

**From:** Alison Jones <>  
**Sent:** November 5, 2021 8:23 PM  
**To:** [clerk@hamilton.ca](mailto:clerk@hamilton.ca)  
**Subject:** Monday municipal budget

Greetings,

I am a Hamilton resident presently residing in Ward 2. I feel compelled to write something considering the upcoming municipal budget meeting and want to add my voice to others concerned with what is going on with these encampment evictions.

I read how the Superior Court of Ontario recently decided that evicting people living in tents in parks is legal and can continue. While it may be "legal," it is absolutely inhumane. There are news stories every single year across this country about people dying from exposure to the elements. Everybody knows this happens. There is no legitimate claim to ignorance on the matter. I am truly horrified that my city choses to send bylaw and police officers to show up where people are trying to live and take from them basic tools for survival such as tents and blankets. Taking *tents and blankets*, tearing down tarps put up to block freezing wind? Unconscionable. I condemn this reactive and disgraceful behaviour.

This council's decisions have obviously not produced long-term housing results for all Hamilton's residents. I am not convinced by anyone pretending that there is sufficient affordable housing in this city. I am 34 years old, was born at McMaster Hospital, went to school here, live and work here, my mother was born here, my grandparents were born here, my aunts and uncles live and work here, and my little cousins go to school here. Those making excuses, and their supporters who make complaints about "transients" "harming" city parks, cannot pull the wool over my eyes. The people surviving in encampments are not the problem; the problem is setbacks in implementation of the right to housing.

While I have not (yet) been in the position of being without housing, I had difficulty trying to find my present rental unit, especially as I needed to move during the pandemic due to my divorce. It is a bachelor apartment for \$815 a month which, frankly, is almost my entire month's employment income as a social work graduate student working part-time. This is hardly affordable, yet I was so relieved to find it given the situation in this city. The landlord looked over my proof of employment and hesitated and asked if I would be able to pay him. I couldn't find any apartment for less. I moved in January and immediately found myself thinking, what will happen if/when I get renovicted? It seems almost inevitable. It happened to my aunt and uncle and their two kids last year. They had been living in a rental unit of my grandpa's house, and when he died the new owner did what he could to get them out. It was a tense and hostile environment to try to live in. They found a different place, thankfully, but had to move out of the

city and it was incredibly stressful even for my uncle, who is a hardworking tradesman with experience under his belt. We are experiencing a housing crisis.

The excuse that anyone who wants to can stay in a shelter bed is just that: an excuse. And it's a poor one. Shelters are not accessible to everyone, and they are not a long-term solution. Shelters are a reactive measure to systemic inequalities. Sending officers to go tearing down tents and tarps is inexcusable, especially as subzero weather is upon us. I call on the City of Hamilton to stop this outrageous and shameful behaviour immediately. I am disgusted by the cavalier disregard for humanity and dignity this city's decision-makers and agents have shown, by using or accepting money to go destroy a person's tent. All residents of Hamilton encampments deserve the means to survive the winter. And we all deserve leaders who will make policy choices that prioritize housing for all, as a basic human right.

**As a resident I am demanding the City allocate the necessary funds during budget deliberations to adopt the following policy suggestions.**

### **Housing Policy**

1. The City of Hamilton must **adopt a compassion and universal homelessness policy** eliminating any waiting periods to access additional supports towards housing.
2. The City of Hamilton must embrace a legal **responsibility to house**.

