

POSTED ON 14/07/06

## City approves women's housing

HAYLEY MICK

For the past two weeks, Penny Fultz has slept in an enclosed bus shelter on Bay Street, in the shadow of city hall.

She hasn't showered for days. Last week, someone stole her shoes. But the slight 41-year-old, who has been homeless, on and off, for about a quarter of her life, says she prefers the streets to the chaos of emergency shelters she says are rife with scabies, bed bugs, sleep disturbances and "thievin'."

She wants a home that's cheap and permanent.

"Shelters are no good. They need affordable homes for the homeless," Ms. Fultz said yesterday, as she rubbed her blistered feet outside a shelter, located downtown at 110 Edward St., where her boyfriend had spent the night.

Yesterday, city council approved a \$61-million plan to transform 110 Edward St., which for two years has been a city-run, 80-bed shelter and referral service for the homeless, into an affordable-housing complex for women. The plan will see the building renovated and two new buildings constructed to form a 300-unit housing complex for single mothers, aboriginal women and women with mental illnesses who need permanent roofs over their heads. It's a move that Mayor David Miller, homeless advocates and Ms. Fultz say is badly needed to make a lasting dent in the homeless population in Toronto.

"The whole point is to get people housed," Mr. Miller said yesterday. "We're trying to move to a housing-based solution rather than a shelter-based solution."

Permanent housing was listed as a priority after the city's recent homelessness survey, which found about 5,000 people are living on Toronto streets. According to city records, about 66,300 households are on the waiting list for affordable housing and more than half are women and single mothers.

The new facility will be run by the YWCA, the Jean Tweed Centre -- an addiction treatment centre for women -- and Wigwamen Incorporated, an aboriginal urban-housing provider.

They will pay about half of the \$61-million price tag, and the rest will be split by federal, provincial and municipal governments.

The development, slated for completion in 2009, includes transforming the original building into a head office for the YWCA, and adding a 200-seat auditorium, and a café and boutique that will provide job training for residents.

Two new buildings will also be built. One will have 150 units for single mothers and their families, and another 100 units for women with serious mental illness, along with mental health services. The other building will have 50 units for aboriginal singles and families -- including 10 units for women fleeing violent partners.

Yesterday, councillors and homeless advocates hailed the decision as a success. "There is a need for women-only buildings. It makes a huge difference in their sense of safety and their ability to keep violence out of their lives," said Amanda Dale, spokeswoman for YWCA Toronto. However, some expressed concern no plan has been proposed about where to relocate the shelter and referral services now provided at 110 Edward St.

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Front St. W., Toronto, Canada M5V 2S9  
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