

47 Maria Street, Acton
Drop-In Meeting - What We Heard Summary
June 8, 2021

Meeting Summary

To meet the neighbours of 47 Maria Street, Acton and discuss the future plans for the property, the owner, Support House hosted a virtual drop-in meeting via ZOOM on Tuesday June 8, 2021.

Support House is a well-established Halton based non-profit agency that wished to share their plan to redevelop the site to provide affordable rental housing with supports. 51 homes (all within a 120- meter radius of 47 Maria Street) were sent meeting invitations via Canada Post. Approximately 25 residents attended the meeting and 5 e-mails with comments and questions were received.

This summary addresses the questions and comments received by e-mail and in person at the meeting.

Short presentations were made by Paul Gregory, Executive Director of Support House, the development consultant Tim Welch, and the project architect Emma Cubitt from Invizij Architects.

The following plan for 47 Maria Street was outlined:

- A new 2 storey 12-1-bedroom apartment building that will contain 3 accessible units will replace the existing home. There will be 6 parking spaces provided for staff and visitors.
- The units will all be self-contained apartments, and residents will need to be able to live independently, and they can access necessary supports provided by Support House staff or a qualified community partner.
- Support House is moving away from the current model of providing transitional housing for youth on Maria Street and instead will be offering permanent, self-contained housing that is intended for those of all ages who can live independently.
- Support House plans to provide direct support to the residents 7 days a week and will also have an onsite “key tenant” on a 24/7 basis.
- All residents will pay rent and sign a *Residential Tenancies Act* lease. A Support Agreement is included that outlines a resident’s obligations.

Support House is currently moving ahead with Official Plan and Zoning By-Law applications (OPA/ZBA) and these will be discussed on July 5, 2021, at the Town of Halton Hills Council meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to provide an opportunity for public comment on the proposed building under the Planning Act. There will then be a follow up meeting of council where Support House will seek council approval for the land use planning amendments required for this new apartment development.

A question-and-answer portion of the meeting was held, and the discussion notes are contained in the following “What We Heard” section. Many of the comments made at the meeting and in correspondence focussed on some central themes and the responses have been categorized accordingly. Questions and comments have been paraphrased, but accurately reflect what was said and in some cases additional information and clarifications have been added to ensure complete transparency and understanding.

What We Heard

1. Parking/Traffic Issues

Questions and Comments from residents were made regarding:

- *The adequacy of the number of parking spaces to be provided.*
- *The potential impact of additional traffic due to the new building.*
- *Current problems with parking in the neighbourhood.*
- *Concern regarding snow plowing and placement of snow.*

Our Response

A Traffic and Parking Study required by the town and undertaken by Paradigm Transportation Solutions Limited for the OPA/ZBA confirmed that the additional residents will not impact traffic or parking.

47 Maria Street residents will generally not have vehicles. Staff, community partners and visitors can be accommodated with the recommended 6 spaces. Impact to local traffic will be very minimal given that normally only 1-2 staff members/community partners will be working onsite, which is the same as the current usage. The Paradigm study included calculations that were based on several factors including parking usage at existing Support House properties and looked comparatively at community housing parking usage and by-laws in other Ontario cities.

As of June 11, 2021, none of the 44 Support House tenants living in congregate settings (like 47 Maria Street) have a car. Of the other 150 clients living within other Support House properties in Halton, only 4 have cars.

Residents who are experiencing issues regarding snow plowing and ongoing on street parking matters are encouraged to speak to the Town of Halton Hills regarding their concerns.

2. Supportive Housing in Acton

Questions and Comments from residents were made regarding:

- *There is already too much supportive housing in Acton and there are no job opportunities or other opportunities for people in town.*
- *Questions were asked regarding the type of programming/supports that will be offered in the building.*
- *This property should be used for another type of housing.*
- *Thank you for doing this. There is a need for supportive and affordable housing in our community.*

Our Response

As a support agency, Support House works with people to promote health and wellness in the context of person-directed support. Support House recognizes the increased complexity of behaviors at the intersection of mental health, substance use and trauma and we work towards understanding the life experiences that precipitated behaviors. We support people to make informed healthy choices by providing supportive counselling, offering education, service options and appropriate service/resource connections. We also respect the right of clients to personal privacy and to make their own life choices.

