

Harbord Village Residents' Association Board Meeting

Tuesday, December 19, 2023, 7:00– 9:00 pm

by Zoom call

APPROVED MINUTES

Attendees: Sue Dexter, Anne Fleming, Karen Laurence, Tania Lewis, Susan McDonald, Cathy Merkley, Frances-Mary Morrison, Gus Sinclair, Moritz Steinbauer

Regrets: Elizabeth Chen, Kerry Clare, Lena Mortensen, Jane Perdue, Nick Provar, Jody Salomon, Robert Stambula

Special Guest: TJ Amaro, Councillor Saxe's office

1. **Chair's welcome: 7:08**
2. **Approval of Agenda:** When quorum was achieved, Gus moved Agenda be approved; Susan seconded. **The Agenda was approved.**
3. **Approval of the November 21, 2023 Board Meeting Minutes:** When quorum was achieved, Tania moved the minutes be approved; Gus seconded. **The November Minutes were approved.**
4. **Business Arising from Past Minutes:**
 - 4.1 **Money owed CT Community Swim--** Gus reported that he had contacted Fernanda. She was not aware of how much, exactly, was owing. She said she would follow up with Razor, but she didn't think it would be a problem. This matter can be considered resolved.
5. **New Business:**
 - 5.1 **Report from the Chair Zero Waste Pilot** – Anne brought up the PARA email and attached article (https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/07/its-kind-of-gross-but-we-can-do-it-how-a-community-learned-to-go-zero-waste?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other), and asked for board participants. Susan offered, but was not available for the next two months. **Gus** volunteered to reach out to PARA to see what exactly they are looking for, which will allow us to have a better understanding of how we might contribute. **Anne** will send Gus to contact information.
 - 5.2 **Letter to Councillor Saxe about St. Stephen's encampment.** Anne noted, for the minutes, that this letter had been sent (see appendix). There had also been a letter

- sent to the councillor, copied to Urban Forestry and Transportation Services, about the concrete blocks used to deter further encampment (see appendix).
- 5.3 Online survey about interactions with encampments:** Anne noted for the minutes that, after email consultation with the board and neighbours and based on concerns expressed at the AGM, a response to this survey was submitted (see appendix).
- 5.4 Harbord bike lane upgrade:** Sue updated the board on the consultation, noting we are trying to incorporate parts of the Green Plan into the bike lane. Also, concerns were raised about TTC stops and bike lanes, as bicyclists can pose a threat there.
- 5.5 Installation of road line painting:** Anne noted that despite individual and group efforts to get things moving, installation of pedestrian crossings on College Street and bike lanes on Borden Street had still not happened. Anne will continue to seek answers.
- 5.6 Bur oak fund:** Anne noted that this fund had received an excess of \$3000 for the fall depaving project, and asked for suggestions of what should be done with it. Options include holding on to it until the spring to see if there are tree maintenance expenses, or refunding, on a prorated basis, to the donors.
- 5.7 Net zero committee:** Anne mentioned that the committee is having a webinar about solar panels and will be blanketing neighbourhood with promo flyers.
- 6. Succession:** Gus elaborated on the points raised in his document outlining concerns around various aspects of recruiting and maintaining board members (see appendix). After discussion, Gus moved that: **A “striking” committee of Anne and himself be struck to populate a governance committee to deal with these issues.** Tania seconded. **The motion passed.**
- 7. Committee and Area Rep Reports:** Acknowledgement of receipt only unless action or discussion is required.
- 7.1 P & D Update:** Sue updated the board on various developments. Agreement has been reached on the Metro site which will see big public realm improvement, unanimous (except possibly for the councillor). The process is now underway with the Knox Church development.
- 8. Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at by consensus at 8:55.

APPENDICIES

- 1. Chair's letter to Councillor Saxe re: Imminent Eviction of Encampment at St. Stephen's**
- 2. Chair's email to Councillor Saxe re: Concrete blocks at St. Stephen's**
- 3. Chair's response to City of Toronto Encampment Survey**
- 4. Area Rep's December Reports**
- 5. Safe Streets December Report**

HARBORD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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TO: **Dianne Saxe**, Councillor, Ward 11, City of Toronto October 23, 2023

Re Imminent Eviction of Encampment at St. Stephen's

HVRA has recently learned of a Street Occupation Permit issued to a group calling itself "Friends of Bellevue Parkette," granting temporary access to the unpaved patch of land on the south east corner of College and Bellevue, in front of St Stephen's Church. This group is apparently planning to leverage this permit to evict houseless individuals who are currently living there in tents. The purpose of the eviction is ostensibly to establish a pollinator garden, for which the group may also have gotten a city grant.

