

Safer Community Committee (SCC)
Meeting 3 - September 7, 2023
6:30-9 PM on Zoom

Attendees

Members in attendance:

Kathryn Adams, Meaghan C., Naureen Choudhry, Laurence DeWolfe, Sara Ehrhardt, Derek Finkle, Mike Hayles, Emily Hill, Rebecca Ho, Aparna Kajenthira, Gillian Kolla, Ashley McPherson, Andrea Nickel, Jennifer Orenstein, Edward Speicher, Christiane Tetreault, Mike Wilson.

Meeting support attendees:

Bruce Davis (Public Progress), Yasmin Yusuf (Public Progress), Dana Granofsky (Facilitator), Julie Grgar (SCC Administrative Support), Amber Kroegel (BGM Strategy Group), Shannon Wiens (Convener).

Members absent:

Mike Hayless, Gillian Kolla, Scott McKean, Angela Robertson, Kim O'Toole, Mike Wilson.

1. Welcome and recap

Facilitator welcomed members of the Safer Community Committee (SCC) and shared the SCC's agenda for Meeting 3:

1. **Welcome and recap:** Reviewing the range of community safety issues identified at Meeting 2.
2. **Presentation of Community Canvas:** Reviewing and discussing findings and key takeaways from the community survey conducted by Public Progress.
3. **Solution generation:** Identify solutions and potential recommendations to improve the safety of all community members in South Riverdale, to be refined into concrete recommendations in Meeting 4.

Facilitator reminded members of the pre-reading package for that included:

- New materials and updates on actions taken by SRCHC since the last meeting;
- Results of the issue identification exercise in Meeting 2, including the range of community safety issues identified by the SCC, and members' assessment of the frequency with which issues occurred (high frequency to low frequency) and the severity of the issues (high danger to low danger);
- Findings and ideas offered by other residents' groups as discussed in the last meeting.

Members reviewed the issue identification and sorting from the previous meeting. The facilitator noted one of the key areas of agreement in Meeting 2 was that overdose itself was ranked as the greatest risk that occurs with the highest frequency.

One member voiced a disagreement with the results of the issue ranking exercise, noting they thought the issue of response to public engagement was a higher risk of danger than the group had determined prior. Facilitator responded by reminding members their goal should be to solve for all issues identified, and that the full results of the SCC's work to date would be reviewed and refined in Meeting 4.

2. Presentation of Community Canvas

Bruce Davis of Public Progress introduced himself and his colleague Yasmin Yusuf, and acknowledged the critical importance of the conversation taking place through the SCC – for individuals experiencing marginalization, mental health and addictions challenges; for parents playing an important role advocating for their children; and for other communities within and beyond Toronto where these issues are present.

Bruce shared background on the Community Canvas and its methodology, noting that community outreach for the survey placed particular emphasis on Heward Ave. and follow-up conversations with parents. Bruce also noted that while Public Progress engaged approximately 30 merchants, the time they were able to share was limited and further engagement with merchants and the Leslieville BIA could be beneficial.

Bruce presented findings in each of the three key areas the survey solicited input on:

1. Information the community wishes to be made available to help clarify safety trends
2. Concerns for the SCC to consider
3. Solutions, including:
 - 3.1 Safety processes
 - 3.2 Environmental design
 - 3.3 Other concerns
 - 3.4 Education
 - 3.5 Policies

Notable themes that Bruce highlighted for the group included:

- **Distribution of safety issues throughout the Leslieville area:** While there is a geographic concentration of concerns around certain “hotspots”, there are issues throughout the Leslieville area. Solutions need to ensure that attention paid to hotspots does not result in the issues simply moving elsewhere.
- **Visibility of issues:** Public drug use and drug dealing have become more visible as hotspots have moved into new areas. There is some ambiguity on the extent to which the frequency of antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhood has increased, given the migration of hotspots into more visible areas and how the makeup of Leslieville has changed as the neighbourhood has welcomed more families sensitive to these concerns.
- **Different experiences of safety concerns:** Safety risks to children are top of mind for the community, and the survey revealed several areas of alignment among community members on safety concerns. At the same time, some longer-term neighbourhood residents described feeling

“more safe” now than in the past, while others who the Community Canvas attempted to engage expressed they did not feel the need to participate because they had no concerns.

- **Attitudes towards SRCHC and the SIS:** Alongside safety concerns, community members expressed widespread support and respect for SRCHC and the SIS – including businesses, who expressed desire for the BIA and SRCHC to work together more closely. Some community members distinguished between SRCHC and the SIS in their feedback, and many raised the need for a new location for the SIS specifically. While many community members were supportive of SRCHC, a common theme was a breakdown in trust between SRCHC and the community, especially Heward Ave. residents – feeling that SRCHC has not fulfilled its obligations to promote the safety of the wider community in how it has operated the SIS.

