



December 2, 2021

Dear Mayor & Council:

As per the request from the City Clerk and our Legal Counsel, Doug Kearns, this letter is our response to the concerned citizens that submitted correspondence to the City of Elliot Lake regarding the zoning change requests for 7 Diefenbaker Court and 143 Frobel Ave. We ask that this correspondence be read aloud during the zoning meeting on Dec. 6th, 2021.

We would like to take this opportunity to address these concerns and provide some awareness. At least nine of these letters from citizens are extremely discriminatory and flag a human rights issue. This is why this process of zoning changes has been challenged by human rights organizations. This is not a constructive process. Can you imagine how the vulnerable people that we support currently feel with the onslaught of negative comments this has prompted on social media? That was brought to our attention this morning by a previous resident of Larry's Place. It is destructive to the human spirit. We would like the public to be aware that most vulnerable people have experienced extreme childhood trauma, in the form of physical and/or sexual abuse and extreme neglect. This assault continues into adulthood with incredible stigmatization, less chances for education and privileged jobs and a society that thinks these individuals should lose their sense of agency, when accepting support from organizations. We challenge these actions and ask that the people living in a nice neighbourhood, in a nice home, become part of the solution and not part of the problem. Be a

good neighbor and offer support and acceptance. Othering and saying that “They do not belong in our neighbourhood” is discriminatory. May we also remind you that the women we are proposing to live at 143 Froebel, are women that have experienced Gender-Based-Violence and you are telling them they are not good enough to live in your neighbourhood. We challenge you to re-direct your thoughts and energy to the partners who have committed this abuse, instead of the survivors. Again, be part of the solution. When you see Gender-Based-Violence and control, let the abuser know, THAT is not acceptable. Be a good citizen and neighbour.

Regarding the letter on the issue of harm reduction and transparency, thank you for bringing this subject up. It provides us with an opportunity to provide further awareness. Yes, in 2013, Maplegate made a conscious decision to change to a harm reduction model for the following reasons:

1. At that time, we realized that we were not accessible to the most vulnerable people and put up barriers to access to support. We continuously had a 50% occupancy rate because we were operating on an abstinence model. All women needing support should have access to that support. They choose us. We do not choose them. That is not our job. That is discriminatory. The shelter system in Ontario, has in most part moved to a harm reduction model because of this issue. Again, many of these individuals have experienced extreme trauma as a child. There is no difference at the men’s shelter. When they choose to share, their stories, they are just as heart breaking. Sometimes they choose substances to numb out the pain of past trauma and the isolation from a society that does not accept them, rather than society addressing the real issues of child abuse, mistreatment and inequity in society.
2. We choose to be there as an organization, to support everyone who needs it. We choose to be a leader in harm reduction in our area. Are we perfect in our approach? Absolutely not but are working towards it. We posted our strategic plan that was developed with consultants, to address some of our challenges. This is transparency. We as an organization, still provide support to those that need it by removing barriers to service until we do get it right. Let’s be clear, we do work with all of the other agencies in town in a collaborative manner, to provide wrap around supports for individuals. We are not the Oaks Centre. That is not our service. Please do not compare apples and oranges. They provide another very valuable service on the continuum of abstinence to harm reduction. Sometimes abstinence works. Sometimes harm reduction works, and may we add that harm reduction is a supported model by public health, to protect the individuals and the community. People should have choices about what works best for them. People are individuals and are different. We choose not to take rights away.

Regarding the letters that question the transition houses being occupied during the pandemic, before the process of a zoning change, we would like to provide awareness on these processes and how they came about. The Federal Government chose to support humanity during the pandemic and provide supports and funding to protect the vulnerable populations. The Government asked non-profit organizations to step up and work through the pandemic to provide alternate and creative supports to provide protection to vulnerable citizens during the pandemic. The Government realized that we have a housing shortage and thus has not provided options for vulnerable people. The Provincial Government, in collaboration passed legislation suspending planning timelines and zoning changes for Municipalities, to facilitate this action. They ensured this “through the enactment of Bill 189 (titled the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Support and Protection Act, 2020) and the passage of new Ontario Regulation 149/20 (O. Reg. 149/20). Through these enactments, the Province has (a) retroactively exempted the Planning Act from O. Reg. 73/20 and (b) created a new set of rules to govern the timelines for decision making and appeals under the Planning Act” (<https://www.airdberlis.com/insights/publications/publication/changes-to-planning-act-timelines-during-ontario-state-of-emergency>).

