

Public Debrief & Sparks Pizza

Living Space Relocation Review – Part 3

Sat, Feb 10, 2024

11:00 am – 1:00 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

The purpose of this Public Debrief and Light Lunch was to provide an opportunity for those with an interest in the emerging results of the Relocation Review to reflect on the learnings from the week together, with food. There were approximately 40 participants, including a diverse mix of residents of Timmins. Following a presentation of the feedback received during the week (see presentation on the Relocation Review website [here](#)), there was open discussion with the microphone moving around the room. The notes below summarize the thoughts shared by participants during this open discussion. 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 for ease of reference only and the numbers are not intended to imply that some points are more important than others.



Participants made the following comments following the presentation that shared the Draft Outcomes of the Relocation Review, along with the feedback on those Draft Outcomes shared during working sessions this week.

1. We need to address the over-supply of legal prescription drugs that leads to addictions:
 - People get addicted to drugs often through no fault of their own. My wife had surgery 4 years ago and still has painkillers from that time that she has not used, along with a refill that she can fill automatically without re-connecting with her doctor. This should not be how things work. Drugs are too easily prescribed. Workers are doing their best. People get addicted and then they can't function. They lose their job, lose their house, and they're on the street. We need to nip this in the bud. We need to get a petition going. We need to write a letter and get all the local mayors to sign it and get disgruntled community members to sign it. We need to get signatures from other towns and cities too – Sault St Marie, Sudbury, Ottawa, and others. Get them to sign it and get our numbers up. We have a pipeline directly to the Premier through our former Mayor. And we should send it to the federal government too.
2. We need an answer to the lack of public washrooms. When I have a shower, a washroom, and clean clothes, I feel better. The same is true for people that are homeless. I understand that businesses don't want to open the doors to their washrooms. The answer is to have port-a-potties in Timmins and a business in town that cleans them every day. We also need garbage cans with City staff cleaning them every day.

3. We need to focus on the people reaching out for help. There are too many barriers for them. It's very hard to become clean and it's hard to stay clean. Let's remove those barriers. If someone wants to become clean, let's help them. It's also a problem across the country – homelessness and addictions. My community of Fort Albany is dealing with this too. It's an issue that's dividing communities that have no room to be divided. This is a common issue for all of us. It impacts everybody. That's why we're all here. I'm thankful for this work.

When this work started, people were afraid to go to the meetings because people are angry. When you call for a general meeting, it's an opportunity for anyone to express their thoughts and their frustrations. We shouldn't get angered. At the same time, let's provide a balanced perspective. Let's make sure we get the facts straight. Let's make sure people understand the history of First Nations people in Canada.

Technically I'm a homeless person. A displaced, disempowered person. I don't have any title to land, my home – I have no title to anything. I'm a walking homeless person. And that's probably one of the biggest problems with this country. That lack of understanding, that lack of knowledge. If we want to fix something, let's sit down together at the table again.

4. From all the information in the presentation this morning, the part that impacted me the most was the feedback from the people using the shelter – their concerns and the solutions they provided. The solutions are so simple and they don't cost millions of dollars. It really resonated with me and I think really resonated with a lot of people.
5. Homelessness doesn't just happen. What's our role in this story? We need to have room for healing to happen. I live in Timmins and I've been to the Relocation Review working sessions in November and also this week. I feel a lot of people are touching on things that we need to pay attention to.

People living outdoors are among the strongest and wisest people I know. My mom was one. She died a week after her 45th birthday and her funeral was the day before my birthday. My mom went to Indian Day School and experienced the “tough love” that some people earlier this week said was needed. For my mom, “tough love” was being flogged by nuns with whips. My mom's family fell apart because of the repercussions of that institution. I don't mean to trigger people, but these things need to be discussed.

The last time I visited my mom she was with her street family. And they're all gone. One lost their daughter in a house fire; how do you recover from that? Sexual abuse happened, who would want to stay with that? What I learned from her was that there was no help back home, and there was no help here 10 years ago in an urban setting. I disagree that “we're all victims”. I'm not a victim. We're the strongest people I know. One of the teachings in trauma-informed care is to restore people's humanity. This happens when you get to know people, listen to their stories, and treat people as humans. It's hard because people living outdoors, living on the street, don't need to explain this to any of us.

I appreciate how all of this is written-up as part of the Relocation Review, but it's all very business-like. People are claiming ownership of “our issue” and there seems to be little to no effort to get at the root of the issues. We can find all band aid solutions, but what will that do if we don't get to the root of the issue? The point isn't to catch people as they're dying. Homelessness doesn't just happen. We need to think about what's our role in this story? We have to make an effort to listen to each other.

I needed to participate in a few meetings before I got to the point where I could talk to a room full of people about this. I want to acknowledge the ways people feel about this and the trauma they're experiencing. I believe it may be vicarious trauma too.

The people in this room are not homeless – most of us have our own bed or own room. That's monumental. Think about how easy it is to lose all that – it doesn't take a lot. Education is one way to debunk misunderstandings and misinformation. It's an emotional issue. It's emotional to talk to each other. No matter how big or small the room is.

6. We should be bringing in police to deal with the drug dealers. People in this room know who and where the dealers are. They've been there a long time. But nothing's being done about it. The pushers keep on pushing – and nothing is said and nothing is done about them. I know where they are. The cops can't say they don't know where they are.
7. When it comes to drug dealers, if the police know who they are and we know what real estate they own and what cars they drive, what are we missing? I like the petition idea – let's go right to the top. I was hesitant to say anything. I've been homeless, I've been a drug addict. The ruling 1% will judge you. Anyway, thank you so much. This was heartwarming for me.
8. I used to not believe in mental illness. I thought if you didn't help yourself, you weren't worth my time. Then I joined the army a few years ago and I got hurt while I was training. I experienced some brain damage because of a fall. The point is that I learned very quickly that depression is real. Loss of hope and loss of aspiration is real. I've learned what alcoholism and addiction is like. What sleeping outside is like. But if you have ever withdrawn from alcohol or THC or even just caffeine, you know it's not fun. Withdrawal from opioids, that is something else. I saw how good it was when we first moved up here to Timmins a few years ago when it really did feel like a city with a heart of gold. We can't just burn everything down; we have to improve on what exists. We have to have integrity and step up and be very patient. A lot of people want to help themselves and they're never given a chance. Everyone is human. We're all doing the best we can.
9. We need to put the effort in – people need our help. Today's the day we're going to start. Who here has dealt with addictions? I'm not 2 years sober yet, but I'm 17 years old. We just keep kicking people while they're down. Youth are dying. We see people in the street dying. We need rehab for youth – the Jubilee Centre won't take us. People need help. We need to work together, not against each other. We need to respect each other. We are supposed to be the city with a heart of gold.
10. About the services provided at the Living Space Emergency Shelter (as shared by shelter management): The toilets at the Living Space shelter are not for public access. If someone came to the window of the shelter and said they urgently needed to use the toilet, we would let them in. A cook started at the shelter in early January of this year. A meal is provided every morning and there are other meals provided in the community. If there is a gap in a community meal, then lunch or dinner is provided at the shelter.

Next steps:

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.