

# URBAN ISSUES

## Bus shelters...

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cent of all bus shelter responses. All but five of the 15 are in the downtown area.

About 60 per cent of the responses were classified as an unknown problem, or "person down," usually initiated by people driving by who don't stop. Persons found in shelters under this category have no medical complaint, but may accept resources or services offered.

"We know that residents experiencing homelessness are using the shelters as temporary space," said Schmidt, citing the pandemic and unwillingness to use emergency shelters as the main causes.

Schmidt told the committee that the WFPS is sharing data and working with harm reduction partners to improve support efforts for vulnerable persons.

Less than three weeks after Schmidt's appearance at council a man was found dead in one of the 15 shelters most visited by WFPS after a night of extreme cold. The cause of death has not been released.

Downtown Community Safety Patrol (DCSP) executive director Greg Burnett told STREETS their collaboration with the WFPS helps outreach teams more effectively serve vulnerable populations and alleviates pressure on the WFPS. DCSP outreach teams regularly visit bus shelters and other places homeless people congregate, he says, "just to see how they're doing and if there's something we can do to help."

Burnett says they want to move people from bus shelters to better places, but the solution is not always as simple as driving them someplace else.

"We have to do a lot of work in getting these folks to safe places that are really going to help with the very complex issues that they're dealing with individually, whether that be mental illness, addictions... whatever's keeping them there," he said.

Jamil Mahmood, executive director of Main Street Project (MSP), says the solution starts with more housing.

"Without the creation of supportive and transitional

## 'The government should look after them, to get everybody safe'

By Sean Ledwich  
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

**H**ien Tran felt anger towards people who were forcing open doors and squatting in the Saigon Centre, but that anger has drained away.

"It's not their fault...I don't get angry with them anymore, because, you know, they (are) just like us. They need shelter too, and the government should look after them, to get everybody safe," says Tran, president of the Free Vietnamese Association of Manitoba (FVAM), which owns Saigon Centre.

The February issue of STREETS reported how people had been breaking into the 54-unit complex at 458 Balmoral Street, squatting in and damaging unoccupied suites and worsening a financial crunch that threatens the building's future.

After months of replacing locks and asking squatters to leave, the FVAM reinforced exterior doors, and since January they have managed to keep the intruders out.

Tran says he speaks to people in neighbouring apartment buildings along Balmoral and has heard they have similar struggles with squatters.

housing we won't see a change at the bus shelters."

MSP's 24/7 mobile outreach teams go city-wide and include case workers that can connect people to benefits and housing, health care, mental health services, and addictions support. A report provided to the city in February showed MSP's mobile outreach logged 2,631 visits to bus shelters in the last five months of 2021.

Gerald says low-barrier housing programs (sobriety not required for entry) that deal with the root causes of an addiction would help more people like him and Marie leave bus shelters behind. That, and maybe a lift, when the time comes.

"There are resources...but, I mean, it's hard for us to get somewhere on any given day because we don't know where we're going to be."

The FVAM was advised by Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA) last November on how to secure their building and to educate tenants to not allow strangers inside. Vanessa Wiedeman, rental safety coordinator with SNA, is now working with the City of Winnipeg's Community Development Division to identify potential solutions for FVAM's challenges, which include 22 unoccupied suites in the affordable housing complex needing repairs before they can be rented out.

Wiedeman says she works to share information with squatters about places that provide food, hygiene products and blankets, as well as information about outreach services.

"Resources that can keep them warm and safe and meet them where they're at, really...and also have housing workers, like housing first workers and advocates who can support them with EIA."

SNA executive director Lin Howes Barr worries about the people now locked out of the Saigon Centre.

Howes Barr, who sits on the End Homelessness Winnipeg (EHW) Extreme Weather Response Committee, says her "heart goes out" to the people who were squatting in the Saigon Centre.



**Hien Tran, president of Free Vietnamese Association of Manitoba, does not fault the people who squatted in the Saigon Centre for the situation they find themselves in.**  
Photo Sean Ledwich

"It's not the right space for them, and we need to make sure that building is safe for the tenants, for sure," she says, adding, however, that "it's too easy to be, like, 'OK, we locked the doors and now those folks aren't there,' OK, cool, where are they?"

Emergency shelters have been full all winter, she says, and the options for people wanting to move past the shelter system are hampered by "system failures," including a lack of transitional housing.

"These folks that are going to the Saigon Centre are probably folks that have been going to Main Street Project, going to Salvation Army, going to Siloam Mission, coming to (West End 24-hour Safe Space), but what help can those outreach workers do if housing doesn't exist? Like, great, you got a meal and a friendly face,

that's helpful, sure, but we need housing."

Howes Barr says a lack of transitional housing, where people are supported to stabilize their lives and move towards independent living, is keeping people homeless.

For homeless youth—as many of those who use the SNA West End 24-hour Safe Space in the West End are—and for youth aging out of the child welfare system, Howes Barr says there is no supportive housing model available.

"There's no supportive youth housing model in our city where we can be, like, 'OK, you're 19, you're aging out, you have all this trauma, how do we get you into a place that's your own, where you're safe, and make sure that you get the support that you need for whatever the challenges are in your life?' It doesn't exist. It's like the chain is broken."



**Leah Gazan**  
Winnipeg Centre

## Putting Community at the Centre

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OUR WEST END SITE  
IS CURRENTLY  
LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS.



WEST END  
365 McGeer Street

- 1JustCity's weekend drop-in programs
- run until Sunday, March 27, 2022
- Shifts are Saturdays and Sundays

Shifts are Saturdays and Sundays from 11:30 am to 3:30 pm. Volunteers will help with drop-in set-up and take-down, foodservice and prep, and will make sure that our weekend drop-in is a welcoming and hospitable space for the many people who have no other place to go on the weekends!

- Anyone interested can email Josh at [josh@1justcity.ca](mailto:josh@1justcity.ca) or check out [www.1justcity.ca](http://www.1justcity.ca)

-You'll be helping us work toward our vision.

1JustCity works towards a city that is founded on justice, where all are heard, all are welcome, all are cared-for, all are celebrated and all are working together.