Members took the opportunity to raise feedback or clarifying questions on the results presented so far. One member noted the issues identified in the Community Canvas were consistent with feedback some community members had previously raised to SRCHC.

Bruce then shared key takeaways and suggestions for moving forward based on the survey findings, including:

- Solutions require a ‘whole of community’ response: While there are tangible steps that can be taken to address issues in specific hotspots, many of the issues raised cannot be effectively addressed by a single street or group, and must be addressed from a holistic perspective to ensure the issues are not simply relocated to a different area. This will require involvement from a range of actors with a role to play, and particular attention to ongoing, proactive collaboration and communication between SRCHC and local residents and businesses.
- The location of the SIS needs to be addressed, including whether it is mobile or embedded in a shelter, storefront or institutional setting. Community members can play a role in identifying parameters to inform the location of the SIS, but not have a decision-making role in determining the location of services.
- Input from SRCHC staff and clients, as well as service users and street-involved community members, is necessary to inform solutions and was not captured as part of the Community Canvas.

Facilitator invited members to raise questions about the Community Canvas. These included:

- When and how canvassing was done, raised by a member who owns a business and was unaware of the opportunity to participate in the Community Canvas.
 - This member realized he was out of town when canvassing was done, while Bruce noted that the presentation identified greater opportunity for collaboration with the BIA and local businesses.
- There was a discussion about how individuals were recruited for the sessions
- Clarification on what is meant by a ‘whole of community’ response and the extent to which SRCHC can and should take responsibility over safety issues, including why more people are not consuming drugs inside the SIS.

- Bruce clarified that there are concrete actions SRCHC can take to improve community safety and that SRCHC has a responsibility to the community to do so, while noting that the causes of many of the safety issues are bigger than SRCHC and require involvement from a range of actors.
- Whether comments specifically about Morse School were raised by survey respondents.
 - Bruce responded that respondents raised many safety concerns about children, but not about activities happening inside the school grounds. However, Bruce noted that certain design considerations (e.g. changing groundcover as woodchips can conceal drug paraphernalia) could be proactively explored to prevent safety concerns in the playground area.
- Clarification on the desired role for the BIA in implementing solutions.
 - Bruce recognized that BIAs in many communities – including those without safe consumption sites – are grappling with antisocial behaviour and crime. In the case of the Leslieville BIA, the ‘storefront’ setting of the SIS has created a focal point for these challenges. The pervasiveness and complexity of these challenges in communities across Canada are leading to increased collaboration by groups whose mandates have not typically intersected. In Leslieville, the BIA can be an active partner in implementing certain solutions to these challenges.

3. Solution generation

Identifying relevant actors

Facilitator introduced a facilitated activity to identify specific actors with a role to play in implementing solutions to safety issues, noting that the purpose of this exercise is not to assign responsibility for issues, but to identify those who can play a role in solutions. Facilitator noted that none of the input provided here would constitute a final decision on recommendations; rather, this is a generative exercise to support the SCC in identifying the full range of relevant actors. She also encouraged members to raise any additional actors they did not see represented in the exercise.

After members completed the exercise, they reflected on the results. Comments included:

- EMS and Mobile Crisis Teams could be identified more explicitly as having a role to play.
- Queen Street East Presbyterian Church (QSEPC) could be identified more explicitly as having a role to play. QSEPC is exploring options for redeveloping the church property to provide RGI, affordable and market-rate housing and community space. QSEPC also continues to explore ways to address loitering and illegal activity on the church property while preserving community access to the property given its agreement with the City of Toronto to maintain the outdoor space to the west of the church as a public park.
- The SCC might benefit from further reflection on who has a role to play in *preventing* issues in addition to responding to issues.
- Attention needs to be paid to SRCHC’s formal responsibilities as part of their contract with the provincial government for operating the SIS.

- The municipal, provincial and federal governments all have a role to play, and need to ensure responsibility is not downloaded to the community for issues that cannot be addressed at that level.

