

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Encampment Evictions

From: Kara Jongeling

Sent: August 11, 2021 1:22 PM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca; Office of the Mayor <mayor@hamilton.ca>; Farr, Jason <Jason.Farr@hamilton.ca>; Office of Ward 3 City Councillor Nrinder Nann <ward3@hamilton.ca>; Pauls, Esther <Esther.Pauls@hamilton.ca>

Cc: info@hesn.ca

Subject: Encampment Evictions

Hello Mayor, Clerk, and City Councillors,

I am writing to you today about my fellow neighbours. I am a Ward 2 resident who grew up in Ward 7 and has worked in many different wards in our city. Over the years I have seen the steady influx of our homeless population rise across the whole city, but vacant lots sit untouched, and affordable housing has grown few and far between being affordable or even accessible with a waitlist that is years long. I am disgusted (but not surprised) to hear that the city is trying to change encampment laws back to pre-pandemic times during a housing crisis AND while we are still in the pandemic.

We all know the city has been revitalized and with Toronto being unaffordable to most of its residents, Hamilton is a desirable but still not affordable alternative. It is no secret that our city has been doing well economically over the years, but when you go downtown and see the state of our population it does not always appear that way. The disparity between classes is visible and troubling. How is Hamilton the third most expensive city in all of North America (beating Los Angeles and San Jose)? It does not make sense that our downtown is booming amidst a housing crisis.

In terms of current encampment issues, I understand resident's concerns surrounding trash, fire safety, and just keeping public spaces such as parks safe in general. Sadly it does not seem to be common knowledge for residents to understand that many homeless people in our city suffer from mental health issues and addictions, and/or have been homeless for so long and so jaded that cleaning up after themselves is not a high priority (or even on their radar) because they are just trying to survive each day. They still deserve dignity and empathy. Shelters have been consistently full pre-pandemic times, and even if they weren't not every resident is comfortable there as theft of personal belongings is almost a sure thing.

The city urgently needs to prioritize housing for the homeless and ensuring the safety of its residents (this includes the homeless!!) NOW. Not be ready in a few years. Now. The townhouse lot near Bayfront has been sitting vacant since I was a teenager. I am almost 30 now and it has only recently been given the green light for future affordable housing. Only this year was Cathedral highschool decided it will be turned into a shelter to try and lessen the demand made even more urgent by the pandemic. I see what the city has been trying to do for it's homeless community, and I acknowledge that and the time it takes to get through all of the beauracy and red tape to make it happen. But we all know it is not happening quickly enough. Emergency measures need to be put in place.

I believe that you cannot and should not criminalize being homeless. Housing is a human right. At the very least you cannot be so openly for the demise of your own citizens, and not offer accessible options. Los Angeles took a parking lot and turned it into a government funded encampment with access to every day amenities and resources. This would most certainly be an alternative for park encampments and make concerned residents happy. that is a temporary measure though. There are multiple studies out there confirming that housing the homeless is cheaper than temporary housing such as shelters. The data and evidence is apparent. If you need examples of vacant lots or parking lots that go unused, I would be happy to list them.

To be blunt, by enforcing encampment evictions the city will likely end people's lives. Having to move around every two weeks makes it more difficult and sometimes impossible for healthcare providers and street outreach to find people and do their jobs, which is provide people with ongoing care - I have seen this firsthand. In late 2020 I alerted street outreach about a young man who has celiac disease and needed housing and (realized later on by outreach) medical attention due to the sores on his legs from his condition. Police evicted his small encampment the following day despite a street outreach member being onsite and asking officers to wait a few minutes so he could give the homeless man resources and ensure he would know where to find him, his partner, and their friend next. The officers called him a bleeding heart and told him to leave. As far as I know, outreach has still not located them.

There are more, harrowing and heartbreaking stories out there (for example the recent stabbing at missions services) but they all point to the same lack of empathy, concern, and sense of urgency for the homeless population from people in power and other residents. So many people do not realize that they are one or two bad financial events away from being homeless themselves and don't see the homeless population as people. They are our neighbours, and often former co-workers or classmates.

Thank you for reading and taking the time to review my concerns and advocacy. I can only urge you to use that energy tenfolds for the homeless population.

Sincerely,

Kara Jongeling