This information only came to light when the city's Encampment Office informed St Stephen's that an eviction was imminent. No prior notice was circulated to the community about the permit, the garden, or the eviction, nor was any attempt at consultation made.

HVRA is concerned at the lack of solid information on what is happening— or has happened— around a City decision that may lead to the eviction of the residents of the encampment at Bellevue and College. While it is understandable that people are frustrated with the lack of progress after months of issues, this secretive process would seem to set a bad precedent for dealing with this and other encampments. We would like clarification on the following:

- What is the status of this encampment?
- What policies/processes are being used to evict the persons who are living next to St. Stephen's?

We are also concerned about the impact of a sudden eviction. While we recognize that encampments can be unsafe both for those living in them as well as for neighbours interacting with them, to simply evict these vulnerable individuals from this location without a proper housing plan or supports is simply a geographic displacement and does not address longer range solutions in any meaningful way. We would like to know:

- What plans are there in place to assist the residents find housing once they are moved?
- What health and social service supports will be put in place for them?

We appreciate that this is a complex issue involving many factors and interests. Nevertheless, residents of Toronto deserve a transparent and equitable process. Moving forward we ask that you:

- Inform and consult with the wider community about this issue - at the very least ensure detailed and accurate information is being distributed.
- Continue to work with local organizations – and make it a priority - to find long term housing solutions for those in tents here and across the city.

Thank you for your consideration.

Anne Fleming
Chair, HVRA

Chair's email to Councillor about Concrete Blocks

Councillor Saxe, Ms Statham and Ms Gray:

I would like to echo Nicole's sentiments and express HVRA's dismay at the heavy handed and inappropriate installation of spiky concrete blocks in the treed area in front of St Stephen's following the encampment clearance this past Friday. Besides being grossly hostile to humans, they will cause severe and lasting damage to the roots of the trees and potentially render the soil unusable for any future plantings.

I am copying Urban Forestry and Transportation Services as it seems these two departments need to communicate with each other ASAP and figure out how to secure the area without causing more damage to our fragile ecosystem.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Anne Fleming
Chair, HVRA

5. What is your RA's experience with encampments?

Most residents are aware of tents in the local parks, but generally don't have direct contact with anyone in them.. A few people are concerned about drug use and related hazardous waste, as well as about disruptive noise. Some taking their kids to school in an adjacent neighbourhood have indicated they have encountered threatening behaviour while passing by an encampment there. Many others have indicated that they are concerned for the well being of those living in tents and want to know how to support them better while the city works to find permanent solutions.

*** 6. What do you find the most challenging about your experience with encampments? Why?**

- In general, concerns include access to the green spaces where tents are; the parks are very small and if tents are taking up a large portion of the area, it feels like it can't be used by others
- excess garbage / drug paraphernalia
- noise after hours
- the sense that we would like to support the less fortunate among us, but are not sure how best to do that

*** 7. Is there anything that's positive from your experience with encampments? Why?**

- they have increased our awareness of the extent of homelessness in Toronto - it is literally on our doorstep. We have had to confront our biases and find ways to remember the humanity of those on the streets, even as we are inconvenienced
- We reached out to our local social organization (Scott Mission) to speak to our general residents meeting about how best to support the less fortunate - their presentation was very enlightening and inspiring.

*** 8. What do you think the City does well and should continue doing in responding to encampments, if anything?**

The city is doing the bare minimum in providing short and long term shelter / housing. Realizing that funding is an issue, it is simply not acceptable to have hundreds of people turned away every night. More temporary shelter is an immediate need; more staff outreach to support those in tents needing supports in addition to housing (ie the hardest to house) will be required for more lasting solutions. Housing advocates indicate that there is no one size fits all solution - city staff must listen to individuals and communities to understand the real needs and find the funds to meet these needs. I know there is compassion out there - we need to fund more of it!

9. What do you think the City could do better when it comes to responding to encampments, if anything?

- Disruptive clearing must stop. These very vulnerable populations are driven further away from housing solutions and essential supports every time they are cleared out and they lose their ID, phones, belongings and their connection with supportive people, groups and institutions. The recent St Stephens clearance was another shocking development, considering that church staff and others had been providing stability and guidance and were experiencing some successes.
- It may be that there are ways to avoid some of the excesses of encampments, such as by limiting the number of tents that can be in one spot; requiring garbage removal and safe drug paraphernalia disposal, etc. When people fear for their safety in shelters or are at risk of being run over by cars driving through parks, tented encampments are one of the few safe options - we may have to recognize they will always be around and try to mitigate instead of eradicate.
- The City needs humane policies and strategies to address the root issues that ultimately force people to live in an encampments in the first place. They need better housing options and better ways to help those with addiction and mental health issues.

