



COMMUNITY OUTREACH CENTRE INFORMATION SESSION SUMMARY

March, 2024

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Executive Summary

On February 8, 2024, two public engagement sessions were hosted at Murphy's Community Centre in Charlottetown by the Department of Housing, Land and Communities. The purpose of these sessions was to share updates and gather community feedback regarding the new location for the Community Outreach Centre in an open forum format. Session attendance included 16 individuals in the 3 pm session and 22 people in the 7 pm session. These numbers include speakers and staff who were also present in the room.

Key representatives including Carlene Donnell, Prince Edward Island's (PEI) Special Advisor to the Premier on Complex Islanders; Jason Doyle, Director of Housing; and Brad McConnell, Chief of Police for Charlottetown City Police, were present to provide updates and respond to questions and concerns from attendees.

The sessions commenced with departmental updates from the respective representatives on the reasoning behind the new Community Outreach Centre location and how they are working together to ensure a smooth opening and reduce any potential negative impact the new location will have on the surrounding residents. Following the updates, attendees were encouraged to voice their concerns, share comments, and pose questions regarding the move.

Several key themes emerged from the discussions. Firstly, improved communication was emphasized, with participants highlighting the need for more transparent and open channels between the community and relevant authorities, particularly concerning the Community Outreach Centre's operations and impact on surrounding residents and businesses. Secondly, concerns were raised regarding infrastructure needs, including transportation access, parking facilities, fencing and the integration of the Community Outreach Centre within the community's existing infrastructure. Thirdly, participants expressed the importance of enhanced policing, safety, and case management strategies for individuals who use the services of the Community Outreach Centre. There was a consensus on the necessity for proactive measures to address potential challenges and ensure the safety and well-being of both users and the community.

Action items stemming from the sessions include establishing regular community updates and forums to maintain ongoing dialogue, conducting assessments, addressing infrastructure gaps to support the smooth functioning of the Community Outreach Centre, and collaborating on enhanced policing and case management protocols tailored to the needs of their clientele and the broader community.

Unattributed discussion feedback from participants offered a further understanding of community concerns, contributing to the development of a comprehensive plan. The insights gleaned from these sessions will inform a thoughtful approach aimed at keeping the public engaged and informed throughout the process of opening the new facility.

These engagement sessions served as valuable forums for dialogue and fostering collaboration between community members and key stakeholders. Moving forward, continued efforts will be made to address the identified concerns and ensure a collaborative approach to the successful implementation of the Community Outreach Centre's new location.

Department Update Overview

To kick off the public engagement sessions, Government representatives and stakeholders came together to lead the conversation and provide operational updates from their respective expertise around the pressing issues of homelessness and addiction in the community.

Carlene Donnell, PEI's Special Advisor to the Premier on Complex Islanders shared her experiences in larger provinces and emphasized the critical need for tailored strategies that fit PEI's unique context. With a focus on enhancing quality of life and safety for all Islanders, she has championed the development of screening policies and intentional intake measures geared towards fostering independence among those grappling with homelessness and addiction.

Jason Doyle, Director of Housing, provided valuable insights into the logistical side of the operation and strategy for the new Community Outreach Centre. He revealed exciting progress with the submission of building permits and plans to install modular complexes on-site as early as next week March, 2024. This swift action underscores the need to address these urgent issues promptly and effectively.

On the frontlines of safety and community well-being, Brad McConnell, Chief of Police for Charlottetown City Police, outlined proactive measures aimed at preventing the recurrence of past challenges. He stressed the importance of deploying resources strategically to establish a positive tone at the new site and deter undesirable behaviours observed in previous instances. Additionally, he touched on the necessity of comprehensive case-work and individual accountability to ensure that available services are effectively utilized to support those in need.

Together, these updates reflect a collaborative and proactive approach to addressing these common yet complex societal issues in PEI. By fostering a supportive environment, prioritizing the well-being of all Islanders, and creating a space for an open dialogue with residents, this concerted effort aims to create a safer, more inclusive community where individuals and residents can feel supported.

Key Themes

■ HIGH-LEVEL TAKEAWAYS:

- ▲ Communication, open conversation, and transparency are important.
- ▲ A wrap-around approach and professional services are needed.
- ▲ Success stories, challenges and actions need to be shared to be transparent and accountable.

■ COMMUNICATION NEEDS:

- ▲ Immediate need for increased communication with residents.
- ▲ Mail, email, regular monthly updates, hosting more conversations.
- ▲ There is an application for OPS, but it was submitted to the City before the public consultation happened.

■ INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS:

- ▲ Immediate request for a fence constructed - specifically a fifteen-foot wooden (not wire) fence
- ▲ If it's blocked completely, only ONE entrance to the Centre is allowed
- ▲ Surveillance cameras on-site and at the surrounding homes is needed.

■ HIGH-LEVEL CONCERNS FROM RESIDENTS:

- ▲ What's going on inside the fence is going to be different than what's happening in surrounding areas (parks, backyards, sidewalks)
- ▲ Lack of trust in the current operator
- ▲ What happens outside of the gate? Will Joe Ghiz Park be the new Euston St. where all the needles are? What about Wendy's/Tim's and the path in between for kids?

■ SUGGESTIONS:

- ▲ Work with case management services. People who are educated in case management (social workers, youth care workers, etc.) have to have some level of knowledge and experience to deal with this very vulnerable group of people.
- ▲ The Community Outreach Centre has potential, but its execution falls short. While the shelter serves a positive purpose, considering a government-run facility might be beneficial. Trying it out could lead to improvements, and over time, it may become unnecessary.
- ▲ Once a system is running well, NGO can step in and run. But when it's fresh and new, it needs to be run by the government.

Discussion from Attendees

Resident feedback is italicized but not attributed.

- ▲ *Hours of the Community Outreach Centre on Park Street make it so that the environmental testing doesn't matter since it's not a living area.*
- ▲ *Lots of concerns for people in the area - especially now that we're cut off from Grafton Street.*
- ▲ *Moving the entrance so it's by the trail (making it so that people will go through backyards?) - the goal is so they'll go through Beach Street.*
- ▲ *When people put three walls up, it attracts people. Police have been called. Lots of people here shoot up, hang out, etc., and then others have to walk through. The rest of the walkable areas have been destroyed by Fiona.*
- ▲ *Part of the frustration is that up until tonight, it doesn't matter how many meetings have happened. No one has listened to them. I was told at the meetings that there would be extra time requested, but now it's not. Now, eastern gateways are being opened.*
- ▲ *Thankful for the police presence, but it doesn't do much to help.*
- ▲ *Staff are trained in de-escalation. We're not. This is a danger to our health. Their needs should not supersede ours.*
- ▲ *Communication from the province on this meeting and updates should have been step one, especially since this is what we've been asking for. There needs to be multiple formats - email, online, call, mail.*

- *Concern is not really about what's happening on the property. It's about what's happening off the property around the Centre.*
- *The public needs to know what the Centre knows has been a failure and what is being done to change that. Don't just fix the issue after; be ahead of it.*
- *The central hub is the issue. De-centralization is an issue that needs to be fixed.*
- *If the shelter is a warming centre, isn't just getting warm and clean a purpose enough to be there?*
- *It is way too large of a scope. This is deterring a person from accessing because the wrong people are being helped. There shouldn't just be one spot for warming AND helping.*
- *The town hall was awful, and this is not ideal either. No recording?? Why is it such a controlled meeting? Why are only 8 people here? Part Street to Euston Street - all those people should be notified and invited to come here.*
- *The area of influence was not contacted... so who was? Mail is not adequate communication. You are asking now how we want to be communicated with, which is shameful when all the decisions have already been made.*
- *We're told that the sidewalks are now accessible, so now something can't be done.*
- *Would love to see a committee set up that's not just government officials - people of the community, police, and planning committee - meet monthly so they can bring up concerns and have them addressed.*
- *Looking for an update on the resident task force.*
- *Looking for further public consultation.*
- *The centre has a police presence and 24-hour security, but when people get their drugs and weapons back and leave the shelter, are there police for us?*
- *This is the police's job. We think the module idea is good.*
- *Hope we also consider the fact that if we don't centralize, we won't need a police hub.*
- *Put in a request that we get a reimbursement program for all the surveillance cameras, etc, that we will need to buy to protect ourselves and our homes.*
- *What are the reporting requirements for the Adventure Group? We want monthly/quarterly reports to show how good and bad the Adventure Group is. Measurable reports are wanted, with community input included. Done by a third party.*
- *Adventure Group reports to someone. We want to know why the Community Outreach Centre is doing "so well" to continue when all services are available within 20 minutes.*
- *The folks in Wards 1, 2, and 4 are amazing people, and if they had had a consultation, these conversations would have been very different, so going forward, hopefully, their voices will be at the top of their minds.*

