

Diesel Generator Running 24/7 at 39 Camden Street

Tuesday, April 25, 2017

Several dozen residents have contacted my office or called 311 to report a diesel generator that has been operating around the clock at 39 Camden Street since Saturday, April 22. I observed the problem myself with some neighbours on Saturday afternoon.

Unacceptable Lack of Advance Communication

The series of decisions that led to this situation were made without notifying my office or applying to the City of Toronto for the necessary Noise Exemption Permit. I am deeply disappointed by the lack of advance communication to neighbouring residents. In a dense, mixed-use neighbourhood like the Garment District, meaningful communication is essential for avoiding unnecessary conflict and disturbance, and keeping our city liveable. Advance communication would also have given us time to explore alternative ways of resolving this issue without relying on a diesel generator for an extended period. The sound and fumes are extremely disturbing for local residents, especially when trying to sleep. This situation is profoundly unacceptable.

The generator belongs to the Brant Park condo (at Adelaide and Brant) and is the sole source of electricity to that building at this time. The building has been disconnected from Toronto Hydro's grid because the main and backup cables serving the building were unintentionally constructed under adjacent private property, which only became clear when that property began to be redeveloped in the past year. The cables are in the process of being physically removed so that the "duct bank" that houses them underground can be safely relocated.

Noise By-law Offence and Application for Noise Exemption Permit

A City of Toronto inspector from Municipal Licencing and Standards visited 39 Camden on Monday morning and confirmed that the generator is breaking the Noise By-law. Shortly afterward, Lamb Development Corporation, which constructed Brant Park, contacted my office to let me know that they would be applying for a Noise Exemption Permit immediately to legalize the ongoing operation of the diesel generator.

A Noise Exemption Permit can only be issued with the consent of the local councillor. I have told Lamb Development Corporation that the first thing they need to do is start communicating with neighbouring residents, providing clear information about why this is happening, what to expect, and when it will be over. I also need to see that they are taking every possible measure to minimize the negative impacts on neighbours caused by noise and diesel exhaust.

I am mindful that Brant Park is occupied by many residents and as a consequence it is not an option to simply shut down the generator, leaving hundreds of people in the dark without any electricity. A way would have to be found to reconnect the building to the grid, or provide an alternative source of power, before the generator could be turned off.

Role of Toronto Hydro

Toronto Hydro helped to plan this work and they are delivering the construction on behalf of their customer, but this is not a Toronto Hydro capital project so their normal community-engagement processes were not initiated in this case. The work is not part of any City-wide plans and it is not being funded from Toronto Hydro's budget. However, they have been very helpful in assisting my office to understand the background of this issue.

Timeline and Next Steps

Early indications are that it may take a number of weeks to complete the underground construction work that is needed in order to re-connect Brant Park to the electrical grid, and the generator would be running for the full duration. The expected communication to neighbours from Lamb Development Corporation should provide more certainty about the projected timeline to complete work.

If this could go on for weeks, it only heightens the importance of implementing mitigation measures to reduce negative impacts of noise and exhaust from the diesel generator. The status quo has been difficult for neighbours to endure over a few days; it will be unbearable if it carries on without any improvement for weeks. Residents need to be able to sleep and they need to be able to open their windows.

Toronto Public Health has been alerted to the numerous complaints about diesel exhaust fumes outdoors and infiltrating nearby homes. A public health inspector has been assigned to the case. My office will provide further updates if there is anything the City of Toronto can do in regard to this aspect of the problem, or if we need to escalate the issue to another level of government with appropriate jurisdiction.

I encourage you to be in contact with the Garment District Neighbourhood Association (GDNA) about this problem if you are not already connected to them. The GDNA is advocating for local residents, coordinating with my office, and ensuring everyone in the community is kept up to date. Please visit their website at www.gdnatoronto.org for contact information.

Before I would consider approving any Noise Exemption Permit, I will need to be convinced that every possible measure to improve the situation has been implemented, and that adequate communication is being provided to neighbours. I know that change is needed urgently. My office will continue to work with Municipal Licencing and Standards, Toronto Public Health, Lamb Development Corporation, and Toronto Hydro, and I am committed to finding a better solution that improves the situation for the whole neighbourhood.

Sincerely,

Joe Cressy



City Councillor