



Doly Begum

Member of Provincial Parliament
Scarborough Southwest



18th June 2019

Dear neighbour,

Two weeks ago my office was notified of a Committee of Adjustment application by the Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society (TWHLS) to obtain some minor variances for a proposed development for a Healing Lodge at 2217 Kingston Road. Usually, there is no role for the local MPP in a routine application such as this because planning falls under municipal jurisdiction. However this proposal has generated significantly more interest than most Committee of Adjustment applications, and many of you have been reaching out to my office about this.

My first reaction upon hearing about the proposed Healing Lodge for Indigenous women was curiosity. Like many of you, I had a lot of questions.

When I was a student going through Ontario's education system, we spent very little time in the classroom learning about Indigenous history and the intergenerational impacts of the past that echo into the present. The dark legacy of residential schools, a broken foster care system, disproportionate rates of incarceration and poverty, inadequate access to healthcare, education, and clean water, and the systemic racism Indigenous Canadians face were simply not covered in classrooms.

I'm disappointed that under the current provincial government, this learning gap is only getting worse. A plan for a curriculum rewrite with more Indigenous content was cut, and an initiative that would have supported Indigenous languages being taught in kindergarten was cancelled at the same time. This curriculum update was intended to incorporate in-depth studies on residential schools, and would have been integrated across different class subjects, such as geography and social studies.

On Wednesday, June 12th, the TWHLS hosted a public meeting to answer questions from the community about the Healing Lodge proposal and how it will fit into our neighbourhood. As a local resident (I live within a 5-minute walk of the proposed site), I joined hundreds of you from the Birch Cliff area and across Scarborough to learn more at the meeting.

I grew up in Scarborough Southwest and have lived here for most of my life. It has always been a community of rich diversity and inclusivity, where we rally to support our neighbours. It was heartening to see so many people at the meeting stand up and speak in support of welcoming this project to our community.

TWHLS President Patti Pettigrew and her team were generous enough to organize this information session and also took the time to sit down with me and my staff earlier this week to share their expertise. I know that some of you have some remaining questions. Hence, the TWHLS team have made themselves available to personally answer any questions that residents have about the project - you can reach them at twhls.inc@gmail.com.

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The proposal is for a 6-story Healing Lodge to be built by the Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society with funding from the federal and provincial governments, and it will be the first of its kind in Ontario. It has drawn inaccurate comparison to other facilities that use the name “healing lodge”, which are operated by Corrections Canada in the western provinces, but this is an unfortunate misappropriation of the name. While those sites are correctional facilities, the TWHLS proposal is for a residential facility for women transitioning back into society, who have either never been convicted or have already served their full sentences and have been released.

Scarborough Southwest has the largest number of Indigenous residents of any riding in the City of Toronto. The women who will benefit from the Healing Lodge already live here in our community, but currently have no culturally relevant supports to help them reintegrate into society. The wrap-around services and focus on rehabilitation at the Healing Lodge will enable these women to find employment and housing.

Everyone in Ontario deserves an opportunity to build a life for themselves. To build strong, safe communities where we support one another, we must fulfill our collective responsibility by welcoming services for neighbours who are looking to turn their lives around.

Earlier this month the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls released their final report, and put into sharp focus the work we still need to do as a society towards meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. This is a small step - the site only houses 24 women at a time. But this healing site not only has the potential to transform the lives of its residents; it also gives those of us who are not the native people of this land an opportunity to educate ourselves about Canada’s history and the work we need to do towards reconciliation. It is a chance for us to write the story of our community as an inclusive one dedicated to supporting our neighbours in need of a helping hand.

In light of the increased interest in this proposal, the TWHLS have made the decision to defer their application to the Committee of Adjustment and have generously offered to conduct more community consultations. This will include small group discussions to allow everyone to have their voices heard and get the chance to ask their questions directly to TWHLS. I strongly encourage you to contact the Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society (twlhl.inc@gmail.com) if you need more information or wish to participate in one of their upcoming Q & A sessions, and then join me in supporting the proposal.

Scarborough Southwest is an inclusive community where we have a tradition of helping out our neighbours. I’m proud to live here and proud to represent you at Queen’s Park. Together, I hope that we can welcome this important healing space into our neighbourhood.

Yours truly, serving you,



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