Identifying solutions

The SCC turned its attention towards the final exercise of Meeting 3: identifying solutions to address community safety issues. The facilitator provided an overview of recommendations put forward by the Leslieville Harm Reduction Coalition, Public Progress, and the Community Survey & Proposal. Reminding the SCC that their recommendations are non-binding, she offered suggestions to help increase the likelihood that the identified recipients of the recommendations – including but not limited to the SRCHC – would adopt SCC recommendations:

- Consider solutions for both responding to and preventing issues.
- Be as specific as possible. Specificity is what helps make the recommendation actionable.
- Consider the regulatory requirements, mandates, and limitations that shape the work of specific actors. The SCC includes representatives from a range of institutions who can provide insight on how they work, so the SCC can duly consider those parameters.
- Meet the needs of as many stakeholders as possible – balancing perspectives and helping multiple actors will increase likelihood of recommendations being adopted.
- Solutions will be solidified and refined into concrete recommendations for specific actors at Meeting 4.

Facilitator presented the 22 safety issues identified in Meeting 2, suggesting they fall along six thematic areas for solutions to be targeted:

- Nowhere to go: lack of space for people experiencing homelessness; access to public washroom for people experiencing homelessness; masturbation and sexual activity; garbage/defecation/urination; public access blocked
- Safety of staff: visitors causing harm to SRCHC staff; harassment and trauma of SRCHC staff
- Access, safety and privacy of patients: Access to the centre for people needing services (including people with disabilities); safety and privacy infringement of SRCHC clients
- Addiction/mental health: overdose; visible substance use; lack of training and experience interacting with people using substances; disordered behaviour, aggressive language, screaming, fighting
- Crime/violence: drug selling; assault; theft; guns and weapons inside and outside; trespassing; damage to property (public and private)
- Paraphernalia: drug paraphernalia in public places

Facilitator invited the group to provide feedback on these categories. This feedback included:

- Some of these categories have more safety issues within them than others, so we need to ensure the weight of those items is not overshadowed by grouping them under one theme.

- Facilitator agreed that this grouping does not imply weight or priority, but is intended to help organize the conversation to support the group in identifying solutions and recommendations.
- Given that the scope of certain issues goes beyond the Leslieville neighbourhood, the SCC's recommendations should focus on actionable steps that apply exclusively to the SRCHC and the 15-foot perimeter around the SIS.
 - Facilitator invited feedback from the group on this proposal to narrow the SCC's focus. The group did not express support for this. There was some agreement that solutions focused on the space within the 15-foot perimeter around the SIS may differ from solutions focused on the broader community.
- The "safety of staff" category should be expanded to "safety of staff and community," to recognize the safety risks encountered by residents – especially children – and businesses.
 - Facilitator reframed this category as "safety of staff and community."

The group turned to identifying solutions to issues across these categories. This included:

Nowhere to go:

- *No solutions raised*

Safety of staff and community:

- Create training for schoolchildren on how to respond to potential situations in public, especially taking public transit and WalkSafe.
- Education and training for children and families on how to respond to paraphernalia, drugs, disordered behaviour

Access, safety and privacy of patients:

- Conduct research and engage people using substances outside of the SRCHC to understand why they are 'outside' instead of coming 'inside' to access services
- TPS and SIS commit to open communication to create approach to build trust between SRCHC, clients, and TPS. Goal should be to mitigate 'trade off' between increased police presence and diminished service use.
- TPS to build trust with marginalized people at neighbourhood level so service users can know police are there to stop drug dealers, not to penalize drug users.

Addiction/mental health:

- Institute mobile units/alternate locations (such as in hospitals) to prevent concentration of need and minimize demand on the SRCHC.
- Relocate SIS further away from schools

- Cease SIS operations at SRCHC, and all other bricks and mortar formats
- Ensure any alternative considers pathways to support people who wish to pursue sobriety
- Province to create strategy to address substance use crisis.
- SRCHC/TPH establish/amplify resources, training, and communication to businesses for how to 'survive together' and navigate difficult situations.
- Decriminalize substances
- Provide safe supply to undercut illicit selling of drugs

Crime/violence:

- Create formal protocols between collaboration, ongoing monitoring, improvement and enforcement involving SRCHC, TPS, TPH, BIA.

Paraphernalia:

- Develop plan for sweeps: What does it mean to have a community sweep? How can this involve volunteers safely? Involve whole community so that private property can be included in sweeps (working with BIA, community organizations and others)
- Institute incentive program for clients to return needles
- SRCHC to review policy on needs distribution to minimize materials left around the neighbourhood

Other:

- Replace management of the SIS (and their direct report) to demonstrate accountability and rebuild trust with community

Wrap Up

Facilitator thanked members, and reiterated that today's meeting was focused on brainstorming solutions that will be refined into concrete recommendations in the Meeting 4, the SCC's final meeting on September 18. The list of solutions identified today will be shared in advance of the next meeting. She encouraged members to consider recommendations further before Meeting 4 and come prepared to fill in any gaps.