

# Crossroads Village – a new chapter in the ministry of Crossroads

## What is being proposed?

That Crossroads United Church enter into negotiations for an agreement with Our Livable Solutions (OLS) for the rental of half (approx. 0.4A) of the unpaved parking lot at the west side of the church and an associated utility right-of-way for 10 years at the nominal rate of \$1 per year for the purpose of accommodating up to 18 sleeping cabins and associated service structures, subject to successful negotiations.

## Why?

*Matthew 25:35 “I was hungry and you clothed me; thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me into your homes”.*

*James 2: 10 “What good is there in your saying to them “God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!” if you don’t give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead.*

## What is Our Livable Solutions (OLS)?

OLS is a local non-profit organization actively pursuing community solutions that aim at ending homelessness in Kingston. It is currently pursuing charitable status, but in the meantime, it has an arrangement with the Community Foundation of Kingston to receive tax-receipted charitable donations. OLS staff and volunteers interview and maintain a waiting list for the cabins, process the rental agreements of the residents, and offer a variety of onsite services to residents (including employment counselling, assistance with government paperwork, security, arranging health referrals, and coordinating a dental health program.) Chrystal Wilson is the Executive Director.

## Where would the Village be located?



The picture above is one *possibility*, but the fencing to the top (N) and left (W) sides is helpful. White rectangles are cabins. The white parking lines (not currently in place) indicate overflow parking (for about 40 cars) for the church. Snow can also be dumped there in the winter, although in a smaller area than is currently available. The line at the top is where utilities could run to a Utilities Kingston connection on the street.

The cabins would not be moved to Crossroads until the fall.

### **What are sleeping cabins?**

Sleeping cabins are 8' x 12' structures (less than the legal definition of a building) equipped with electricity (including lighting & heating/cooling) smoke detectors, windows and lockable steel doors. Currently there are 17 of these that the City of Kingston has offered to sell to OLS for \$1 if an agreement for where to place them is reached before **July 1, 2024**. More than half the original cost was from **private donations**. Basic furniture (especially beds) and bar fridges are generally provided. There are no washrooms, showers or laundry in cabins, which instead (along with kitchen facilities) are located in a separate service module (to which residents have keys). This keeps housing costs low and encourages cooperation among residents.

Residents **pay rent** to stay in the cabins. Those on social assistance pay their shelter allowance (eg. \$390/mo from Ontario Works); otherwise up to 30% of their monthly income. Residents are responsible for their own food and cooking. OLS helps coordinate orders from local food banks and food pantries and are onsite to assist with cooking skills as needed. Cabin community residents assist in keeping the common facilities clean (including snow removal in the winter).

### **Is this an encampment?**

No. Tents or similar structures will not be allowed. This is not day-to-day shelter. Only individuals who are interviewed, accepted and have signed a 13-page rental and behaviour document can live at the Village. Violation of the conditions of their rental agreement would mean termination of the right to live in the Village and the resident would be removed. Cabin residents are **no longer homeless – their cabin is their home**.

### **Isn't there somewhere else to put the cabins?**

Not right now. In November of 2023, Kingston city council voted against locating the cabins at either of two locations that city staff had suggested, and stipulated that the cabins could not be located on city-owned land. There has been an offer of private land in South Frontenac township, but it would be 30 minutes out of the city and would cost \$4 million. That makes it difficult for volunteers to get to the site, for residents to get to medical appointments, and siphon away money desperately needed for services for the residents.

### **How long do residents stay?**

Weeks or months, depending on the needs of the resident. There is currently a limit of 364 days for living in the cabin community. The object is to find a more permanent place in the community for each resident, but this takes time.

## **What are the financial obligations to Crossroads?**

Very limited. OLS pays for the purchase of the **service module**, the **utility corridor** to the street, **repairs and upkeep** of the module, cabins and grounds, and **utility costs**. OLS also **hires the staff** necessary for the running of the Village and provision of services to residents. Crossroads requires renters of church space to carry liability insurance (typically \$1 million); OLS carries \$5 million in **liability insurance** for the cabins. Regular renters of the church building can add to church costs (washrooms maintained more often; floors swept more often; more wear-and tear on walls and doors; the driveway needs repair more often, etc). Village residents would **not have any right to access the church building**, and do not have cars, which would minimize such extra maintenance costs.

## **Would this arrangement be permanent?**

No. The agreement is for a rental, not a purchase. The suggestion is for 10 years (although renewable terms of 5 years might work). Why so long? The cabins have been moved twice a year so far, and this expense comes out of OLS operating funds, so there is less funding for programs for residents. Moving to an entirely new location requires additional planning and costs. And the chaos of moving is hard on the psychological health of the residents – something which already makes it more difficult for them to integrate into the rest of society. If OLS and the church cannot reach a continuation agreement at the end of the lease, the Village would have to be removed at OLS expense. There would be no structures with foundations that would have to be removed.

## **What if there's violence or people put up tents?**

This already occurs from time to time at Crossroads, and it takes staff and volunteer time to deal with. OLS would have staff on site to handle such situations in the Village, and can help even if situations arise on church property beyond the Village, if the church gives them permission to do so. Residents of the Village **want to feel safe**, and removing intruders and abusive residents is to the benefit of the whole community.

## **What rules must residents follow?**

Overnight stays by guests are not allowed, but pets may be kept, subject to OLS approval and dependent on the ability of the resident to care for the pet and ensure that the pet does not have an adverse affect on the community. Violence (physical or emotional) is not tolerated and is grounds for terminating the rental agreement and removing the resident. All this and more is contained in a lengthy rental agreement.

However, as renters, residents have rights. Residents can lock their doors. Written notice (24 hour) must be given before staff can enter for an inspection or repairs (unless in the case of emergency), although wellness checks (where the resident hasn't been seen for an extended time) may allow staff to enter the cabin. Residents can come and go as they please, as would any apartment dweller. This is unlike shelters, where occupants must vacate and take their belongings with them during the

day. Although smoking or vaping in the cabins or common facilities is not allowed, what residents do or keep in their cabin is up to them, as long as it is not a health hazard; the item is legal; and it is not in quantities that could be used for trafficking.

### **What about zoning restrictions?**

Currently, the Crossroads property is zoned URM4, which is a multi-residential zoning that allows for most buildings from duplexes to multi-storey buildings. Often when an owner wants a **new** use for a property, the city can veto the request, **even if the zoning allows it**. An application for a zoning modification generally includes one or more public meetings, but this would be a wise step to take out of respect to our neighbours, even if it weren't required.

Finally, this approval-in-principle doesn't guarantee that the proposal will go through. Rental negotiations may reach an impasse. The City may not approve a new land use. But if either of these happen, we will still be **seen in the community as a congregation that seeks to be true to its faith**, even if it has been prevented from doing so. And that just might make seekers more likely to join us.

### **Crossroads Village**

- is social justice at a level that Crossroads can handle (in volunteer time or financial outlay)
- elevates Crossroads' visibility in the community and shows us as a Christian community that lives out its faith.
- involves minimal expense to Crossroads.
- makes use of church resources that are currently unused or greatly underused.
- is the right thing to do.