*** 10. Do you think RAs have a role in providing response to encampments?**

We would need guidance from the city and community social services about what we could voluntarily provide. I think individuals would gladly offer food, camping supplies, clothes etc if they felt it would help and not be thrown out during an eviction. It would be helpful for us to know which organizations are supporting the encampments so we could in turn support them.

We can help disseminate accurate information about the people in encampments and the supports they are getting - and about whom to contact if there is a dangerous situation for either campers or neighbourhood residents. People certainly feel helpless in the face of garbage and aggressive anti-social behaviour - RAs can let people know ways to mitigate those situations.

We feel there needs to be much more transparency around the city's role with respect to encampments, eg which department is responsible for supporting people in encampments and what are they doing; who can you call if there is a problem, etc. Also more transparency is needed around the when and how of evictions and who is undertaking them. The recent activity at St Stephens was completely opaque.

11. If you have any other comments or suggestions, please share them below.

Here is one longer narration about a specific experience with people living in a neighbourhood park. It reflects some of the more general statements I have made above:

"There was a couple camping in Sally Bird Park for several months this year, starting in the winter. Since the park is directly across the street from us we had a pretty good vantage point to see and hear what was going on.

"It started with the couple. They were later joined by another person (with another tent), and at one point there were at least three tents of people. There was also a squatter in the nearby abandoned house (which has had squatters removed from it at least five times now), who was hanging out with them. The other denizens seemed to vary but were all male.

"The initial couple started out being fairly unobtrusive. They had a dog that was off leash, but it was non-reactive with people and dogs (our dog and it met several times, Rob chatted about dogs with the owner). In general, the neighbours I know were fairly sympathetic to the plight of the couple, particularly as it was quite cold out. However, as time passed there were an increasing number of small incidents — loud shouting in the night, hoarding of scavenged random clutter all over the park, increasingly large tented areas, public scenes in the daytime, etc... Neighbours were increasingly torn about what to do, because while they wanted to be supportive they were also somewhat worried by the goings on. That said, most of the time the couple's behaviour was not a problem. I engaged in chit-chat several times when I was cutting through the park. I think most of the weirdness happened at night.

"The city was actively engaged in outreach with the couple and perhaps with others. They visited almost every day. They told me that this couple was known to them and had been living in the rough prior to the pandemic. They did not expressly say, but it was glaringly apparent, that they had serious drug use issues (which is why there was the hoarding of junk — which the city removed at least three times). One day, after there had been a loud to do at night, I spoke with the woman resident to ask what had been going on. She had a black eye but intimated that the fighting had been due to her (and subsequent observed interactions between her and her partner suggest that was probably true — I saw her physically attack him at least twice). I told her that neighbours were sympathetic but if they continued to disrupt people's sleep that their feelings would probably change.

"Neighbours were conflicted. There was some concern that the presence of the tents prevented others from using the park, and that was unfair. However I observed that the main daytime users of the park, the students from Central Tech, were in no way deterred by the tents and frequented the park just as much as they always did (which is quite a lot). I was surprised how unfazed they were in fact. Once I walked through and there was one resident (not the couple, someone else) who was nodding off literally ten feet away from the high school students. I called 311 because I was worried he was overdosing (when paramedics arrived he was able to walk away) but the students didn't bat an eye. So while the encampment was certainly an eyesore I don't think it really prevented others from using the park as they do.

"One of the neighbours immediately adjacent was worried because the residents were lighting fires which were very close to his (wooden) house. They also approached him about running an extension cord so they could have electricity but he declined. He and I talked about what the best course of action was and came to no conclusions. He has two small kids, and while he might have been concerned about their safety I don't think that was a big concern. He didn't mention that, and the kids were allowed to run about, in and out of the park. My sense talking to him and others was not that people were frightened that the residents would do them harm, it was more that the by-products of their presence (like a fire getting out of control or having the park filled up with random junk) were the worry.

"I was out of the country when the group were dispersed by the city so I'm not sure what the details were, or if there was some incident that made the city act. I've seen the couple around, they may have been residing at the encampment at St Stephens (or they may just have been visiting). Since the dispersal there was the brief reappearance of a tent with someone else, another squatter in the abandoned house, and the apparent repurposing of the shrubbery as a place to defecate. Students from the school were smashing bottles on the walkway and others were throwing explosives at people (yes the police were notified)...

