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Pilon, Janet

Subject: Please Improve the Encampment Protocol, Not Remove It.

From: Matthew Higginson

Sent: August 13, 2021 3:21 PM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca; Nann, Nrinder <Nrinder.Nann@hamilton.ca>; Spadafora, Gemma <Gemma.Spadafora@hamilton.ca>; Office of the Mayor <mayor@hamilton.ca>

Subject: Please Improve the Encampment Protocol, Not Remove It.

Hello Councillor Nann, Clerk Holland and Mayor Eisenberger,

I am writing in response to the emergency meeting and the resulting announcement that Hamilton will be returning to the “pre-pandemic enforcement of camping bylaws.”

Since moving here in 2019 I have learned a lot about the history of this place, the ongoing housing crisis, and the obstacles that would lead folks to feel that living in a tent is their best option.

Mayor, you said recently that “the pandemic has underscored the increasing need for access to safe, humane, and affordable housing.” While I agree with this in principle, removing homes that people currently live in before we can deliver on the promise of future housing is very troubling.

As pointed out by the Hamilton Encampment Support Network, we have somewhere around 11,350 homes vacant across the city - many of which I pass by daily. And as the Stop Sprawl campaign, which visited city hall a couple of weeks ago highlighted, there are many more vacant lots that could be transformed into middle density housing, connecting the issues of our climate emergency with the current housing crisis. But instead we see unaffordable condos on the rise as we make our way downtown.

So, do I tell my kids that this is the housing you are referring to? When they ask where our neighbours in tents will go after the city workers clear them away, how do I answer them? And what specifically is the plan to get folks in the door of these “safe[er], [more] humane” places - or to make them “affordable”?

According to the Toronto Star, estimates put the vacancy rate of Toronto’s condos at about 5.6%. If this is a risk when we build condos - that they may well remain empty - are we not actively pushing marginalized folks out of our city for seeing the writing on these towers and trying to make it on their own?

As noted by the Hamilton Encampment Support Network (HESN), “[e]ncampment 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.”

I understand that the Ward in which I live also has one of the lowest vaccination rates in this province - right as we are set to face a fourth and unpredictable wave of a global pandemic. This presents an even more pressing reason to support our neighbours who live in encampments rather than threaten to marginalize them further.

I am disappointed at the speed with which this was brought to a decision and that it happened behind closed doors without public input. I believe this is unjust and lacks compassion and I do not believe it reflects the values of our city.

We can and must do better.

We must listen to the people who will be directly affected - listen to the voices of the people this policy seeks to remove.

Where will they go?

Do they feel safe?

Is this a humane approach?

And what is affordable, actually?

Sincerely,

Matthew Higginson