- ▲ *Just do what you say you're going to do. And communicate more and be more transparent. Would love to be contacted to set up a community group including residents. We want to know what protocol is for a long list of things. Where are people going when they don't follow appropriate measures to be allowed to stay at the Community Outreach Centre?*
- ▲ *It is not just the responsibility of the police. It's the responsibility of the province, the centre and the Adventure Group.*
- ▲ *Provincial elected officials have not shown up tonight, and that's duly noted. They should be held accountable for that.*
- ▲ *Hanging out in the park isn't illegal, but the drugs need to be addressed. How do we curb that?*
- ▲ *Some conversation with residents would be important.*
- ▲ *We want a meeting where people can stand up and say their piece.*
- ▲ *There is a desire for ongoing communication.*
- ▲ *We all want to help vulnerable people, but when you're fixing one problem and creating 3 more, are you doing anything?*
- ▲ *Seniors are vulnerable, too.*
- ▲ *We have had to put security systems in.*
- ▲ *Public perception is that there isn't enough being done.*
- ▲ *We were promised a gateway plan with green spaces, a rink, and all kinds of improvements, and we were getting fixed up, and now that's not happening.*
- ▲ *I'm not sure Adventure Group will run as well as when it was government-run.*
- ▲ *There has to be a centralized case management system that will help individuals. I would be comfortable knowing these people are being taken care of in the most equitable fashion.*
- ▲ *We know what the picture is for the centre, but what are the services going to be, and how are they different from what's happening today? I want to help people. I don't want to see people I know shooting up on any street corner. I don't want them to be diverted because they're not there for a service, but I'm searching for a plan, and I want to know what that looks like.*
- ▲ *Where you put your resources is where people will stay.*
- ▲ *The transition facility has 6 rooms that aren't being used. I have little faith in some ways.*
- ▲ *The Community Outreach Centre started as a warming centre, and what the public sees is people hanging out outside. They don't see the classes inside.*

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Action and Next Steps

ACTION:

Look into the contaminants report to share with local residents.

ACTION:

Provide updates on the status of the safe injection site.

ACTION:

Share whether or not this is a permanent or temporary location.

ACTION:

Determine if there is information from corrections that could assist with helping individuals re-enter the community.

ACTION:

Ensure that walking paths and gates keep clients from accessing or using Park and Beach Street.

ACTION:

Update the community on the residential task force to provide feedback and updates.

ACTION:

Determine where individuals who are turned away from programming at the new Park Street Community Outreach Centre will go during the day when shelters are closed.

ACTION:

Determine what organizations and services will be at Park Street that are currently in the Euston Street location.

ACTION:

Assess if centralized or decentralized is the best approach for our city.

ACTION:

Have an independent third party review the operations of the Community Outreach Centre to provide transparency for the public.

ACTION:

Expand the scope of the property owners/residents informed about updates and use the property registry to send mail vs. hand delivery.

ACTION:

Assess if a mobile unit of the City of Charlottetown Police on site would assist in the security of the site and surrounding areas.

ACTION:

Send a summary of updates from meetings to the impacted area.

ACTION:

Review if financial or operational support should be provided to surrounding residents for surveillance.

ACTION:

Assess if a fence can be put in on the end of the streets and around people's properties.

ACTION:

Develop a plan to reduce the use of Joe Ghiz Park and increase the security for residents and park users.





APPENDIX

COMMUNITY OUTREACH CENTRE INFORMATION SESSION

ATTENDEE QUESTION AND ANSWER



Q: *You said there was not going to be an application for a permanent rezoning, but in the presentation, it said there is. Is this new? Is it going to be in writing?*

▲ Yes, this is new and updated.

Q: *What about the shelter?*

▲ An application was put forward for that. Community Outreach Centre, not permanent status but emergency, maybe.

Q: *What about the pollution in the ground not allowing people to live there?*

▲ Additional testing is required to go over Stage 2.

Q: *What about the outcome of contamination?*

▲ Confirmation from the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action that there aren't concerns. There will be some remediation procedures that the contractor will follow.

- *What is the nature of contamination? Will there be problems with surrounding houses? Airborne contamination?*

Q: How much money is the province going to spend to rehabilitate the area?

- ▲ Certain areas still need to be tested.

Q: If police are called on people, now those people know you call the police.

- ▲ Chief: Continue to call the police. We understand this is heightening anxiety. Communication remains important, and active dialogue needs to happen.

Q: Are the officers assigned going to be the same ones over and over or different?

- ▲ Dedicated officers, continuity piece. Assigning NCO.

Q: Will there be a hotline?

- ▲ No, but you'll get to know the officers and have conversations, which will increase responsiveness. Commitment is to make it very, very safe.

Q: With the new site, there will be a policy of no drug use on-site. What about drug use in our backyards? What's being put in place to make sure that doesn't happen?