Supportive housing is important in any community because it ensures that people are provided housing that includes the help and support they need to maintain it. When unsupported, untreated, and left on their own some people may find themselves in hospital, in contact with the criminal justice system or living on the street. These “options” are very expensive, do not offer adequate supports and do not contribute to a safe and vibrant community.

Support House exists to ensure that the necessary help is available to anyone that requires it. It is important to note that people’s life journeys with mental health and addictions are not linear. All people can have periods where they are thriving and doing very well and at other times may struggle more. It is important that people can work with available supports that will work alongside them through life’s ups and downs.

Including Maria Street, Support House owns three properties in Acton. Plans are to sell one of these properties and move those residents (who are ageing and require accessible housing) to Maria Street. Most of the residents moving into the completed building will be from the Acton

area - which has been their home for quite some time. Existing residents will be temporarily relocated and supported during construction and will return upon completion.

Support House acknowledges that their current transitional and congregate housing model has been challenged to meet the needs of some residents. COVID-19 has also proven that there is a need to change the model. An approach that provides self-contained units, 7-day a week customized supports and permanent housing for the resident is more appropriate. The design and program plan for the new Maria Street building reflects this change in operating principles. Efficiencies in support will also be gained because of increasing the number of units at this location.

Programming and supports for residents will focus on activities of daily living, meaningful activity/occupations, engagement with their circle of care and other life goals. This includes for example, preparing to return to school or work or participating in volunteer opportunities. Helping residents manage relationships and providing the tools to deal with a crisis are all part of the services offered. Support House works with local community partners and has access to a variety of opportunities that will allow their residents to move forward.

Support House is just like any other property owner and wants to improve their properties and assets to serve the growing needs of the community. An independent living housing model that supports mixed age residents and strives to improve their health and wellness is what is absolutely needed on this site. The new building will ensure that more Acton residents will be able to access safe, affordable and supported housing.

3. Community Safety Concerns

Questions and Comments from residents were made regarding:

- *You are bringing more problems into the neighbourhood.*
- *We are already dealing with theft, drugs and safety issues and you are going to make things worse.*
- *You are creating an unsafe environment for our children.*
- *Your track record in this neighbourhood is not good.*
- *What is your plan to deal with problem residents?*

Our Response

In 2013, the Mental Health Commission of Canada reported that [1 in 5 people in Canada](#) experience a mental health issue. 1 in 7 people struggle with an addiction. It is because of this fact that it is vitally important that services and community supports are available for all to promote healthy living, personal stability and issues are addressed before they become far more

difficult to manage. People living with mental health concerns are already living in Acton. Support House feels it is a better option to have them living in a rental apartment where they can access the supports that they need.

As stated by the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), misperceptions about the relationship between mental health, mental illnesses and violence contribute significantly to stigma, discrimination and social exclusion. Studies indicate that people living with mental health conditions are no more likely to engage in violent behaviour than the general population.

Support House also wants a safe and good neighbourhood for its residents. We will be proactively work with the town, neighbours, local community partners and police to begin collectively addressing issues that could impact their residents or others such as the activities that are occurring around the local bridge.

In the context of Support House's focus on wellness and well-being, tenants will be expected and supported to assume responsibility for their behaviour. Behaviour is a factor in determining the suitability of a person for a particular support or housing solution. Our approach is not consequence based or punitive but works towards an understanding within person directed support while balancing the reasonable enjoyment of a group/living space for all residents.

Support House takes its role as a landlord and property owner very seriously. All Support House residents sign a tenancy agreement which is enforceable under the *Residential Tenancies Act*. All obligations are explained in detail to residents. Support House will not tolerate illegal activities or violence on their properties and swift action will be taken to address a problematic behaviour with the resident. Eviction will occur if the incident is of a serious nature.