### **Accessibility Policies in Shelters**

1. Shelters systems are reactive measures to systemic failure of governments to offer housing to all members of the public. Shelter systems are spaces where members of our community are subjected to strict qualification requirements and can even be banned from accessing shelter spaces. Shelter systems, like other systems which seek to criminalize members of the public rather than prioritize alternatives, must be abolished.
2. **Establishment of a Shelter Advisory Committee** of present and past shelter residents advise on improving shelter operations and appropriate housing options. Consultations should include discussions about accessibility, vaccine uptake, and general administration.
3. Pending the access of all to safe, dignified housing, **the City of Hamilton will unilaterally adopt accessibility policies around harm reduction**, including but not limited to:
  - a. Policy around **the right to exist in shelter space as you are**, including but not limited to allowing use of drugs in designated shelters
  - b. **Identifying shelters friendly to drug users**
  - c. Funding shelters to **permanently hire staff trained in safe consumption**

- d. **Collaborate with shelter residents who use drugs** to determine and help implement what harm reduction policies, programs and practices work best for the residents at the sites where they reside.
  - e. Shelter systems are spaces where members of our community are subjected to strict qualification requirements and can even be banned from accessing shelter spaces due to what is often called disruptive behaviour. **The labelling of disability related and mental health related symptoms as disruptive is ableist, and this practice must end.**
  - f. **Only two accessible women's shelters exist in Hamilton.** The City of Hamilton must build more.
- 4. There is no housing standard through the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, though disability activists at the AODA alliance have pushed for this for years. **The City of Hamilton must be in compliance with AODA, but also work beyond AODA to ensure these policies centre accessibility**
  - 4. The City of Hamilton **will secure accessible temporary housing options specifically for people with disabilities immediately.**
  - 4. **Keep shelter bed access transparent.** The City of Hamilton must publicize daily Wrap-up Code data (no suitable bed available at time of call) and Service Queue Daily Close-out (no bed provided by 4 AM), information made online for access by all.
  - 4. **Provincially-funded exceptional relationships with Hamilton Police Services**, such as “reserved” crisis centre beds, and extended stays afforded to only police-referred cases at the expense of general referrals, create a surmountable inequity within the shelter system. They must end.

## **Expropriation Policy**

- 1. The expropriation of municipal lands for infrastructure should be extended towards the apprehension of infrastructure for affordable housing. The City of Hamilton must advocate for the expropriation of buildings towards housing and supports.
- 2. The City of Hamilton must develop expropriation strategies that include, but are not limited to:
  - a. expropriating buildings owned by landlords with repeated health and safety violations
  - b. expropriation of abandoned / vacant buildings
  - c. expropriation from landlords with over 1000 units
  - d. expropriation of unused lands to protect against speculation and commercial development

## **Cold Alerts, Inclement Weather and Warming Centres**

- 1. Issue a cold alert / inclement weather alert when Environment Canada forecasts, for the City of Hamilton:

- a. **Cold:** A temperature of -5°C or colder, or a temperature above -5°C with a windchill -10°C or below.
  - b. **Freezing rain:** When freezing rain is expected to pose a hazard to transportation or property or when freezing rain is expected for at least two hours.
  - c. **Snowfall:** When 15 cm or more of snow falls within 12 hours or less.
  - d. **Rainfall in winter:** When 25 mm or more of rain is expected within 24 hours
2. During active inclement weather alerts, require City operated and funded facilities to:
- a. **Drop-in centers accept as many clients as possible** within COVID, Public Health and Toronto Fire Occupancy standards.
  - b. **Refrain from refusing walk-in access** to any sector-appropriate shelter, admitting individuals without forcing them to undergo typical intake and eligibility procedures
  - c. **Allow clients to access any sector appropriate shelter**, not only assigned shelter for the night
  - d. **Staffing.** Fully staff warming and respite centres, including such as:
    - i. harm reduction services and supplies
    - ii. hot meals
    - iii. wi-fi
  - e. **24H respite/warming centres.** Activate at least two 24H warming centres to address overflow and social distancing protocols.
  - f. **No shelter bans.** No shelter suspensions or sanctions can be carried out during cold weather alerts. Any clients who have been sanctioned/suspended/banned can return to the shelter during these periods.
    - i. The City of Hamilton must make public its shelter ban/suspension procedures and anonymized data around their application.
3. Create an Inclement Weather Staffing Fund and make it available to warming and respite centre operators to place additional staff on shift during inclement weather alerts.

Sincerely,

Alison Cassandra Jones, BSW