

EDMONTON – Edmonton’s development appeal board postponed a hearing on a proposed 118th Avenue massage parlour Thursday after the applicant’s translator was arrested on prostitution-related charges.

55-year-old Simon Shum was arrested in connection with an unrelated investigation into human trafficking, and for allegedly living on the avails of prostitution. He was taken away in handcuffs as he waited for the hearing to start.

Shum has said he’s helping Ha Yung Tso with the redevelopment project which has sparked opposition from the Alberta Avenue community, in part, because it would be just two doors down from the [Crystal Kids Youth Centre](#).

“The main concern for Crystal Kids is that we work with very vulnerable youth that are at great risk of recruitment into the sex trade,” explained Miri Peterson, Executive Director of the youth centre. “We have specifically worked with youth, thwarting the threat of that, and have actually worked with those youth victimized and being trafficked – sometimes by their own family members – into the sex trade.”

Residents fear the “Personal Service Shop” will boost the sex trade in the area.

“I have no reason to doubt that this might be a possible sex trade business,” adds Peterson. “There are indicators out there that it is truly the intention to operate a sex trade type business. The application itself stated ‘Massage Parlour.’”

Tso spoke little English, but denied her business would involve sex.

However, community members who packed the hearing room to voice their concerns with the proposed business aren’t convinced.

“We have a copy of the floor plan of the business, and to us it looks like a sex shop and nothing else,” explains Bryan LaFleche, President of the Board of Directors for the Crystal Kids Youth Centre. “We of course have the arrest that occurred today that indicates there’s involvement with the sex trade. So I guess our comment is if it walks like a duck and it quacks – and it quacked pretty loud today – it’s a duck.”

“I think that speaks volumes to the fact that we’re shining a light on this,” adds Peterson, “and whatever they claim the business may be it’s evident that it may not be forthcoming in what their true intentions are.”

“It was actually shocking to see the events that took place before the SDAB hearing, before we actually got into the room,” shares Christy Morin, an area resident and Executive Director of Arts on the Ave. “The interpreter for the appellant of this particular business was arrested for human trafficking.”

“It really states clearly to us as a community that we are standing for the right reasons, and that we’re working hard together to see justice, to see good come to 118th avenue,” she says.

The Subdivision and Development Appeal Board hearing was packed with dozens of community members and representatives of community organizations like the Crystal Kids Youth Centre, Arts on the Ave, the Salvation

Army, and Guardian Angels, who argued against the proposed development of a building at 8706 118th Ave. into a massage parlour.

A city development officer denied the initial permit based on inadequate parking.

Tso appealed the decision, and a Calgary planner retained to handle the case for Hayung Holdings Ltd. sent an email asking for an adjournment because he couldn't attend the hearing and wants more time for community consultation.

However, community members say they've tried, on numerous occasions, to reach out to Tso and provide their input and haven't heard much in return.

"The committee that's been working together with the community... has been trying to reach out and talk to her and find out what exactly is this, what's the name of the business, what's supposed to happen, and there's been very, very little response," explains Morin.

The board adjourned the hearing until May 2 in order to provide the appellant "a fair hearing."

"I'm a little disappointed that we weren't able to go ahead with the hearing," admits Peterson. "As I indicated in the hearing, my arguments to continue were that it's been a great drain on our resources when we could be otherwise spending that time invested in the children and defending their needs."

"I guess we prepare ourselves for May 2nd, and we'll just get another 12,000 or 30,000 more petitioners to sign the petition."

Crystal Kids has collected more than 12,000 signatures in an [online petition](#) opposing the project.

"No one is here to attack," says Chris Morris, a former principal of a junior high school in the area. "If you think something's wrong, you speak out against it, and there's a process for these things."

"This is about putting a business that's not appropriate to be near kids, right beside them, and right beside the most socially, economically vulnerable kids in our city. It's just wrong. So really, them having more time to think about it, and having the community think about it, may not be a bad thing," says Morris.

"Hopefully, May 2nd, it's even greater support."

With files from the Edmonton Journal



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