison reported on unsuccessful negotiations within the legislature in areas of priority as opposition – Paid Sick Leave for all workers, Pay Increases for Support Workers, Better Protections for long term care homes, Eviction ban, Rent Subsidies, and commitments for more investment in public housing. They hosted a successful Telephone Town Hall regarding access to vaccinations. Her office would be happy to help with any public enquires in this regard.

Chris Glover – Spadina – Fort York

MPP Glover congratulated the SLNA and all involved, including the Friends of the Foundry, on their success in stopping the demolition of the Foundry. The fight continues.

He started a coalition group, the Federation of the South Toronto Residents’ Associations, running from Bloor Street down to the Lake, and from the Humber River to the Don River. The coalition is modelled after the Federation of North Toronto Residents’ Association and will be run by the community at this point. The idea is to get a coalition to amplify our voices because the community voice and the municipal voice in local planning decisions is being completely overridden by the Provincial government and we need to be able to fight back.

Chris also reported on a number of incidents of anti-Asian racism experienced not just in Toronto but throughout the country, and there was big a rally on Sunday in support of the Asian community attended by Kristyn Wong-Tam and many others,

a number of people gave very powerful speeches. Being there was a really great antidote to the anger and hate that fuels this kind of attack on people. It was a call

-5-

for solidarity. We need to stand up against any kind of racism, it is completely unacceptable.

A year ago Chris started an initiative to feed vulnerable residents, seniors and individuals facing homelessness, and at this point the Spadina-Fort York community care program feeds 1,000 residents a week, including some food-insecure residents at the Older Women's Network Co-op. It operates out of the St. Lawrence Market tent from 4:30 – 6:30 on Saturdays. There will also be tables set up to help seniors with the vaccine registration process, and Stewart pointed out that the SLNA has started a similar process for our community members and could provide additional volunteers if needed. Please contact Chris Glover's office if you require assistance with the vaccine appointment booking process.

Tom Davidson – Ward 10

Tom reported on the Lakeshore Boulevard Public Realm plan for the Gardiner, they undertook the design and scheduling is still to be determined.

They are looking ahead at the timing of major infrastructure projects with the East Bay Front LRT, and potentially other transportation improvements related to the Lower Yonge precinct and reconfiguration of ramps. The Toronto Island Park master plan process has been launched and is underway.

Kristyn Wong-Tam – Ward 13 – Toronto Centre

Councillor Wong-Tam reported that there are 290 structures (definition: a tent, a dome or a small box) in 45 parks across the city. The Novotel is a hotel shelter, for temporary use until December, and destined to house people from 4 encampments only. There are another 35 structures in 31 different public right-of-ways, such as laneways, sidewalks, etc. There are 43 structures at Trinity Bellwood, 34 at Lamport Stadium, 61 at Alexander Park and 17 at Moss Park. Not every structure houses a person, some individuals own more than one, they don't exactly represent the number of people. So there should be more than enough rooms at the Novotel for those four shelters. From those four encampments the city has already housed 375 people during the pandemic over the last year, moving in and out. The Streets

to Home staff canvass the encampments and compensate the residents for filling in surveys, etc. Out of the surveys they learned that 19% of the people are from the

-6-

GTA, the GTA donut across the city. That means the balance of everybody else is not from the GTA.

Out of the folks they surveyed 70% have been under-housed and/or homeless, anywhere from 2 years to 12 years, without a stable address. This clearly indicates that there is no straightforward path to permanent housing.

First Parliament Site: this project obviously represents a significant part of our Canadian history and the preservation and appropriate commemoration of this site is now under threat given Metrolinx's plans to expropriate the site. While they indicate that heritage preservation and commemoration will be respected and incorporated into the development we have no control as to what that will look like. The SLNA is focused on pushing for ownership to remain with the city and Ontario Heritage Trust.

A consultation/town hall is being hosted by our Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam on April 15 and Metrolinx representatives will be there. All SLNA members and residents of the neighbourhood are encouraged to attend. A flyer is being produced by the City and will be circulated shortly.

Of concern is information that we have indicating that the province seeks to own and control deeded ownership of the site by August 2021.

Market Lane Park: completion of this park is tentatively set for autumn of 2022. To date there have been significant delays primarily because of the archeological assessment, but hopefully going forward the work will progress smoothly. This work will cost approximately \$3.2 million, and is being entirely funded through Section 37 funds.

The next SLNA Community Meeting will be held on April 28.