- ▲ That's going to be the police's issue.
- ▲ In the past, they have restricted people from coming to Part St. because of their drug use and violence.

Q: What additional support systems are in place?

- ▲ Finding who's going there. Not just going to hang out without a purpose. Intake is becoming more intense.

Q: So if they're rejected... they're now going into the neighbourhood?

- ▲ So, what would you like it to be?
 - You need to come up with a plan, not us. You created this issue.

Q: *Where are they going?*

- ▲ Some into housing, some into treatment, some moving on. Some are compliant, and some are not compliant. We need to keep them engaged.

Q: *Why are you combining temporary housing and the Community Outreach Centre? If I were down and out, I wouldn't want to go through the people who are violent/using. Why was this a good idea?*

- ▲ The Governor said Euston wasn't good, so this property was an opportunity to relocate quickly. It's not an ideal location, and we see that it's a struggle to find locations. But this is the best option.

Q: *What's the province going to do for us?*

- ▲ Carlene - there have been concerns, and if we have clear plans, we can mitigate future disruption.
- ▲ Brad - our resources are focused on the dealers and not simple possession.

Q: *Is temporary housing ruined for some people?*

- ▲ His experience is that 8-10 people are consistently an issue every night. We try to help and work with them. The challenge is to find another avenue. We're trying to - not trying to push it on Part Street. We ARE concerned for residents.
 - *But not one person has said this. Justin and Alanna have shown up, but the government has NOT. There is no excuse for houses in low-density areas not to know about updates, meetings, etc. The province has let us down with a lack of communication.*

Q: *Are the organizations getting government funding to do their job? Producing reports? What are they doing with this money to make a change?*

- ▲ Things are moving so quickly that we're just catching up. I see the province making plans. It's taking more time than it should.
- ▲ The resident support team was announced by the government but hasn't been fully formed yet. Will be led by the executive team, and residents will have a mechanism for ongoing support. Not just a website but a way to be involved and respond in real-time.
- ▲ When Queen Street Clinic was brought in (4-5 docs ran it) and we evaluated that service, the amount of petty crime and crime in the area was significant, and we were able to see the impact of that one initiative.

Q: How much time are you putting in? How many extra officers?

- ▲ 6 officers for the area of influence. Right now, there are 4.
 - *You think two more officers are going to help when the area has grown, but the four can't handle what's happening now?*
- ▲ It represents less than 10% of total calls for the city; we're still busy with the rest of the city. We wanted to frontload, especially in the Park Street and Beach Street area. 6 officers are funded, but they're part of a bigger team. In reality, this is challenging one call can occupy an officer for 6-8 hours. We know visible police presence is necessary. Calls for service have increased significantly for all of the city (over 21,000 calls). It's a challenge to deal with the city while still setting a tone at this new location/area of influence, but that's our commitment. There are about 70 people at the Community Outreach Centre compared to the rest of the city.
 - Even the new drugs are posing an issue.
- ▲ We're in a mental health crisis. Suicide attempts are way up.
 - The area of impact was identified by the Harm Reduction Group. This was created because of the Community Outreach Centre and the proposed safe consumption site. People want to know whether or not this temporary move to Park Street means PEERS Alliance is going. Is PEERS going to have an office space? Also, residents not here have made it clear that they've been asking for public info consultation for 6-10 months. Also, how will the Native Council of PEI be included?

Q: Have the police ever considered bringing in their module? Buying a house? They should have a hub.

- ▲ "Hub" was a term being used... The Community Outreach Centre started as a warming centre... now assistance... and the intent in doing this was to connect with individuals coming to a warming center to help them move along. Started at a low number, but it has grown.

Q: What does PEERS Alliance even do here?

- ▲ PEERS Alliance: They have several different services and supports for people who identify with this group... homeless... not engaged with services...
 - *Will they be moving?*

This is part of the work that Carlene and Amanda have been doing.

We're still in the process of figuring this out.

Q: Operations: accountability, changes. Who is going to oversee this at the department?

- ▲ Contract with the Adventure Group (until March 2025), working with Carlene, we know there's lots of negative publicity about the Adventure Group, but there's been lots of good work happening here.

Q: When was the Adventure Group contract extended, and why was it done in the middle of the review? And why is it being outsourced?

- ▲ A new contract began in November 2023 and will go until March 2025.

Q: Why is government outsourcing?

- ▲ Have to do with the expertise of these groups. Shelter was a unique situation.
- ▲ In the downtown core during the day, there are not a lot of other resources that can and will deal with challenging individuals.

