

November 17, 2023

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS IN CLARINGTON

Activity: Community dialogue on navigating issues surrounding homelessness as well as discussion on criminal activity vs perception of criminal activity.

Purpose: 30 members of the business community, CBOT, Durham Regional Police Service, Durham Social Services, and representatives from all levels of government including Clarington Mayor Foster, had an open discussion about how we can work together with compassion, to identify tools and resources to help to address situations surrounding homelessness. Discussion also took place surrounding identifying criminal activity and importance of security and reporting a crime – working together to support a safe space in employment areas.

Feedback from businesses:

- Compassion is key
- Employee safety, unsheltered people sleeping on steps
- Uncomfortable environment may create challenge in attracting businesses to Bowmanville
- Panhandling
- Small encampments in Courtice Beach area, not many issues. Local business installed gates, no issues
- Difficult to help as business not aware about mental health status.

Insight:

- 90% of crime it unrelated to homelessness.
- Unhomed people making conscious choices about their lives regardless if we understand it.
- The issues stem from discomfort not violence
- Services are not always appropriate for every situation and person.
- Services can't respond to challenges alone. Need business community at the table to create solutions.
- Primary driver of homelessness is additions and mental health.
- Community services are extremely stretched. Growth for services demand, housing and food. **Work together**, can't respond on our own.
- Think about how Clarington can manage before is escalates more.
- Be more mindful of design, be proactive, not reactive.
- Nothing police can do to stop or solve issues surrounding the unsheltered.
- Consensus is the importance of creating a safe space, and having resources to help business navigate homelessness, **not solve** as this is a global issue.
- How can we learn from other communities and prepare better to support business and unsheltered.

Insight and Support from Community Organizations:

Province:

- Want to work with business community to create solutions.
- Exploring more funding to support.
- Create places to feel safe even though temporary. House people first then build services around this.

Durham Regional Police Service:

- No correlation between unsheltered and crime.
- Criminality issue – important to report incidents to DRPS, as they identify crime trends.
- If pattern identified, patrolling amplified.
- DRPS can direct public to resources.
- There is a petty crime reporting website.
<https://www.drps.ca/online-services/online-reporting-and-registries/report-a-crime/>
- 2,100 proactive patrols in Clarington and property checks.
- B&E and theft down in Clarington in 2023 compared to 2022.

DRPS Community Safety Unit:

- Mental health support unit. Not enforcement driven.
- A lot of partnerships with community agencies.
- Make sure we're not criminalizing unsheltered.
- Unsheltered: community safety specialist – mental health addiction homelessness, enforcement vs community safety – wholistic approach to policing.
- Devising strategies, ie. opioid task force.
- Training and education: GAP Committee, based on true unsheltered experiences, to engage with unsheltered community.
- Where Policing meets community.
- If employees have **safety concerns**, staff not feeling safe etc., call DRPS, explain why not feeling safe. If someone is aggressive, police will come, divert crisis and deploy services. Don't report being 'uncomfortable', just because a person looks a certain way.

Crime prevention officer works with services and organizations in Durham. **How can we help businesses help the unsheltered.**

Tips to help protect business and employees:

- People should make appointment before coming in. Install doorbell, chimes, change mindset of person entering.
- Lighting crucial
- Camera system, register with DRPS, if crime, DRPS can ask business to check their feed
- Crime prevention assessment for business
- Securing dumpsters
- Accordion style doors, deters sleeping in doorways
- Graffiti, leverage art programs to enhance, schools etc.

Durham Region Social Services:

- Works closely with DRPS and community partners.
- Poverty huge issue.
- Service System Manager – integrated employment system. System planning, program management and funding.
- Approach in Region has changed, funding allocated for homelessness work and allocation from Province secured in 2023.
- Unsheltered increasing in Region. Supporting people on fringe of homelessness.
- Opioid crisis.
- Short term programs ie. To support detox.
- Durham building system service side. Regional council very supportive – approved Region outreach team to help build data and support communities in Durham.
- Important to understand, poverty, health issues, but they are a person first.

What is missing?

Durham does not have a mental health and addictions system. Capacity for treatment and support is missing. Need system to recognize measurement of outcomes.

Actions:

- Mayor's office to provide a resource list to CBOT to provide members of the business community.
- Exploring future partnership with Durham Region Social Services to offer training and information sessions on navigating homelessness for business.
- Hold community meetings to continue conversation, build relationships, educate and collaborate to promote a safe, compassionate community.
- Make resource list available to unhomed, explore asking downtown businesses to display in their windows
- Work with Durham Region social services to coordinate educational opportunities to learn more about homelessness, how to navigate and make employees feel safe.
- **NEW**, as of January 18 – Region-run **Warming center in Clarington**. St. Paul's United Church, 178 Church Street, Bowmanville. 8pm-8am, 7 days a week, until March 31, 2024