

**Pilon, Janet**

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**Subject:** End Encampment Evictions

**From:** Montana Mellett

**Sent:** August 11, 2021 8:10 AM

**To:** [clerk@hamilton.ca](mailto:clerk@hamilton.ca); Nann, Nrinder <[Nrinder.Nann@hamilton.ca](mailto:Nrinder.Nann@hamilton.ca)>; Office of the Mayor <[mayor@hamilton.ca](mailto:mayor@hamilton.ca)>

**Cc:** [info@hesn.ca](mailto:info@hesn.ca)

**Subject:** End Encampment Evictions

TO: Mayor Fred Eisenberger  
City Councillor Nrinder Nann  
Clerk

My name is Montana and I am writing to you today with hopes that you'll listen and understand the facts written in the following open letter from the Hamilton Encampment Support Network. I stand with encampment residents and fully support the below letter. **I demand the end to encampment evictions and encampment bans on stolen land.**

"This past week, the City of Hamilton announced that it would be returning to "pre-pandemic enforcement of camping bylaws" in Hamilton, which will prohibit encampments on all City property, including public parks, starting on August 30. This is not a solution to the ongoing housing crisis in our city.

This comes out of a motion to repeal the Bylaw Enforcement Protocol, motioned by Jason Farr (Ward 2 Councillor) and seconded by Sam Merulla (Ward 4 Councillor.) This decision came out of a sudden emergency City Council meeting, which occurred behind closed doors, with no way for the public or houseless residents to weigh in.

Encampment evictions have been and continue to be dehumanizing, insidious displays of violence in a sustained municipal war on Black, Indigenous, racialized, disabled, poor, and unhoused communities, both in so-called Hamilton as well as across Turtle Island.

Mayor Fred Eisenberger was quoted following the meeting as saying, "the pandemic has underscored the increasing need for access to safe, humane, and affordable housing." Meanwhile, as of 2016, over 11,350 homes stood vacant across the City while condo development projects continue to be approved by Council.

The national and provincial responses have also been dismal. In late June, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the creation of 4,500 new affordable housing units slated for creation across the country to help 320 Ontario families and individuals find housing, when Hamilton alone presently has a multi-year housing waitlist of over 5,000. Recent research pronounced Hamilton one of the least affordable cities in North America, more expensive to live in than New York and Los Angeles.

The Ferguson encampment, which triggered the creation of Hamilton's encampment Bylaw Enforcement Protocol in 2020, was one of the largest encampments across Turtle Island at the time of the encampment eviction. This encampment had over 60 residents and was violently torn down in the pouring rain, during a worsening global pandemic. People were denied their ask to stay in the community, on an unused boulevard, on the premise that the encampment hurt development prospects.

Encampment evictions are a public health crisis. According to Leilani Farha, the former UN Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, applications for evictions in Hamilton have gone up 90-95% in the last six years and, in the Greater Toronto Area, housing prices have gone up 425% in the last 30 years.

Many people living on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) cannot

afford to live in this City, because social assistance rates are fixed below the poverty line, creating the current conditions we are witnessing, where most encampment residents are disabled. On top of this, while forcing people out of parks under the false promise of providing houseless people with indoor spaces, we continue to see shelter hotels evict people on the basis of disability-related “disruptions.” We also know that houseless community members are at far greater risk of contracting COVID-19 under current overcrowded shelter conditions, and that encampment evictions physically prevent homeless community members from accessing resources, supports, and medical care through routine displacement.

As we learned during the Ferguson tear down, and through subsequent encampment tear downs, policing houselessness will never eradicate the public health risks at hand. The only solution is housing. Despite knowing this, the City of Hamilton wishes to return to pre-pandemic enforcement of camping bylaws, a decision which will perpetuate the increased criminalization of unhoused community members. Hamilton City Council has decided to do this in the middle of a global pandemic. We also know that Wards 2 and 3, which have some of the most frequent encampment eviction rates, have some of the lowest vaccine rates in the province of Ontario.

All of this is also happening in the middle of an opioid epidemic. Without sufficient support for community members who use drugs, such as safe injection and drug inhalation sites, the City’s efforts to destroy community and their ways of keeping safe through the weaponization of encampment evictions puts blood on their hands.

What’s clear to us is that encampment evictions put people directly in harm’s way and we know that Black and Indigenous community members are overrepresented in encampments. Across Turtle Island, from Tkaronto to the unseeded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), & Sk̓w̓x̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish) Nations in so-called Vancouver, it is unjust to violate the dignity and humanity of people in our community."

**So I ask these questions of Mayor Eisenberger and City Councillor Nann, as political leaders in this city after reading through that letter and knowing what is going on behind closed doors:**

- 1. What will you be doing to take meaningful direct action, right now?**
- 2. What demands and solutions will you be proposing in stopping the violence being committed against encampment residents?**
- 3. Will these proposed solutions include the voices and be led by the folks living in the encampments?**

**Thanks for taking the time to read this correspondence, I look forward to hearing your responses.**

Montana Mellett