

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Hamilton Homeless Encampment Dismantlement July 31 2020

From: **Julia Bryson**

Date: Thu, Jul 30, 2020 at 3:23 PM

Subject: Hamilton Homeless Encampment Dismantlement July 31 2020

To: Partridge, Judi <Judi.Partridge@hamilton.ca>

Cc: <Christine.DiGiantomasso@hamilton.ca>, <info@hamsmart.ca>, <info@keepingsix.org>, <hclc.cjch@gmail.com>

Hello Judi,

I am writing to both follow up on my previous email regarding homelessness and COVID-19, and to ask you to address more urgently the planned dismantlement of encampments at the First Ontario Centre and the Ferguson Street encampment tomorrow (July 31, 2020). I am highly concerned about this announcement, which was communicated by City of Hamilton staff to the local advocacy groups HAMSMaRT and Keeping Six. As I outlined in my previous email, the CDC has advised AGAINST the clearing of encampments during COVID: *"If individual housing options are not available, allow people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread."* <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html#facility-encampments>

I would also highlight that clearing of encampments without providing safe alternative housing, pandemic or not, is cruel and does not solve any of the root issues which led to the formation of these encampments, namely lack of appropriate social supports. As you expressed in your last email, there is currently not enough housing in Hamilton and I recognize this. However, taking down encampments where people have found safety and community does not solve the issue and often forces people into more dangerous situations. I would encourage you to listen to a recent Crackdown Podcast episode regarding the recent dismantling of an encampment at Oppenheimer Park in B.C., and the impact it had on residents: <https://crackdownpod.com/podcast/episode-18-blue-metal-fence/>. Crackdown is an excellent podcast addressing drug use and policy in Canada; it is led by drug user activists and is supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. I recommend it highly to everyone, especially policy-makers such as yourself, who I believe have a duty to be informed on these issues considering the magnitude of the ongoing overdose crisis.

In solidarity with the folks living at the First Ontario Centre and Ferguson Street encampments, we are asking the following of the City:

1. The City not dismantle homeless encampments

2. The City provide interim and permanent housing for encampment residents with necessary supports
3. The City prioritize individuals experiencing homelessness for urgent housing placement
4. The City engage encampment residents in assessing their needs prior to dismantling
5. The City remove barriers in shelters and hotels in order to accommodate the individual needs of encampment residents
6. The City allow for sanctioned encampment sites and/or designate specific parks/public lands where

individuals are allowed to set up tents/temporary structures

6. The City allow for a streamlined, low-barrier, accessible process of issuing permits allowing for tents and temporary structures

Please let me know how you plan to address this urgent issue as my elected representative at city council.

Best,
Julia

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Julia Bryson
Carlisle, ON

On Tue, Jun 23, 2020 at 11:39 PM Julia Bryson wrote:

Hi Judi,

Thanks for your reply. I'm glad to hear the city has been working to find more housing for people in need. It is so fundamental to health and wellbeing, and I think if we use our resources and partnerships well then we can make massive improvements in this area.

I'm wondering if you could comment on how the city is addressing the specific asks in my first email, including stopping ticketing homeless people, providing more access to washrooms, etc. Happy to hear other councillors are also being contacted about these issues. It will take everyone advocating to make headway.

Best,
Julia

On Tue, Jun 16, 2020 at 3:29 PM Partridge, Judi <Judi.Partridge@hamilton.ca> wrote:

Hello Julia

Thank you for the email below, I appreciate you taking the time to send these comments. Please do keep in touch, I can tell you Councillors have received several very similar emails coming from across the city. Certainly on the housing front, there is interest from housing organizations such as Indewell to partner with the city to build affordable housing within Waterdown/Flamborough where there is a significant lack. We just do not have enough housing for those less fortunate many who are seniors and quite frankly people of all ages, some in dire need.

Kind regards,

Judi

Councillor Judi Partridge
Ward 15 - City of Hamilton 905-546-2713
Admin Christine DiGiantomasso 905-546-3944
www.hamilton.ca www.judipartridge.ca

COVID-19 INFORMATION: hamilton.ca/coronavirus

To subscribe to Councillor Partridge's Monthly E-NEWS
for important community updates and events, please visit www.judipartridge.ca

From: Julia Bryson
Sent: June 10, 2020 1:06 AM
To: Partridge, Judi <Judi.Partridge@hamilton.ca>
Cc: DiGiantomasso, Christine <Christine.DiGiantomasso@hamilton.ca>
Subject: Homelessness in Hamilton + COVID-19: Items for action

Hi Judi,

I hope that you are doing well. I imagine that the past few months have been incredibly busy.

I am writing to you as a lifelong Carlisle resident/Ward 15 constituent to advocate on the issues facing people with precarious housing situations in Hamilton right now. I am also writing as a medical student and the co-director of a student-led clinic at the Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre. In these roles, I have seen first hand how being homeless drastically impacts health and wellness, from difficulty accessing traditional healthcare structures, to lack of security, to the everyday challenges of trying to find places to eat and stay clean and just to exist. All of these issues and more have been amplified by COVID-19. I know that the City of Hamilton has taken steps to mitigate these issues, and I thank Council for that. However, I want to draw attention to some areas where we need continued work and action. The following have been highlighted by the Keeping Six community advocacy group that I work with:

- 1. Stop ticketing people who are homeless. It does not acknowledge the difficulties homeless people face in trying to follow the new restrictions and it does not solve the issues at hand. If people are not provided with reasonable ways to adhere to the guidelines, issuing them a ticket is dehumanizing and does not help them comply in the future.*
- 2. Enact a moratorium on clearing encampments on public lands as per available public health guidance. Per the CDC: "If individual housing options are not available, allow people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread." <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html#facility-encampments>*
- 3. Work to quickly open more washrooms, showers, and physical spaces for people to safely be throughout downtown and east Hamilton.*
- 4. Quickly establish methods for distributing water while water fountains are shut down.*
- 5. Take a housing first approach to helping people access non-congregate housing options.*
- 6. Open more cooling centres and keep them open beyond designated heat wave days.*

I want to highlight that the homeless population in Hamilton has incredible resilience. The stories that I have heard as a medical student have made me marvel at how people can survive against such great odds, although many do not. However, their resiliency does not negate the fact that they deserve the city's support to improve their health and wellbeing. We know the health disparities that exist in Hamilton are pervasive (I am sure you are familiar with the Code Red project). If we do not act now, COVID-19 will only worsen these gaps. I am also aware that the homeless population in our ward is minimal compared to the city's core. However, I believe that these issues should be prioritized by city councillors no matter the ward they represent. Hamiltonians are Hamiltonians. And at the end of the day, people are people.

Thank you for the attention to these issues. I look forward to hearing how you plan to address them as my elected representative at Hamilton City Council.

Sincerely,

Julia Bryson
Carlisle, ON