

New Warming Centres Across the City

4 new locations this year

- There are four new warming centres opening this winter across: Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, downtown.
- The City has leased the site for use as a Warming Centre for five years, with an option to extend the lease for another five years.
- An online community information session was held on Wednesday, November 1st from 6:30PM-8PM.
- The sites will be opening when needed. When the temperature dips to -5 degrees Celsius from November 15, 2023, to April 15, 2024.
- City Staff will be onsite when the open 24/7, aiding to locate housing, shelter and other needs
- **Further information please contact** Community Engagement Facilitator, Jane Farrow at WeatherResponseTO@gmail.com.

New warming Centre Site in Scarborough-Guildwood - 885 Scarborough Golf Club Road - Former St. John the Divine Church: In the 2021 Street Needs Assessment Survey found about 30% of people experiencing homelessness were in Scarborough. The City will be opening a new warming centre at 885 Scarborough Golf Club Road (former St. John the Divine) to ensure warm spaces are available for those experiencing homelessness during the winter months (from November 15 to April 15). There will be safe indoor spaces for approximately 48 people.

Identifying new Warming Centre sites

In December 2017, City Council updated the process to secure new homelessness services through [CD24.7 - 2018 Shelter Infrastructure Plan and Progress Report](#), which included a new Emergency Shelter Development Process (ESDP). Through the process, **instead of Council approving each new site, the Deputy City Manager was given the absolute authority to approve sites, provided that specific criteria are met. Local Councillors do not choose sites and are not part of the process in their selection.**

The City is hosting a virtual community information session to allow neighbours surrounding each site to ask questions and learn more about Warming Centre operations.

- Date: Wednesday, November 1, 2023
- Time: 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- How to join:
 - [Online through Zoom](#)
 - By Phone: 647-558-0588. Enter the access code 818 7193 2226 followed by #

Further Information regarding New Site Selections

Q. What is a Warming Centre?

A. Warming Centres are a key component of the City's Winter Services Plan. They provide safe, warm indoor places for individuals to rest and access snacks, washroom facilities and referrals to emergency shelters and other community services. Warming Centres are activated when temperatures reach minus 5 degrees Celsius and/or when Environment and Climate Change Canada issues a warning about a winter weather event (i.e., freezing rain, snow squall, winter storm, snowfall and/or blizzard warnings). Once activated, Warming Centres remain open 24 hours a day until it is determined that locations will close due to rise in temperature. Once a Warming Centre closes to new admissions, staff work to refer individuals who remain onsite to alternate spaces.

Q. How can people access Warming Centres?

A. Individuals do not need to contact Central Intake to access a Warming Centre. Walk-ins are accepted. Should someone arrive at a centre to find that it is already at capacity, the City will assist with transportation to another Warming Centre that has space.

Q. What supports are provided to those staying in a Warming Centre?

A. The City of Toronto has a comprehensive approach to providing support to individuals staying in a Warming Centre, offering resting spaces and overnight cots, snacks, washroom facilities and referrals to emergency shelters and other community services. Staff are also trained on harm reduction and overdose prevention and response, and have access to on-site harm reduction supplies, including naloxone.

Q. What staffing is provided at a Warming Centre?

A. Warming Centres are staffed 24/7 for the duration of an activation. In addition to shelter staff, each site is provided with a complement of security staff.

Q. Will the City be activating a 24-hour Warming Centre that stays open all winter as part of its Winter Plan?

A. As directed by Council in May 2023, the City is working to prioritize the opening and operation of 24-hour Respite Sites this winter.

Q. What is the difference between a Warming Centre and a shelter/respice?

A. Warming Centres are activated when temperatures reach minus 5 degrees Celsius and/or when Environment and Climate Change Canada issues a warning about a winter weather event. Shelters and 24-Hour Respite Sites provide temporary accommodation and wrap-around support services year-round, seven days a week, regardless of weather conditions.

Q. Are shelters, 24-hour Respite Sites or Warming Centres pet-friendly?

A. The City is committed to providing pet-friendly services across the shelter system, including Warming Centres whenever possible.

Q. Are Warming Centres accessible?

A. The City is committed to providing accessible services across the shelter system, including Warming Centres whenever possible. The following Warming Centres are accessible:

- 75-81 Elizabeth St.
- 136 Spadina Rd.
- 15 Olive Ave.

Q. How are sites for Warming Centres selected?

A. In response to Council direction, SSHA undertook a comprehensive search for potential Warming Centres. Staff have worked with real estate brokers, faith-based and community groups, and other City divisions and agencies to investigate properties and issued a public Request for Express of Interest (REOI) to call for space. To date, staff have investigated approximately 130 properties across the city for potential Warming Centre use.

