

Hamilton's tiny shelters find temporary home in Gibson neighbourhood

The Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters will officially announce the Barton Street East site on Friday morning.

By [Fallon Hewitt](#) Spectator Reporter
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The Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters (HATS) has secured a temporary site to call home, The Spectator has learned.

Notices regarding the proposed spot, a parking lot located at 647 Barton St. E. in the Gibson neighbourhood, were delivered to around 500 homes in the surrounding area on Monday, said Tom Cooper, a member of the HATS steering committee, in an interview.

The site, located at the corner of Barton and Earl streets, is owned by local architect Bill Curran. Plans for a four-storey commercial-residential structure

at the site were unveiled back in August — yet the development is a long ways away from fruition.

Cooper said, in the meantime, Curran has “generously offered” the organization the short-term use of the site as a place to build their village of pint-sized homes meant to shelter people from the streets.

“Given the footprint of the area, we won’t be able to have a huge space,” he said. “But, it will enable us to get started.”

The news of the location comes just weeks after the organization, launched by a coalition of anti-poverty advocates earlier this year, told The Spectator that they were close to announcing plans for a potential site.

The initiative had originally hoped to utilize part of the former Sir John A. Macdonald Secondary School property for the temporary community, but that vision was quashed by a mix of political resistance, zoning hurdles and demolition plans.

Cooper said that, through their agreement with Curran, the organization is aiming to make use of the site for approximately two years, after which, they’ll be on the hunt for a new location.

In the letter to residents, which was obtained by The Spectator the organization noted that they’re hoping to have around a dozen unhoused residents — including some from the neighbourhood — moved into their cabins by the coming holiday season.

However, Cooper noted that getting there is entirely dependent on funding and ensuring the project is on “solid financial footing.”

Each cabin costs approximately \$5,000 to build — with that cost covering construction materials, a heater, a bed, fridge and microwave.

The project also has other infrastructure needs, such as setting up hydro, washrooms and showers, a kitchen trailer and hiring staff.

Dan Bednis, a member of the HATS leadership team, said the organization needs to raise approximately \$300,000 to “initiate a controlled rollout” of the project at the site.

Bednis said they had raised around \$90,000 for the project as of Tuesday, through their GoFundMe campaign as well as private and corporate donations.

Cooper said the group is also planning to present during prebudget delegations with the newly elected council. They had previously asked the city for a \$100,000 contribution to assist in the effort.

Ahead of the official announcement of the site on Friday morning, the group will be hosting a pair of community information sessions at Tim Hortons Field on Thursday afternoon.

Those sessions are aimed at answering questions from community members, sharing more in-depth plans for the site, reviewing other similar programs from across Canada and providing details on the organizations that are supporting the initiative.

Cooper reiterated that the tiny homes are not a permanent solution for unhoused folks, but are instead a way to bridge the gap between living rough and securing supportive housing.

“None of us see this as the end game,” said Cooper. “It’s very much a way to stabilize people, get them off the street and keep them safe and healthy.”

The community information sessions will run at 2 and 7 p.m. at 64 Melrose Ave. N.

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