

To the members of the Emergency and Community Services Committee

Re report 2021/2022 Winter Service Planning (HSC21048), item 10.4 on the Nov. 18, 2021 agenda

It is a few days before National Housing Day, November 22, which commemorates the day in 1998 when Big City Mayors in Canada declared homelessness and unaffordable housing a national emergency. We must never forget that for people who experience homelessness, homelessness is always an emergency, a crisis, a traumatic experience. Being without a home makes you extraordinarily vulnerable, at risk of injury and physical and mental health damage. Winter significantly multiplies the risks.

There is something surprising to me about this report. It makes no mention at all about encampments.

That's surprising given the amount of conversation and consternation around encampments over the past two years. Much more importantly, it's surprising because those in encampments are among the most vulnerable of our citizens, especially when it's cold. We already know that most of them aren't served by our shelter system, whether because they have pets or partners they want to stay with, because of fear of theft, because they have addiction or mental health issues that shelters aren't equipped to deal with or that make shelters impossible places for them to be in.

So I ask:

- Does the city have a plan specifically for people in encampments this winter?
- Specifically, does the city have a plan for reaching out to encampments when to warn of cold alerts?
- Would it be easier to find people to warn them of a cold alert if the city knew where they were?
- Would the city be willing to declare a moratorium on moving people from encampments during the winter, so that you know where they are and can ensure they are OK?
- If not, would the city consider providing alternate outdoor spaces on city land in locations further from neighbours, such as the land between King and Main West south of the cathedral?
- If neither of these, what is the city's plan to reach out to people sleeping rough but scattered and in unknown places?

Second, we all know that the real solution for those experiencing homeless isn't encampments and it isn't shelters, it's housing. For some, it's housing with supports. Can I recommend that the city provide monthly reports to the Emergency and Community Services on its progress in housing people who are currently experiencing homelessness, specifically

1. The number on the city's By Name list
2. The number of those on that list who are contacted to determine their needs
3. The number of those housed and whether or not they have the supports they need
4. The number who remain housed
5. The barriers the city faces to reducing the number on the By Name list and increasing the numbers contacted, housed and remaining housed. Those statistics, and likely others that would help to chart progress, would help the city to identify how far the demand for housing exceeds the supply of available social housing units or subsidized (rent supplements etc.) private sector units, so that it can increase the resources needed or make the case to the federal and provincial governments for more funding to provide those resources.

Thank you for considering the issues raised here.

Bill Johnston, Dundas