

To the General Issues Committee:

My name is Haley Reap and I live in Ward 3 in Hamilton. I am writing to express my support of Councillor Nann's motion to reallocate the Hamilton Police Services surplus towards community-led harm reduction support for those experiencing houselessness, and to express my concern for the continued inflation of the HPS budget.

The Hamilton Police Services budget is far larger than any funding allocated to social services in Hamilton (171 million for HPS vs. 156 million for all existing social services). Additionally, the existing surplus of \$567,000 indicates that the HPS absolutely does not need their requested 2.98% budget increase. I strongly encourage the Committee to move forward in denying the proposed 2.98% increase to the Hamilton Police Services budget and re-allocating the HPS budget surplus into community-led initiatives, as a start.

With an increasingly stark housing crisis, Hamilton needs to shift its priorities in a major way. The Covid-19 pandemic has seen more people being pushed out of housing they can not afford, and crowded shelters are turning people away to sleep on the street.

In a recent communication from the City of Hamilton in response to these concerns, I was told that "In 2017, Council committed an additional \$50 million dollars over ten years to support investments in housing, and Indigenous-led poverty reduction. This is in addition to the \$45-50 million dollars that the City invests in the housing system annually." 45 to 55 million dollars a year is still less than half of the annual budget for Hamilton Police Services. The money exists, and currently it is being used to purchase armoured vehicles (\$279,000 for a single vehicle; what is it even meant to be used for?) and pay officers to destroy encampments, harass houseless individuals, arrest peaceful protesters, and surveil Hamilton's racialized populations, rather than house our neighbours. The Hamilton Police Services do not and can not provide the support that houseless individuals and communities need, especially BIPOC/racialized people, 2-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ people, people with mental illnesses, disabilities, or addictions, all of whom face increased likelihood of violence at the hands of police. There are currently several officers on the force who remain on duty despite perpetrating violence, from illegal and unfounded arrests to sexual assault. I support all those calling for funds to be reallocated from the Hamilton Police Services budget into chronically underfunded initiatives that provide true support (e.g. SACHA, Disability Justice Network of Ontario, etc.).

The communication I received also emphasized that Hamilton requires federal and provincial aid to address the affordable housing crisis. While I agree that support would be welcome, I think the City of Hamilton needs to take more responsibility for housing and supporting its residents. Perhaps rather than feigning helplessness, Hamilton could step up and reallocate additional funds.

Thank you for your consideration.
Haley Reap