Q: What if the "bad" clients have another place to go to that's not around homes... safer...? The area of influence is 20 min around downtown. Can free bussing mitigate that to ensure accessibility isn't lost?

- ▲ Don't see why not. There's a balance/hyper-model that could be done as long as we can identify what's needed and why.

Q: Is there any information or focus on what help could be given to folks who are released from correctional facilities?

- ▲ It's a gap that needs to be addressed in people leaving correctional supervision and being in the community without a house or support.

Q: Who pays for City police? What if the City paid for more police for this?

- ▲ We added four, and six more are coming. Trying for proactive policing rather than reactive.
- ▲ Currently, police locations are 4 officers for the Community Outreach Centre/area of influence and an additional 2.
- ▲ Birchwood meeting: The police gave out a survey but wanted to compare it with the broader citizen survey. And the broader city wasn't being as impacted. That's why we've pulled in resources. Sleeping population: 43k. Every day: 80k and 3x that in summer. We need resources for being a tourist city, for protests, for events, etc.

- ▲ One of the things affecting police is how policing has evolved. No longer can we get part-time officers for the summer. Not only has the city grown, but we can no longer hire part-time.

Q: *When the temporary move takes place to Park Street, what level of security is going to be at the abandoned building, or will it be demolished right away?*

- ▲ The Chief is aware there's going to be a dispersal of clients to Euston Street, and we will need to work with businesses looking after that location.
- ▲ *We need to remember that that property has a property owner, and that's the province, so there's a level of responsibility taken for the abandoned building.*
 - Working with the Chief and staff and floated the idea of keeping security here.

Q: *If we had a mental health centre and additions centre, it would help the police and the community. Is there a link in the chain missing (there aren't enough resources)?*

- ▲ Everyone in the know knew people who weren't doing well, and we would pull them together and do a planned admission in the hospital and get them back onto a treatment plan and proper meds. We are seeing the numbers grow so much that we can't do those one-offs anymore. That piece is missing.
- ▲ We're talking with people to tell them we need different resources for this complex population. This is everyone's issue, and we need to pull all resources together.
 - Carlene: The lack of resources and the approach are different, but that doesn't mean they can't be changed.
 - We are mobilizing to look at solutions. This is complicated, but we are asking ourselves the same things. Screened intake and lack of coming in and out will help and will be a good step. We hope anyone there will want to be there to get help, and it will deter others. It's not going to go away, but the team that I see is trying to create pathways. After we've been there for a year, we will be able to see the changes we make show differently than where they were on Euston Street.

CARLENE:

The concern is the non-compliant component - open to options.

In Calgary, they were very treatment-heavy (mixed reviews), Connect to Care Team, psych. help. There are lots of models, but we need to figure out what will work here.

It's not come in and get out. If you're actively working on your issues, you can stay the entire day. Open to feedback.

- ▲ *There should be multiple smaller warming centres throughout Charlottetown - East/West/Brighton/etc. You're mixing too many demographics. Many people would not be comfortable going to Park Street just to get warm.*
- ▲ *Already have already said that they should close down the Community Outreach Centre until other centres are set up.*
- ▲ *Can we get the addresses of the places you think would work?*
- ▲ *Dispersing makes sense because there's more control in small groups.*
- ▲ *This has already been established. The report that came out called for decentralized services. A big problem is that people feel they're not being listened to, and because of this, the decisions being made don't make sense for a small city. Centralizing doesn't work.*
- ▲ *Zero tolerance policy at Salvation Army, etc. This needs to happen more at the Community Outreach Centre. The culture of tolerance has made this issue to be what it is.*

CARLENE:

What are other options we can look at? What can we do that's compassionate but still keeping the community safe?

- *Dispersion doesn't necessarily solve the issue of what to do with those who just will not cooperate.*
- *Warming centres for people who are using do need to be dispersed.*
- *Glad it's a zero tolerance for drugs, but what else is different, and when will someone run it who we can trust? Are there mental health pros working there? Why is the Adventure Group qualified?*
- *Mental Health Services (MHS) has engagement now but previously has done one situation and dealt with that one person, but now the numbers are too big, and it needs to be a system response which is too much for MHS to deal with each time. Meeting with Addictions, MHS, etc. Need to find ways to give people an option to get off the street... facilities, treatments. We're not seeing people flowing to those programs yet, but that's what needs to happen.*
- *Some things that worked in the past are methadone clinics and opioid removal (Health PEI, police, city, doctors). We can build on this out of the resources we already have.*
- *This is helpful because the issue was that there was no further help.*

