

Addressing Accessibility and Safety Issues for Hamiltonians Experiencing Homelessness

Emergency and Community Services Committee

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Impact of COVID-19 on Persons Experiencing Homelessness in Hamilton

- Densely-populated settings facilitate viral transmission
- Lack access to basic hygiene supplies
- High prevalence of comorbid medical conditions
- Significant barriers in accessing timely healthcare.
- Difficult to perform contact tracing

Challenges Accessing Hygiene Facilities

- Reduction in access to public services and spaces
- Challenging to protect against COVID-19 and from the elements
- United Nations COVID-19 Guidance Note: Public facilities for handwashing, toileting and showering must be available and regularly maintained at all times
- Bathrooms are essential to the day-to-day functioning of Hamiltonians and mitigate the spread of COVID-19

Criminalization of Homelessness

- Without permanent shelter, individuals experiencing homelessness must fulfill their basic needs in public spaces.
- Often unable to pay fines for these activities necessary for survival
- Penalties do not solve the initial problem: people without a place to use the restroom need somewhere to relieve themselves; and individuals fined for panhandling need money to survive.

Overdoses & Opportunity for Harm Reduction

- The rate of overdose deaths has more than doubled during the pandemic
 - Pre-pandemic death rate: 18 deaths per 100,000
 - Pandemic death rate: 40 deaths per 100,000
- Increased rate of folks using drugs alone with limited access to harm reduction supplies
- Discrepancies in harm reduction policies between shelters
- Harm reduction approaches in shelters can foster a safe environment and provide refuge for shelter tenants using substances

Our Asks

We ask that the Hamilton City Council:

1. Pass a motion to direct City staff to review mechanisms and best practices to implement accessible, four seasons, public washrooms in Hamilton
2. Pass a motion to direct Bylaw officers to cease the enforcement of the Public Nuisance Bylaw fines for folks experiencing homelessness
3. Motion to direct City Staff to identify discrepancies in harm reduction services and policies between shelters to standardize processes between shelters and ensure equity in shelter access for people who use drugs

**Ask 1A: Motion to direct City staff
to review mechanisms and best
practices to implement
accessible, four seasons, public
washrooms in Hamilton**

Consult experts and review the practice of municipal jurisdictions regarding...

1. Maintenance

- To ensure cleanliness and safety

2. Surveillance

- To reduce vandalism and crime

Consult experts and review the practice of municipal jurisdictions regarding...

3. Winterizing

- For warmth

4. Interim facilities

- To mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the meantime

Ask 1B: Motion to direct City staff to review locations that could benefit from temporary hygiene services such as porta potties and estimated costs of installation and maintenance and report back to Committee at a future meeting.

**Ask 2: Motion to direct Bylaw
officers to cease the
enforcement of the Public
Nuisance Bylaw fines for folks
experiencing homelessness**

Ask 3: Motion to direct City Staff to identify discrepancies in harm reduction services and policies between shelters to standardize processes between shelters and ensure equity in shelter access for people who use drugs