"Overall, obviously no one wants to have people camped out in parks. But I think that the people on my block feel a lot of compassion about how impossible housing is and how desperate some people have become. The real problems we had with the encampment stemmed less from the presence of people living in tents than the consequences of the drug use, which were sporadic but definitely an issue."

AREA REPORTS – December 2023

NE

Construction continues at Oak House and 666 Spadina (both cranes were removed this past month). Sussex has been closed intermittently for utility connections to the townhouses that have been clad rather rapidly over the past couple of weeks.

The Esso on Harbord seems to be closing earlier (the city bylaw inspector issued a fine for operating without a business licence). Moritz is keeping an eye on it.

Renovations at the former River Thai restaurant and the building at the NE corner of Robert and Harbord continue...the work for the 2nd floor addition at the back of the latter building, over the former Hitoshi salon, started a couple of days ago.

There are a couple of large piles of garbage by the former RBC at Harbord and Spadina, from an unhoused person living at the southwest corner. Maybe it is worth a call to 311 to see if someone could clean them up? And are there outreach services that can help the fellow?

The erratic (boulder) on Major being relocated to its original location keeps popping up as a topic. There may be other areas of need that could be focused on.

Nicholas Provart, Mauritz Steinbauer

SW

SW Report.

The dust has settled from road works on College and Borden but both projects remain in an unsafe state of incompleteness.

Resident's communication to City staff and the Councillor's office has not yet produced completion of the work that includes painting (bike lanes, contra-flow lanes and even stop lines) and signage (including those for bikes to yield for TTC passengers).

Also, still no sign of garbage and recycling bins on College that were removed when the tract replacement work was done in 2022.

Lastly, the paving quality on Borden and College seems to be far from the best. Heaven forbid it causes an early return to paving in the hood.

Larger bump outs were installed on Borden at Ulster. We're still looking for boulevards to be installed. A request to the Councillor's office to examine a pilot project on Ulster (Brunswick to Major to coincide with water works) is still outstanding.

Robert Stambula, Jane Perdue

SafeStreets Report

Brunswick/Ulster Intersection

Our efforts to persuade the city to utilize the discarded tree planters as a makeshift traffic calming device in the middle of the intersection have gotten nowhere. The last message we received was from Transportation and they nixed it (although I am not 100% sure that they actually understood what we were proposing — it's been like a game of telephone). Fortunately for Harbord Village a samaritan has once again put pylons in the middle of the intersection to prevent wrong way driving. This time they are brightly decorated and anthropomorphic, which may deter vandalism. We applaud this unknown resident for their initiative!

Borden/Ulster Intersection

This intersection was supposed to be a raised intersection. We were promised this in 2020, and it was ultimately rolled into the much later resurfacing which has finally been completed. However, the degree to which the intersection rises is almost imperceptible, certainly nothing that would do anything to calm traffic (which is the point). We have been in communication with the city to determine whether the builder was negligent or whether the city's specifications for building a raised intersection are inadequate.

College St. rebuild

Although the board asked us to have no involvement with this project, we can't help but observe that the city is very much behind schedule in installing the paint which makes the street FAR more dangerous than it ought to be. There is currently no guidance for vehicles, cycles or pedestrians about where they should be and the result is quite chaotic for everybody. We were told at the meeting about Harbord (below) that the subcontractor responsible is no longer replying to emails.

Harbord St Rebuild

Along with Sue Dexter and Anne Fleming from the board we attended a presentation outlining the plan to rebuild the street from Ossington to Queen's Park. A propos of transportation and pedestrian safety, the most impactful changes will be:

- swapping the bike lane and the parked cars, so that the bike lane is between the cars and the curb
- shifting the location of some bus stops (not sure which yet) and ensuring that the bike lane in front of them is raised and well marked for cyclists to stop when there is a bus
- installing poured concrete barriers between the bike lane and the vehicular lane/parked cars
 - this does have gaps for driveways and such
 - at the SE Bathurst corner, because of space constraints, the bike lane will be raised (as it will at bus stops) and there will be at least one plastic post to deter cars from blocking
- reducing the number of parking spots and introducing planted buffers at the ends of parking lanes and some other places (this was still preliminary so it's hard to remark on the placement of these)
- increasing bulb outs at some of the intersections (Dan made a good case for narrowing the pedestrian x-ings on side streets like Roberts)
- removing some of the left turns (these are West of Bathurst)

I was pleased to see that the bulb out on the NE corner at Brunswick will be shaved slightly to allow the contraflow bikes better access, as this was promised in 2020 as part of the Brunswick bike lane (it's very tight for both the contraflow and cars as it stands). There was considerable discussion about greening, which does have a traffic calming effect and I think we all applaud, but others can report on that.