Not only did Maplegate increase their services for the demand in the community during the pandemic, we worked overtime to apply for the funding the Federal Government was providing through the “Reaching Home” initiative, twice, to assist in the purchase of a transition house for men and one for women. We were successful on both applications, to receive grant money to facilitate the protection of vulnerable people during the pandemic. We as an organization boldly stepped up to assist. That is what we do; we focus on being part of the solution. That is why there were men housed in our Diefenbaker location during the pandemic, while we were not encouraged to be out speaking to the public in any form, because they did not want discriminatory barriers put up for people. They just wanted them to be protected with the same right everyone had.

Yes, there has been challenges as always when people live together. During the pandemic, we were also able to apply for additional money to staff the men’s shelter and to provide outreach supports to the transitional houses. Thank you to ADSAB for supporting this measure. This has allowed us to address some of the conflictual challenges. Thank you for supporting us through this stage. May we also state, that we were not the only residence on the street that exhibited challenging behaviours. We support you through your challenges as well. We cut your grass all summer long in an effort to be a good neighbour. We have also deployed a couple of staff to protect the property on Frobel against theft and vandalism, until the zoning process is finished. Yes, there has been theft in the neighbourhood. The OPP came to us to ask for video footage from another property on Frobel that we rent from Retirement Living, which caught the perpetrator on tape. Our residents were in no way involved, but were able to provide assistance to the OPP. We would like to thank Retirement Living for also stepping up during the pandemic and assisting us with space to increase the demand for services. Kudos to Retirement Living for being part of the solution. We have asked Retirement Living to consider changing the zoning of this residence to continue supporting the vulnerable sector and to keep people off the street.

Thank you to the citizen that was a realtor and wrote in and supported the fact that housing prices have not suffered from having a shelter or transition houses in the neighbourhood. The neighbour beside Larry's Place was able to sell their property for a very healthy sum of money. There is a housing shortage across this Province and definitely in our district. Kudos to the wonderful couple that sold us the houses below market value, to support the cause of assisting in the housing shortage and providing homes for vulnerable citizens. Thank you for having integrity.

While we are on this subject, we would like to bring a further issue to the Mayor and Council's attention. We have been discussing with our collaborative partners, the increased need for homelessness, in our region, that the pandemic has accelerated. We need a warming Centre for the winter. We have churches that are asking us to assist in the matter. Collectively, our social service agencies surmise that we have approximately 50 to 60 more homeless individuals that are outside of the capacity of our shelters and transition homes. The faith-based community is up for the challenge to assist us. Would you consider changing the zoning temporarily over the winter, for Larry's Place, to change it to a warming Centre, where we could house more people to eat, shower and sleep for the night and leave during the day. We could work in collaboration with the churches for activities and food during the day, if needed. They have offered to provide the cooked meals for a warming Centre, collaboratively. We have men and their children on a wait list for space at Larry's Place. We also have a wait list for Maplegate. We need to address this need since the weather has become too cold to spend outside at night. This is an urgent matter.

We ask all of you, Mayor and Council, and the citizens of Elliot Lake, to be good neighbours and support Maplegate while we step up to protect the vulnerable citizens in our society. You can do this by changing this stigmatizing process for zoning changes which as I we have said is supported by human rights organizations. You can do this by changing the zoning to meet the needs of our vulnerable citizens. You can do this by changing the zoning for a temporary warming Centre. You can do this by being a good neighbour and providing support. You can do this by supporting Maplegate in stepping up to the challenge. You can do this by being part of humanity that cares. We need that part of all of you.

Respectfully,

Melody Rose/Executive Director

On Behalf of Maplegate and the Board of Directors