

Community Working Session

Living Space Relocation Review – Part 3

Tues, Feb 6, 2024

7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

The working session included approximately 50 participants, including a diverse mix of residents of Timmins. This summary was written by Nicole Swerhun and Matthew Wheatley from Third Party Public. As facilitators that are not advocating for any particular outcome of the Relocation Review, the intent is to capture the perspectives shared during the discussion, not to assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives. Note that points are numbered in this summary for ease of reference only and are not intended to imply that some points are more important than others. A draft of this summary was distributed for participant review prior to being finalized. Suggested edits have been incorporated.

Feedback related to the Draft Outcomes of the Relocation Review

The Draft Outcomes of the Living Space Relocation Review:

- 1 What's happening in Timmins is not ok. Timmins is not alone in facing these issues. A lot is happening to try and address them.
- 2 There are significant problems with Living Space today. Different people describe the problems in different ways.
- 3 There is a lot of common ground on how to improve the shelter, regardless of its location.
- 4 Relocation alone will not necessarily solve the problems with Living Space. All location options have risks that need to be considered.
- 5 There is a willingness in the Timmins community to try and work together to make Timmins better. Trust needs to be built. Accountability needs to be shared. There is an urgent need to act.

1. Overall feedback:

- The Draft Outcomes did reflect the conversations we had.
- The Draft Outcomes are too business-like and don't include the need for healing or the need for processes for healing. If 4 out of 5 people living outdoors are Indigenous, how do we deal with that?
- There needs to be a focus more on the businesses and residents being impacted. There is not enough recognition in the process of the fact that homeowners and business owners around Living Space are at the breaking point. People defecating on other people's property was identified as a major issue. There were questions to the CDSSAB about whether this is fair. *In response, Brian Marks said that none of this is fair. The Federal government has the funds, the Provincial government has the jurisdiction, and municipalities are left to deal with the problem.* A question was asked about whether the CDSSAB budget increases if they serve more people. *Brian said no, there aren't additional resources if more people are served, but there are additional costs to the municipality because if more people are homeless, then that means Timmins pays more to support the paramedics, the police, and other services. It's in all of our interest to end homelessness.*
- There was a question about the thought process behind the location of the shelters to date? *Brian said that homelessness has evolved from 2012 to today. The location at Cedar Street was selected because it had been a boarding house, but the space used for the shelter was too crowded and there was no way to separate people. The space on Spruce Street became available and it was bigger, included different spaces so we could separate groups at risk (there is a second floor for women, including beds*

for clients of the Ontario Native Women's Association), and the site was zoned properly. So that's why we moved the shelter there.

- There were concerns that the current approach is enabling people and that “tough love” is required. Another participant shared through one-on-one feedback that “tough love” is exactly what nuns in residential schools gave to First Nations children. These impacts have damaged generations of people in need of healing. This is not the answer.
- There was a person who works with people experiencing homelessness in the room who asked others in the room to please stop posting videos on social media of people who are struggling while workers are trying to keep people alive. In response, another participant shared frustration and fear about assaults from people who are homeless. *Mark Vallier from the Timmins Police Service was at the meeting and said that if people are trying to make the connection between homelessness and violent crime, it's his experience (as the person leading the investigation of violent crimes for the Timmins Police) that the vast majority of violent crimes that occur in Timmins are between people who know each other. There are exceptions, but stranger on stranger violent crime is not the norm.*

2. Draft Outcome 5:

- A participant said that instead of referring to the need for more awareness and understanding of First Nations history, just call it what it is, which is – colonization. After working in the field for 17 years in social work, up the coast, and a lot of work on addictions and mental health, we know that addiction is a disease. Penalizing people with an illness such as addiction and mental health has not helped. There is absolute recognition that trauma is passed outwards, and the people of Timmins and around Timmins are impacted as well. If we're going to heal as a community, we need more transparency and calling it what it is. There are impacts and intergenerational impacts. It's odd to say that an Indigenous person is homeless on stolen lands.

Implementation advice for the Relocation Review Steering Committee to consider

1. There are a lot of misconceptions, broadly speaking, in the community and in all sectors.

- I work with patients in the hospital and I learned a lot today. The work people are doing is astonishing, and they are undervalued and underpaid. The problems at Living Space are systemic and moving it somewhere else will in no way address the shortcomings we are trying to address. It would be much better if service providers do what they're supposed to do, but there is a clear funding gap – and an expectation that they'll solve so many of these problems, which is ridiculous. The problem is widespread. There must be some type of political action to work towards getting more funding.
- From the people I speak to, about 75% of people living outdoors are from out-of-town. *In response, a staff member from Living Space said that the data collected by the shelter shows that shelter clients who are not from Timmins have been living in Timmins for an average of 10 years.* It was agreed by both speakers, and many other participants in the room, that more data on this would be helpful to share publicly.

2. We need to work together as a community.

- I'm 17 and I started using at 12 and I can relate to a lot of people – overdosed, pills, heroin. People need help. Everyone needs to work together. Drug addiction affects you in a negative way, and it affects the users too. If we move facilities, it won't do anything if we don't help these people. No matter where we put this, we will have complaints. There will be needs no matter where it's located. Stigmatism and stereotypes need to end before this City gets any better. We need volunteer systems to help people.
- We had a good discussion with different opinions. All agree we need to work together to make something happen. To help this, the Steering Committee needs to have representation from the general public – people could apply. This would go far in bringing people together and making informed decisions. Thank you for coming and helping get to where we are today.

3. We need more transparency.

- We need to highlight that there isn't a lot of clarity on where to go if you need services. It's like running around with your head cut off when you're on drugs. We need more rehab.
- We need an infographic or education opportunity that's available for the general public that has stats on who is homeless in the community. Who is under the poverty line. What homelessness is, including couch surfing. And crime rates. Would be wonderful to have that readily available so we can have more informed conversations.
- We need clarity on where the money is going to.
- We need transparency on what it's actually costing our youth to rent a place – what the cost of living is and what affordability looks like. It's difficult to be housed or get an apartment. We need transparency on who regulates slums and makes sure units are well kept.
- The Relocation Review process has been good and the Steering Committee's work is on track. Continue to do the work and continue with the transparency.

4. The Relocation Review report and Action Plan need to remain alive – both the negative and the positive. People are doing hard work to improve the community. We need to give you permission to fail and show us the trends on how things are going.

5. We need clarity on what success looks like. Is it reducing the number of homeless people or a reduction in crime?

6. Continue advocacy to fund more services like policing, mental health, social assistance for a better living wage to prevent homelessness.

Next steps:

The Third Party Public team will be taking all feedback received by Feb 20, 2024, refining, and then finalizing the Outcomes of the Relocation Review. In addition to in-person working sessions, there is an online feedback form at www.livingspacereview.ca that asks the same questions.

The Relocation Review report will be delivered by Third Party Public to the Relocation Review Steering Committee on February 29, 2024 and also distributed to all participants in the process. It will also be posted online at www.livingspacereview.ca.