

Housing Working Group Meeting Notes

April 19th, 2022

Virtual WebEx Meeting

10:00AM – 12:00PM

Those in Attendance: James Kemp, Tom Manzuk, Paula Kilburn, Lance Dingman, Jayne Cardno

Also in Attendance: Jen Chivers, Laura Cattari, Tom Cooper, Jessica Bowen

Those Absent: Sophie Geffros, Robert Semkow

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Approval of April 19th Agenda: Agenda was approved.
3. Approval of Mar 15th Meeting Notes: Meeting notes were not ready for distribution. Will distribute as soon as ready.
4. RFPR Tom Cooper regarding HATS (Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters): Due to an unprecedented homelessness problem caused by several factors; the pandemic, stagnant social assistance programs, rapid inflation, econovictions, renovictions, poor mental health and addiction

supports, restrictive shelters and RCF residences and a rapidly dwindling housing supply to name just a few.

This has forced people to think outside the box and the HATS program is doing just that. They consist of tiny cabins that are meant to house those that don't fit into the existing programs. They are 8' x 10' cabins or sheds. They have no plumbing, but are heated with electricity and hopefully wifi as well. They all have their own locks and each tenant will be given the only key, giving them a sense of ownership. Not what one would consider luxurious. There is a portable washroom on site with a working shower.

The nearest municipality to attempt a program like this is in Kitchener Waterloo and they have had great success. Their program has been in operation for over three years. The recent encampment by-laws have forced those that live on the fringes to become even more unstable. There are dozens of examples of this sort of program across North America.

For some, there are no options for them in the shelters or RCFs. This can affect couples, people

that cannot live without the support of their pets, people with addiction issues, behavioural issues, mental and emotional disabilities and many more reasons.

A large percentage of the people using some form of homeless support are disabled. HATS is considering asking ODSP recipients to allocate their shelter portion to them in an effort to reduce costs. This payment would be voluntary however, because they do not want to perpetuate homelessness.

The tiny cabins can be rapidly set up as soon as an appropriate location can be found.

They currently have a demonstration cabin on James St. N. and welcome citizens of Hamilton to take a look and get accustomed to the idea.

Paula asked if couples would be given their own cabin?

Tom C. responded; no there is a restriction on the size of the unit. Any larger than 8 x 10 would require permits, more approval, and passing the OBC before it could be implemented. More likely each person would be assigned their own space and they could share it accordingly.

Paula asked; what would it cost for an individual to live in one?

Tom C. replied; Fundraising should take care of a majority of costs including On-Site supervision. Any rents will be voluntary.

Jayne asked; how do we change attitudes about homelessness?

Tom C. responded; it is difficult to make people aware of the institutionalization of poverty and homelessness. There was a time in the 80's that people thought food banks would only be a temporary solution, but here we are 40 years later and food banks can no longer keep up with demand. Local advocacy and awareness is crucial.

Jayne raised the point that ODSP would cut the shelter portion of a person's monthly disability check if they were given a free apartment.

Lance asked: how many people would the on-site plumbing system be able to handle?

Tom C. responded that the first site will support ten people. If it becomes a more permanent placement, they will connect it to the municipal water and plumbing. The washroom unit will also supply the water for the site.

Lance asked if this program was similar to the tiny homes project?

Tom C. responded that the tiny homes project consists of complete mini homes. They have

plumbing and kitchen facilities and pass OBC. HATS could be better described as portable sheds. Tom M. asked if the shelters would be accessible if the person needed it and if they could charge mobility devices?

Tom C. explained that they would be able to build ramps as needed and put in other accessibility features, like grab bars to suit the individual's needs. They would have electricity and be able to charge equipment.

The Chair pointed out that while the shelters may not seem like what one would call luxurious, the fact that they provide privacy is a luxury that is not afforded to people in either the shelters or the RCFs.

The Chair also raised the issue that a lot of homeless people are homeless because the system is too rigid for them, like someone who's only support is their cat. Should we force them to decide between either, a place to sleep safely or their only friend in the world? People would usually prefer to live on the street than to give up those last few freedoms.

The Chair raised the issue of the shelters being considered temporary. If this program serves as an effective alternative to the systems already in place, especially for those that don't fit the current system,

should we not explore the more permanent options? The chair also suggested that while these shelters are very movable, that we should be striving to keep them in the same location to give the residents some sense of stability. They are forced to move often enough, should we not try to show them community? The residents around encampments like to raise the issue of the filth and poor conditions of them, but if those residents welcomed a community of these homes into their area, they could lead by example and show what community spirit is all about.

Jayne asked if there would be any arts program funding for the shelter residents?

Tom C. responded; yes, we received a directed donation specifically for that purpose and we will look at ways to bring it to the shelter residents.