Q. Are Warming Centres the only services available to those experiencing homelessness?

A. Warming Centres are a key component of the City's Winter Services Plan and are activated to provide additional spaces during periods of cold and winter weather. The City's shelter system provides emergency shelter and wrap-around support to approximately 9,000 people each night, at more than 100 sites located across the city. The City also provides funding to several daytime drop-in programs. More information on all services for those experiencing homelessness can be found [here](#).

Q. Potential negative impacts (drug use, harmful garbage, etc.) and how will staff address this?

A. The City has a comprehensive approach to providing support to individuals staying in a Warming Centre, offering resting spaces and overnight cots, snacks, washroom facilities and referrals to emergency shelters and other community services. Staff are also trained on harm reduction and overdose prevention and response, and have access to on-site harm reduction supplies, including naloxone. Warming Centres are staffed 24/7 for the duration of an activation. In addition to shelter staff, each site is provided with a complement of security staff.

Q. Risk of increased homelessness with the new warming centre possibly attracting more people experiencing homelessness, potentially leading to an increase in crime, littering, noise, and trespassing.

A. Warming Centres are activated only when temperatures reach minus 5 degrees Celsius and/or when Environment and Climate Change Canada issues a warning about a winter weather event (i.e., freezing rain, snow squall, winter storm, snowfall and/or blizzard warnings). Once activated, Warming Centres remain open 24 hours a day until it is determined that locations will close due to a rise in temperature. Once a Warming Centre closes to new admissions, staff work to refer individuals who remain onsite to alternate spaces.

It is important also to remember that people using Warming Centre services are equal residents of the city. They can move around communities and use amenities such as parks, and public benches like all residents in our city. And like all residents, they are also expected to conduct themselves according to the rules/laws and by-laws.

Q. Safety and Security: There are concerns that the proposed warming center may not have adequate security, sanitation, or supervision to ensure the safety and well-being of both the visitors and our neighbors.

A. The City is committed to the safety and security of residents, staff, and the broader community, and working together to ensure the success of the site. Warming Centres are staffed 24/7 for the duration of an activation. In addition to shelter staff, each site is provided with a complement of security staff. Toronto Police Service, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) and security will work closely to develop ongoing community safety measures for this site.

There is zero tolerance for any violent and/or criminal activity occurring in the shelter or out in the community. As needed, 911 should be called for crimes in progress or the non-emergency police number 416-808-2222 | 416-467-0493 (TTY) to report crimes where no person is in immediate danger (for example, theft, vandalism, fraud). If a client is found to have acted inappropriately, aggressively, violently, or criminally, they will be accountable for these acts.

Q. Property Value and Aesthetic Appeal: The presence of a warming center in close proximity to residential and commercial areas may reduce property values and the aesthetic appeal of our neighborhood.

A. There is no evidence that the shelter will have any impact on property values. When shelters have been situated in new locations, property values have gone up at the same rate as other places in the City of Toronto where there are no shelters.

The [Wellesley Institute](#) found in 2016 that the shelters provided local business and residents with a small economic benefit with no discernible drop in real estate value for homes in the GTA.

In 2008, New York City found that no long-term changes in property values were experienced after the opening of shelters in all parts of the city as reported [here](#).

Q. Failure to Address Root Causes: While a warming center may provide temporary relief, it does not address the root causes of homelessness, such as a lack of affordable housing, mental health issues, and substance abuse problems.

A. The City recognizes that demand for spaces has increased due to housing cost and supply, a volatile economy with high inflation, low wages and income, and

growing demand from asylum seekers. While housing is the ultimate solution to homelessness, it is also critically important that adequate space is available to people who are experiencing homelessness today.

People experiencing homelessness often seek emergency shelters for access to indoor spaces and critical supports that help guide them along the housing spectrum toward permanent housing. This includes receiving housing help services that connect clients to permanent housing opportunities.

In 2019, City Council adopted the [HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan](#), which provides a comprehensive blueprint to assist more than 341,000 households and has a focus on creating permanent housing solutions. This includes 40,000 new affordable rental home approvals of which 18,000 would be supportive housing units. The City works from a Housing First model, with a priority to assist residents to secure permanent housing and provide support to help with transitions to housing.

As housing solutions are being developed, it is critical to ensure adequate indoor space is available in the shelter system for those in immediate need.

Members of the public can sign up to receive email notifications about the activation status of Warming Centres, including openings and closings, by visiting the [City's Warming Centres webpage](#).