

My name is Brian and I am a long-term resident of 195 Ferguson Ave. N., which is directly adjacent the Wesley Day Centre, and I feel the need to express to the Hamilton Spectator audience of readers and the general public the "other side of the story;" regarding an article written by Teviah Moro, a writer for the Hamilton Spectator.

I am extremely pleased to announce that Wesley Community Homes (WCH) board of directors made the right decision in voting "NO" against a safe injection site operating within the premise of 195 Ferguson Ave. N. A 60-unit apartment building complex... my home!

I've lived in this neighbourhood, and at the address of 195 Ferguson Ave. N. since 1996. Quite frankly, I must say, I've seen it all! In the children's play areas and private property grounds, needles and other drug paraphernalia are constantly being found. Our front entrance foyer, despite all the proper notices to not loiter visibly posted, has homeless people crashing out and sleeping on the ground on a regular basis. This type of behaviour by Wesley Urban Ministries (WUM's) clients; intimidates fellow tenants, mail delivery people, visitors and guests alike.

Then there's the drinking and illicit trade of drugs that befall the street. People in general, regardless of their "client status," shouldn't be drinking alcohol and doing drugs in any neighbourhood area and street.

It's mostly an enforcement issue really; the WUM staff are up to their knees in "BS" if you will... on a regular basis and it overflows into our private property grounds and parking lot.

Despite the drop-in centre having readily accessible washrooms, the drunkards would rather relieve themselves on the sidewalk up and down Ferguson Ave. N. As you could imagine, this atmospheric chaos gets exhausting, especially when WCGH's board of directors and Good Shepherd services are working diligently to improve the situation.

Good Shepherd Services have been responsible for general management of Wesley Community Homes for some time now. They have performed magnificently, in my opinion, in regards to their professionalism and dedication to improving the living condition at 195 Ferguson Ave. N., and to make it a more safe, enjoyable living experience.

The executive director of WUM, Daljit Garry, stated in the May 1, 2018 aforementioned article by Teviah Moro, that she was "shocked and dismayed with the WCH's board of director's decision to vote 'no' to a safe-injection site." I believe she used the acronym "NIMBYism" in reference to our board of directors at 195 Ferguson Ave. N. Well, I would like to be respond and just say that the "drop-in centre" has been in our backyard for 20+ years, and quite frankly, myself and fellow tenants and supporting community have had enough!

They've had over 20 years to try to get it right, and they still struggle daily to manage the crisis of addiction, homelessness, and mental illness, and how a toxic environment can impact an individual's path to recovery and general well-being, and how it can cause set-backs to others trying to succeed and seek and see joy in life.

I firmly believe that more affordable social housing is needed drastically- especially for the vulnerable, and the individuals struggling with mental illness that want to seek help.

When most people are given the chance to live with a basic income/allowance, they will live their lives with pride and dignity, and will think wisely before heading down the path to self-destruction.

I believe, with great certainty, that the relocation of the drop-in centre would welcome a wave of peace and harmony this neighbourhood desperately needs; a place for people to grow and prosper.

Now with the imminent termination of WUM's lease, and the decision to close down, the general public should get a well-balanced perspective of WUM's "day centre." Our WCH board of directors gave a year and a half to make them decide if they were to renew their lease for another 2 years. WUM "renege" and violated lease agreements to rent out the second floor office space, which they abandoned and left WCH with the financial burden that deeply affected the yearly budget.

I've spoken to many of WUM's day centre staff and they seem adamant they are providing many valuable services to their clients. It's hard to appreciate and respect their mandate or "vision" when 90% of their clients set up mini "tent cities" and conduct unsavoury behaviour on a daily basis. While most workplaces have 2 breaks and a lunch, WUM's day centre staff are continuously exiting the building and taking smoke breaks in our private backyard all through their shift. They neglect their responsibilities, and let their clients run free, with no appreciation for the tenants and their guests' safety and "reasonable enjoyment" of 195 Ferguson Ave. N.

Also, ever since the Wesley Day Centre announced to your readers they were closing, effective August 23; some of their clients have been conducting vandalism and theft at a higher level than usual.

As I mentioned earlier, I interacted with WUM's day staff and they feel "guiltless," with no respect to WCH's tenants needs and safety. Wesley Day staff assume the "police" will deal with any issue that arises... which in hand takes valuable resources away from city-wide emergencies!

Wesley Community Homes held a tenant meeting with our independent board of directors June 18th, 2019, and most of WUM's day staff showed up uninvited and interrupted the meeting a few times by a couple of their representatives. This reprehensible behaviour is "classless," in my opinion, and demonstrates the character of WUM's day staff.

I can appreciate the programs Wesley day program provides, however, I would appreciate the location of these services to be relocated out of my backyard, so that myself and fellow tenants can enjoy the comforts of home unencumbered.

Brian Cheeseman, long-time resident of 195 Ferguson Ave. N.