

Little Blue Cabins are not emergency houses

By Bill Kilpatrick

Despite Kevin Taylor's best efforts to get the word out it seems that people are still not fully understanding what exactly the Little Blue Cabins project is about. Taylor, who is the chair of the board and the main driving force behind the project, has met with all seven municipalities in North Hastings, along with multiple community safety and well-being committees, the Children's Sid Society, and has had a delegation with Hastings County council. Little Blue Cabins has a web page, and has had multiple articles in local, regional, and national newspapers, and is active on multiple platforms on social media, and yet people still confuse his project with either a warming centre, a 24/7 shelter, or the tiny home/sea container housing projects that have occurred in Kingston or Peterborough. Taylor admits that while most people who work with the unhoused community understand the difference between his project, a warming centre, or a shelter, the general population and many people in government still misrepresent Little Blue Cabins as something that it is not. "It depends on who were talking about," explained Taylor, "for example many of the people at the interfaith meetings [for the unhoused] have a grip on the fact that it's the transitional part not the emergency part, because they are all focused on creating an emergency centre" and a lot of the professionals are getting it, but I'm concerned that the general public which includes many municipal councillors aren't getting it. While Taylor admits that part of the problem has been his marketing of them as cabins, which are often confused with emergency tiny homes or sea container homes, which are in the news frequently, he sees this as a problem that has to be overcome. "Everybody is still focused on the cabins," said Taylor and this focus is taking away from the main project which is the transitional residential healthcare program. Taylor has attempted some new marketing in the hopes of shaking the emergency home label. The web page now says that the Little Blue Cabins is "A fresh start community" in the hopes of emphasizing that they are not emergency shelters. Taylor and his board have also released renderings of what the interior of the main building will look like and they cannot be confused for an emergency shelter or a sea container home. In fact, if one didn't know any better, they would be led to think that they are renderings of a fancy resort. This has been done on purpose says Taylor, "The living room and those areas [the kitchen, the board rooms, the computer rooms, and much of the communal space] are very relaxing and very warm. The stone walls, colours, and wood are meant to make everything feel like home because that's how they are supposed to feel when they are living there." The main building contains not only common eating and relaxing areas, but there is a gymnasium, a meditation room, a computer/school room, a room for individual and group therapy, and a main board room that is to be used for housed and unhoused committee meetings as well as training and workshops. The detail in the renderings, especially the floor plan, shows the finest of details such as where the coffee and tea station will be to how the tables and chairs will be set up. "This is not haphazard in any way, we have really thought this through," said Taylor. It has been designed with input from multiple community partners such as those working at the Rapid Access Addiction Medicine clinics who gave input about the office spaces where they will be meeting with clients on a weekly basis. Other partners include, but are not limited to, Pat Marcotte, Laura Van Dreil, Jazzminn Hein, the Little Blue Cabins board of directors, Solataire Robinson, Dr. Carolyn Brown, Ilda Furtado, Craig Laton of Reno This Contracting, to name a few. Taylor also sought out and used input from members of the unhoused community on the designs. Nothing is being left to chance and despite some criticisms that he has received that the designs are "too nice" for the people who will be using the facility. Taylor understands how the environment influences behaviour and he and his board have no intention of providing anything but the best service and experience for those who will be participating in the transitional program that could see people staying anywhere from three months to three years. Taylor spoke of a meeting that he had with Dr. Brown where she continually kept labeling the project as a "healthcare facility," and the more she said it the more it made sense to Taylor, "You know what, that's it," he told her, "It's a residential healthcare facility." Now Taylor's goal is to get that message out to the world.