

Opioid Crisis Delegation
Friday, December 6

Councillors and fellow Hamiltonians,

In mid-July when Council moved unanimously to support the Wesley Day Centre till March and find a new site before then to house it and as well as a second CTS, I was elated and filled with gratitude. We were told a report would be given in November to fill us in on everything. It all seemed clear and airtight. There was nothing to worry about anymore. So I thought.

In August, Wesley Community Homes finally broke their silence and shared why they would not consider extending the lease. Okay, I thought, that's their perspective, but all is well because the City is finding the Day Centre a new place, plus we are getting the badly-needed second CTS.

September and October went by in a blur for me. I run a Kumon centre so those are my busiest months, and I also juggle a dozen other responsibilities that were all wildly energy consuming. But every day I read heartbreaking stories about the opioid crisis and shared about them under the #SaveTheWesleyDayCentre hashtag on Twitter and on the Facebook page.

My husband, too, in his work at the Urban Core CTS and the Wesley Day centre, made it clear every time we spoke that people on the ground were suffering from the lack of any communication or encouragement that help was on its way.

I sat down with Andrea at the Wesley on October 10 to offer my help and support with promoting what they do and fundraising. Understandably they are currently swamped with their Christmas campaign and transition to a new ED, so I expect to speak further with them in the New Year.

In November Councillor Merulla recommended that Public Health recommend to Council to declare an opioid crisis. Otherwise, in spite of all my questions to councillors, I could not even get confirmation when this update meeting was happening.

At first I thought it would be November 7. But it wasn't on the agenda (I was later informed the staff weren't ready to report) so I promoted it on the Facebook page for November 21. I even confirmed with the clerk that it would happen then. But the November 21 meeting was cancelled so once more I moved the Facebook event, this time to December 6. Again I sought confirmation it would really happen, and received it.

I stand here, as I was reminded by my Extinction Rebellion colleague Becky Katz Wednesday when she gave her brilliant heartfelt delegation, as someone with a ton of privilege. I am a cis-het woman who has always enjoyed a middle class lifestyle and the benefits of being at least half-white, well educated, and since I was 18, a citizen of Canada. Like Becky, I seek to put that

privilege at the service of those who are most in need both in my full-time work which is primarily with immigrant families and in all my volunteer and community involvements.

Every time I come to delegate or support delegations, especially Wednesday when those delegations went on for 5 hours, I am powerfully impressed by the compassion and commitment of Hamiltonians who show up over and over again to plead with Council to do the right thing. This is an amazing city and I couldn't be more proud of everything people do for those who are in need.

At the same time, I listen to the voices of many who don't feel that their councillors and mayor are there for them. Their suffering is so great that they cannot perceive what you are attempting to do for them, and they are in daily danger of sinking under the weight of that pain. Suicide is a reality amongst other ways they die each day, slowly or quickly.

I hope that there will be a happy announcement today that a site has been secured. But whether or not that happens, I hope that each of you hears the cry of a city that badly needs you to be there for us, and to communicate clearly, consistently, and frequently on progress or even lack of progress. Please don't leave us in the dark. If we know what is happening, we who have privilege can share the news with others who don't have our access to it, and better continue to engage in the fight instead of giving up in despair.

Thanks for your time.