Many statements and allegations were made at the meeting regarding the conduct of 47 Maria Street residents. As a landlord and neighbour that is committed to dealing with issues as they arise, a protocol has been established to report incidents directly related to the conduct of all its residents.

In the event an issue occurs at the house, you are advised to take the following steps:

- If there are ongoing issues or activities that you feel are of concern, please do not hesitate to call 1-833-845-WELL (9355) and/or info@supporthouse.ca. Please document times and descriptions of the events for us to investigate and follow-up.
- If the event involves an **urgent safety or medical issue, call 911 immediately**. This incident should also be reported to Support House.

Support House is committed to acting on resident's issues and concerns.

4. Building, Property Management and Construction

Questions and Comments from residents were made regarding:

- *Why are you including 12 units instead of 10?*
- *What guarantees do we have that it will not be bigger than 12 units?*
- *The building looks bland and is too close to the road.*
- *Will residents be required to look after the property?*
- *We don't have enough sidewalks and this property isn't adding any.*
- *Could a mixed population or just seniors be housed there?*
- *How long is construction going to take? It is going to cause disruptions to life and traffic.*

Our Response

Support House, with the assistance of Halton Region is investing over \$3 million to improve its property at 47 Maria Street. As such, it is important that this new building fit well into the existing neighbourhood. A professional and experienced development and design team have been assembled and will assist us throughout the development stage of the project. Upon completion it will be operated professionally and will be maintained to a high standard.

Based on demand and financial modelling, 12 units is the maximum number of units that Support House can comfortably afford and manage. More would be too difficult to manage and fewer than 12 units is not financially viable to build.

The pictures of the building presented to the community are preliminary and will be refined over time. It is worth noting that as part of the OPA/ZBA application process, a Heritage assessment of the neighbourhood was undertaken, and the preliminary renderings are designed in keeping with the Town of Halton Hill's heritage design principles. As new drawings are available, they will be shared with you on the [Support House](#) website.

Several comments regarding the lack of sidewalks on Maria and the surrounding streets were made. While Support House is not obligated to provide new municipal infrastructure, a decision has been made to include a sidewalk in front of the house. With respect to the setback of the building from the road, an amendment to the setbacks has been requested and there is nothing from a planning or engineering perspective to indicate that this will present a problem. The proposed design utilizes the site appropriately and safely.

Support House is currently looking at a variety of property management options for their properties and a decision regarding this will occur prior to the opening of the new building.

Support House is working with residents at all properties to ensure that they do take an active role in ensuring their home is well maintained and taken care of.

Construction is expected to take approximately 12 months and some minor and temporary inconvenience may be experienced. Typically, a Construction Management plan is required by the municipality as part of the Building Permit process. The plan will lay out how traffic will be dealt with, how residents will be notified of service interruptions, dust management, etc. As part of the process of selecting a Construction Manager, it will be outlined in the tender that attention will need to be paid to mitigate and limit disruptions in the neighbourhood.

While it was not mentioned at the drop-in meeting, as a diligent landlord Support House is also working with a security consultant in the design phase to ensure that the building is secure and safe for its residents. The consultant will advise on the placement of interior/exterior camera's, exterior lighting etc. In addition, as discussed, a "key-tenant" will also reside at the building to ensure any issues after hours are quickly addressed.

As was mentioned, Support House is moving away from providing transitional housing for youth on Maria Street and instead will be offering permanent, self-contained housing that is intended for those of all ages who can live independently. Support House is also finding success in mixing different ages in their buildings and will be moving some of its ageing residents into Maria Street. The accessibility features in the new building, including an elevator or lift will provide greater independence and mobility for these residents.

5. Moving Forward

In the coming months, Support House will be looking at different opportunities to engage with our neighbours to get to know each other better. Watch our website for updates and invitations for future meetings will be mailed out.