

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Encampments in Hamilton

From: Bridget Marsdin

Sent: September 14, 2020 4:38 PM

To: Farr, Jason <Jason.Farr@hamilton.ca>; clerk@hamilton.ca

Cc: Vaccaro, Mary-Elizabeth <vaccarm@mcmaster.ca>; Vengris, Jennie <vengris@mcmaster.ca>

Subject: Encampments in Hamilton

Dear Councillor Jason Farr and Ms. Andrea Holland (City Clerk),

I am writing to you in hopes that you will listen to deep concerns that are echoing throughout Ward 2. I have been a constituent of Ward 2 for over a decade. My first home was located in Corktown, and now I am a proud owner of a small property on Simcoe St East, in the Beasley neighbourhood. I care deeply about my community and do my best to contribute to the well-being of my neighbours. I also have a strong background working in social services serving some of the most marginalized folks in our city. As you are aware, several of my fellow neighbours and Ward 2 constituents have been forced to live in encampments located near First Ontario Centre and on Ferguson St. These encampments are a testament to the critical gaps in supportive housing and care for homeless folks. As we are in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, a housing crisis and an opiate epidemic, should we not be addressing the genuine needs of our fellow citizens and not trying to sweep them away by destroying people's safety, community and dignity by forcibly dismantling their shelter?

I am a mature, fourth-year Social Work student at McMaster University and I am doing my student placement with the Community University Policy Alliance through the School of Social Work at McMaster. This work focuses on developing policy approaches to bring about the kinds of housing and support that is desperately needed by women, and gender diverse people who experience complex homelessness in Hamilton. Encampments in our community further highlight the urgent need for supportive, communal and low-barrier housing with supports.

On April 30 2020, Dr. Kaitlin Schwan, and Leilani Farha (UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing) released [the National Protocol for Homelessness Encampments in Canada](#). Why is Hamilton not following this human-rights based protocol?

Hamilton has been described as one of the most generous cities in Canada and these encampments allow us the opportunity to demonstrate that generosity. It has been deeply disheartening to read about the opinions voiced by several city councillors requesting that these encampments be dismantled and destroyed. This knee-jerk reaction is both shortsighted and elitist. The Mayor and City Council are public servants; elected

to serve all constituents of Hamilton, and this includes folks living in encampments. Class and financial status can be fluid and fragile and all of us must realize how fleeting our acquired status can be. What tragedy would have to strike your life to throw you from your home and comfortable lifestyle? Would you want us to be there to offer you support? Do you believe that there is anything accidental about these encampments or do they shine a glaring light on how we are failing these folks? These encampments signal a time for true change, rather than sparking vitriol and condemnation for our neighbours. The nation is watching us- what do we want them to see? I am a lifelong Hamiltonian and I have always defended this city, but I am profoundly shocked and ashamed at how City Council has chosen to react to my neighbours living in encampments and I support the recommendations put forth by local organizations (including Keeping Six, HAMSMaRT, and the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic) that call for the City to not dismantle encampments, until there are low-barrier, temporary and permanent housing options made available by the City for the residents of these encampments.

I look forward to your reply and the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Respectfully,
Bridget Marsdin

I acknowledge that I live and work on the unceded territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Haudenosaunee First Nations, within the lands protected by the "Dish With One Spoon" Wampum, an agreement amongst all allied Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.