

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Regarding Encampments

From: **Jeanette Eby**

Date: Thu, Aug 6, 2020 at 1:05 AM

Subject:

To: Farr, Jason <jason.farr@hamilton.ca>

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

Dear Councillor Farr,

I am writing to you today to add my voice in support of the advocacy that is happening for our homeless population in Hamilton, specifically those who are currently living in encampments. I deeply respect the work of HAMSMaRT and Keeping Six who have been working with these members of our community and striving to meet their needs during the pandemic when they are even more at risk, and the work of the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic and lawyer Wade Poziomka who have been advocating alongside them.

I was made aware last week of the City's plan to dismantle the encampments on Ferguson Ave. N and around the First Ontario Centre, without collaborating with these organizations or heeding their recommendations. Removing people from their shelters, who have nowhere else to go, would cause further harm to those who have already faced so much trauma and oppression. On July 30th I was relieved to hear about the legal action that was taken so that this could not yet happen.

I will quote Wade Poziomka from his recent Op Ed in the Spectator (<https://www.thespec.com/opinion/contributors/2020/08/03/homeless-encampments-what-is-the-disagreement-really-about.html>)

"Encampments, for some, are the best and only choice available, in a global pandemic, to allow these individuals to exist, stay safe and protect themselves from the elements. We are not suggesting encampments are a better option to the shelter system or supportive housing — we are just saying that for some these “options” as presented, are simply not options at all.

“Suitable accommodation” is about more than just a physical space. It is about building trust in individuals that they can reside in that physical space and will not be ejected a day or two later because of established rules that are not conducive to their disabilities and needs. Suitable housing is about transitioning individuals to those physical spaces without causing trauma. This takes time and teamwork. All that we are saying, and all that we have ever said, is stop the inhumane practice of moving people on from encampments who have nowhere else to go. We are calling for time for outreach and housing workers to engage with people and support them to move when and where they will succeed. ”

As you know, I live in Ward 2 and care deeply about my community. I want my neighbourhood, ward, and city to be places where we look after our most vulnerable and I do what I can to work towards this. Enforcing a by-law that causes harm is NOT the way to do this. I work in community mental health and supportive housing and the way we support people is with dignity, with their needs and strengths at the center. Our community needs so much more supportive housing and requires the resources for a wide variety of options that suit peoples' diverse needs. Creating more options takes time and that is what these organizations and the folks in the encampments are asking for. There is an opportunity for the City to look to the experts in this situation and choose to be on a team that prioritizes the wellbeing of our most marginalized community members. The City has the power to do the right thing, you have the power as our Ward 2 councillor to step up and seek a solution alongside amazing people who are making our city a better place for all.

I echo the demands of Keeping Six, HAMSMaRT and the HCLC:

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

I want to see the humanity of my neighbours uplifted, which will uplift us all.

I hope to hear from you, you are welcome to email me or call me at 905-870-0512.

Sincerely,

Jeanette Eby