Paula asked where would these shelters be situated?

Tom C. replied, we initially had an offer to set up at the John A. MacDonald site, but there was a flood in the gym and the Board of Education is being forced to tear down the school early. We surveyed forty-five homeless individuals and were surprised to learn that they would all like to be in a location close to downtown, but not in downtown. They would like to be able to easily access the services

of downtown, but want to live away from the influences that contributed to their continued homelessness. We are looking for a suitable location away from the core now. We will start with ten and hope to increase to twenty. Not all communities are against this program, but location is going to be crucial. The first site will serve as an example for more.

The Chair asked; how can the Housing Working Group and the ACPD in general help you get this program moving forward.

Tom C. Replied; the best way you could support us is to send a letter of support for the project to City Council.

5. RFPR Jen Chivers regarding RCFs: Jen began by stating that the best way we can all make substantive changes to the system is to join forces with other like-minded groups, especially with those that have the funding and infrastructure in place already.

Her experiences on the Greater Hamilton Health Network's RCF Steering Committee have made great strides in improving the health outcomes of those living in RCFs. It is relatively new and residents may not see the changes yet, but they

have made great strides by using the work other groups have done before and going forward as opposed to reinventing the wheel every time. The purpose is to improve health care in partnership with over thirty organizations across Ontario to improve Ontarians quality of life. They are only running pilots at four RCF sites but results have been positive so far.

Jen mentioned that there is new work being done on connecting residents of RCFs to the internet or WiFi. It has been deemed a vital need and will be reviewed as such.

There is some changes in perspective regarding how we approach substance abuse issues and how we can help not only the users, but the residents around them.

We had a Mac Student perform an environmental scan of RCFs. It was a look at a frozen slice of time. This gave us a chance to see what areas need the most attention.

There are two different homeless numbers. One represents all the people in some form of homelessness support and the second was the number physically living on the street.

6. RFPR Laura Cattari regarding Social Programming: Laura began her presentation by giving some

history. Institutional beds were closed some time ago and a lot of the people that were turned loose suffer from mental disabilities of some form or another. These are people that the system doesn't know how to handle. Politicians certainly misunderstand their needs and adequate, safe housing isn't even available for them. The recent Federal budget made little mention of the housing issue at this level and will not make a serious impact on the problem. For example, the Housing Stability Benefit. They have announced a \$500 top up in order to alleviate some of people housing needs. This is indicative of government not even understanding who this benefit is supposed to help and what problems it will not alleviate. Income security is an integral part of the housing crisis and nothing will improve until it is dealt with on that level.

The previous Liberal government was looking at unifying the ODSP payment but was unable to implement it before they were out of power. This would have eliminated the shelter and support portions so that people could allocate their own funds as needed. The social assistance benefit is not adequate as it is and this government continues to find ways of clawing back support.

The RFPR fully supports basic income. At the start of the pandemic, the Federal government decided that a person requires \$2000 per month in order to have a living wage. ODSP still pays out \$1100 per month, this is mandating deep poverty. We support a person's autonomy to make their own financial decisions. We think the disabled should be able to get this support without jumping through endless hoops and following strict rules. ODSP has been frozen for more than a decade. It never really recovered from the Harris era cuts of more than 20%.

This government has avoided the issue for the past four years. They are only concerned about making people work. After the election, if they remain in power, we will probably see them change the policies in the same fashion as they have changed Ontario Works and force people to work despite their abilities.

The Federal government announced an extra support benefit for working age people with disabilities, but they gave themselves three years to consult about it before they needed to act. The most recent budget only mentioned finding us employment.

There is an active effort to silence or hide the severity of these issues. There seems to be an

opinion with those in power that we don't actually need help and we only want to freeload on the public dime.

Great changes have been made to the system under the radar during the unprecedented power the Government has had during the pandemic. They have made it difficult to advocate for those in the most need.

In order to get the most benefit, it is important to join forces with other like-minded groups. Income is the most important social determinant of health.

Tom C. mentioned that they are part of a larger group called Just Recovery Hamilton and mentioned that they will be holding a number of round tables leading up to the election. Raising issues has been difficult when 80% of media coverage is COVID related.

Electronic voting improves voter turnout by 97%. It is important to adopt new forms of voting because it improves turnout and engagement across the board.

There is a disconnection when speaking to those in power. We don't seem to be speaking the same language and we need to find a way of making them understand the problem, let alone fix them.

The lack of extra support for people on OW and ODSP during the pandemic highlights this fact.

When we told people in government that they needed extra support, they responded that people on social assistance have no need for anything extra and that the pandemic doesn't affect them in any way financially.

7. Adjournment.