

Chair, Mayor Eisenberger, and Members of the General Issues Committee,

Since moving to Hamilton in 2013, I've encountered overt racism repeatedly. There are the hateful messages scrawled across the local park's picnic tables, the n-word spray painted onto the sign of the community garden, the newcomer kid who was harassed by older white teens, the slurs and threats that were yelled at my neighbour last week, and the calls made to Councillor Nann's office – just to name a few. This is hate. It's wrong. Hamilton has a racism problem and we must take a stand against it.

Do you also see the covert racism? Bylaw officers speak threateningly to my brown neighbour and change their tune when my white-skinned body walks out the door. Hamilton Police pull over and degrade my partner, a man of colour, while ignoring the white friends he is cycling with. Mayor Eisenberger, do you see the harm that your callous fear-filled words caused when you spoke to the media about the Black community leaders protesting in the forecourt? Racism is happening every day. It happens in me. It is happening in most, if not all, white people. We have a racism problem. Are we going to take a stand against it?

I'm no politician or financial expert, however I submit these words in hopes that you will ask yourself some questions as you wield your power and make financial decisions for the 2021 Operating Budget that will impact Hamilton's future:

1. How intently have I been listening to the most marginalized voices in our community?
2. How have I responded to IBPOC who have challenged my leadership and expressed needs?
3. Am I able to take an honest look at where racism exists in me?
4. What am I going to do about it?

I ask that as you make decisions you consider the needs highlighted in the *A Just Recovery for Hamilton* policy paper and the thoughtful recommendations made by a number of community leaders and organizations that help make up Hamilton's heart.

As Council you have a responsibility to show the community what it looks like to confront who we are and craft the kind of culture Hamilton will have. It will not be easy, quick, or comfortable, however, it will be necessary if we want to participate in growing a future that is anti-racist, hopeful, healthy, and community-centred.

Sincerely,

Joanna Aitcheson (she/her)