

April 8, 2021

Re: rezoning of the Parkview Motel

Mayor Guthrie, council members, hello.

As I am unable to delegate at the council meeting on Monday, April 12th due to a previous commitment, please accept this written submission in favour of the zoning change for the Parkview/Drop In project.

My name is Margo Davis. My family has lived in the Riverside Park community for over 20 years. The last 6 of those my husband & I have lived, as seniors, at 24 Marilyn Drive, just up the street from our neighbours at the Parkview Motel.

I am sharing what follows with the hope that it might give some who are in opposition, just a little clearer insight into the critical need of the zoning change for this permanent supported housing project. You see, our journey started when our son was 12 years old, and for those of you who do not believe the stories you hear of grade school addicts, I beg you to think again.

For the last 24 years our son has been suffering with drug addiction. I don't think that anyone who has not experienced it, has any real concept of what that means. Honestly, it took years for us to understand that this was an actual illness and not just a behavioural issue. The learning curve for parents of drug addicted children can be huge ... it certainly was for us. The first time he ran away he was 14. He was gone for over 12 weeks. It was a living hell. By the time he was 16 he admitted to a \$600 a day coke habit. He was in and out of school, dropped out before finishing Grade 10, and had been in jail at least once. Can you even begin to imagine supporting a habit like that at 16? Can you even imagine what this meant for our family? Think hard about that, because I assure you, the stigma is not just attached to the addict.

By now you are wondering why I would be sharing this? Am I not painting the very picture of the sort of dangerous criminal that the nay-sayers to this project are warning us against? The reason is that without some history, and perspective, I cannot explain to you how or why we have come to believe in the true and enormous value of the Drop In and this housing project.

Over the years, despite our best efforts, our son deteriorated to the point that on any given day we expected “the call”. A parents’ nightmare, that call to say that our son had been found dead of an overdose, a very real possibility. Add to this, the fact that he has also been diagnosed with schizophrenia.

I can not even begin to explain fully what our relationship with the Drop In has meant to our son and to our family but let me summarize it like this – ***because of it, he is alive!*** Because of the kind and generous support of every worker he has interacted with there, he is alive! Because of the perseverance of people like Sister Christine, and Gail Hoekstra and their affiliates like the Homewood and CMHA and others, who never gave up on him or us; who were there to provide food, shelter, *often at the Parkview*; and support not only for him but for his family, he would not be alive, and our family would not be whole. You may choose not to believe that. All I can say is that it is true; and without having lived through what we have, I know I cannot expect you to believe it or understand it merely because I say so. All I can do is hope that you would open your hearts to the possibility.

Now, fast forward to today. To happier, calmer times.

About 15 months ago our son was picked up by the police, in the worst mental and physical condition of his life and taken to the hospital. From there he went to the Homewood for several weeks. Gail Hoekstra pulled together others from various local organizations and arranged for a community case conference with his doctor. The meeting room was full. We had no idea our son had been on so many people’s and organizations’ radar. I cannot tell you how overwhelmed we were with gratitude. It was here that we finally understood the true magnitude of his illness, and the magnitude of the efforts they had gone to for years; and continue to go to, to this day; to support our son.

For the last year, he had been taking medication for his schizophrenia, he had worked extremely hard on his addiction issues. He had his own apartment with ongoing support from his Drop In and CMHA workers. He was happier and more at peace with himself than he had been in over 2 decades. He called his little apartment home and the pride he had for it and for his hard work was a beautiful thing. He was learning to better manage his money and relied less on community meals.

And then, without warning, he decided to take himself off his meds. He deteriorated very quickly. We were so concerned we contacted his workers, only to find out that they were already on top of the situation. Within 24 hours he was formed and after another stay in the Homewood, I am pleased to report he is back on track, on new medications, back in his little apartment and doing extremely well. Does he still have his demons? Of course. But his workers from the Drop In proved once again that they were right there for him, and that they will continue be. We could not be more grateful.

I know there are some who do not trust in the folks who run the Drop In and their ability to pull together, operate and maintain such a facility as this supported housing project. It is indeed a huge undertaking. The whole purpose of our story is to assure you at least from our experience and perspective, that they are not only capable, but we believe they will do so with the same integrity, perseverance, honesty, kindness and generosity that they have shown our son and our family these many years.

To those who continue to say you fear for the safety of our neighbourhood and the mostly senior population living here, let me say this. Fear, whether real or perceived, is a debilitating thing. How disheartening it is to hear from people who would use fear to generate votes of opposition. It tells me two things: first, that you have a real and tragic lack of respect, understanding and compassion for the people who would no longer be homeless while residing at the very aptly named Grace Gardens. It shows no consideration at all for the work that has happened behind the scenes by themselves and their workers, possibly for years, to get them to this place in their lives. It shows that you have not heard or understood the whole premise of the project.

Second, it shows that you have no real respect for the intelligence, wisdom and integrity for the senior population in our neighbourhood by putting us all in a box labelled “too old and frail to know what’s good for them”, and then presuming the right to speak for us. Shame on you!! This applies also for the parents of kids in our neighbourhood. Do you think them too naive or lacking in parenting ability to know how to look after their own children, or to teach them basic safety skills?

It disturbs me greatly that there are people whose prejudice against the homeless would lead to refusing them the amazing opportunity that is being afforded them here. The opportunity to live and grow in a clean, safe environment, with appropriate supports available 24/7 to help them to be healthy of mind and body, and to successfully reintegrate into a more gracious, safe and respected lifestyle. To shun them like lepers rather than welcome them to our neighbourhood with grace and dignity and treat them like the fellow human beings and the neighbours they have a right to be treated as, is despicable.

The average person cannot not know or understand the struggle that has been their lives thus far. They have their own real and valid reasons for their situations that we have no right to judge. But I assure you that the Drop In and their affiliates do understand. They do care. We believe wholeheartedly that this project will have a profound and positive effect on our community. We take pride in backing this project. We believe our neighbourhood would be safer for all, and that the occupants, who again, would no longer be homeless, are worthy of this opportunity. We believe in the purpose, integrity, need and value of this project and all those who have been working so hard to see it come to fruition.

Our family has experienced firsthand the dedication, generosity of word and deed, the kindness, wisdom, and compassion of the Drop In folks and their affiliates.

We ask you please do not deny the people who would live at Grace Gardens the same truly exceptional opportunity that has been afforded our son and our family. Welcome them to our neighbourhood in the same way you would any new neighbour, with the same grace and dignity that we all deserve. Show them some kindness, share a smile, volunteer, get to know them. They are not monsters. Treat them as you would hope to be treated yourself.

Show them that we too are safe, likeable, caring, compassionate, unbiased neighbours.

Please Welcome them home!

Sincerely,
Margo Davis