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City Councillor | Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina

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Dear Neighbours,

As we grow as a city, we must ensure we are working together to build liveable neighbourhoods. We've worked hard these last three years together in the Annex to ensure we're building a neighbourhood that is liveable, sustainable, and equitable - a community where we manage change, where all are welcome, and where all residents of our city have access to the services and supports they need. Today, I'm writing to inform you of a critical step our City is taking to address a growing service need in our community.

Earlier today, I was joined by the Annex Residents' Association, Former Governor General and local resident the Rt. Hon. Adrienne Clarkson, and other local community members to announce that as part of the city's efforts to address growing homelessness, a new shelter will be opened at 348 Davenport Road in our community. Below, you will find information on the announcement, the critical need in our city, and next steps.

Over the past number of years, our community has continued to face growing development pressure. From applications along Dupont and 300 Bloor Street West, to the OMB appeals at 316 Bloor, 342-346 Davenport and 115 Dupont, to our work together on countless other applications, we are no strangers to the impact of development on a neighbourhood. We've worked proactively to implement change across our communities, through work on the Bloor Visioning Study, Bloor Block Plan and Davenport Triangle Study, and more. Our hard work together has been critical in managing growth and achieving our collective goals. However, as you know, development pressure has continued.

At the same time, our city is facing an unprecedented affordable housing crisis. The waiting list for affordable housing has grown to 181,000 people. That's 181,000 people who do not have an affordable place to call home. The list for supportive housing – housing for those in need of support to find and keep housing - is now years long. And, as we all know, housing prices continue to skyrocket.

This, along with other factors, has seen the number of Torontonians experiencing homelessness continue to grow rapidly. And our shelter system has struggled to respond. With the capacity of our shelter system regularly at 100%, those in need of a bed are unable to find one. This winter we have faced historic freezing temperatures, and reports of shelters over capacity revealed a growing need for shelter space. Additional emergency respite centres have been opened to respond to the demand, so that everyone in our city is able to seek shelter from the cold. To merely meet the current demand, we must open 1,000 spaces in new permanent shelter facilities in our city as soon as possible. We need permanent solutions in our system, and waiting until we can build affordable housing for over 181,000 people simply isn't an option.

Recently, the City became aware of yet another property for sale on Davenport Road. Rather than allowing it to become yet another development site, the City sought to purchase 348 Davenport Road for use as a shelter, with my support. After the very recent fulfillment of legal requirements, the purchase of the site can now be made public.

Over the coming months, 348 Davenport Road will be renovated for accessibility, during which time city staff will design the program to ensure that it meets the standards set out in the city's new shelter model. This includes integrating health supports and wrap-around support services like housing, employment, and case management. It will also include engaging residents, community organizations, and businesses to identify ways the local community can come together and support people staying at the shelter.

As I outlined above, securing new shelter space is critical, but also subject to a number of city policies and procedures. Firstly, real estate negotiations are legally required to be kept confidential, as you can imagine. Thus, once we were made aware that the transaction was confirmed, we made arrangements to announce and communicate the update to the local neighbourhood. Secondly, shelter services are located based on need. The need for housing supports and services is high in the downtown, and thus securing and opening new shelter spaces in downtown areas is a critical part of the work in addressing homelessness.

Finally, a shelter is an as-of-right land use on an arterial road (like Davenport Road) in our city – no approvals by any legislative body are required, and are thus not part of the process. City staff conduct a thorough review of real estate options, consider opportunities based on the need and their professional assessment, and pursue real estate transactions based on this review. Once a purchase is confirmed, a process begins to work with the local neighbourhood to discuss how the services can be incorporated into the community. This is the part of the process we are now beginning.

Additionally, as demand on the City's shelter system has continued to increase, the extreme cold has exacerbated an already critical situation. To respond, the City has opened a number of emergency winter respite sites, to provide drop-in support for those seeking shelter from the cold. Beginning next week, 348 Davenport Road will be added to the system as an emergency winter respite site, to be used on an as-needed basis, to ensure everyone in the city has access to a safe and warm place to stay.

In the coming weeks, I will be hosting an information session on the new 348 Davenport shelter with City of Toronto Shelter Support and Housing staff for the local neighbourhood. I encourage all of you to attend to learn more about these new services coming to our community, and to contact my office for information.

Our neighbourhoods will not truly be liveable unless they are equitable and supportive. We have a duty to build communities that are inclusive, where all are welcome, and where we support each other. Everyone in our city deserves access to a safe space to call home, a place to live in dignity. Welcoming services for those in our community experiencing homelessness is our collective responsibility.

I grew up in the Annex, and have lived here most of my life - our neighbourhood is and always has been, an inclusive community. Together, I look forward to welcoming our new neighbours, and continuing our work to build a city for all.

Sincerely,



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