

**KEEPING
SIX
HAMILTON**



Please find enclosed our summary of Keeping Six and HAMSMaRT's participation in the consultation process on encampments directed by GIC and Council. We circulated this summary to City staff following our participation. We are entering this written summary as part of HAMSMaRT's delegation to the GIC on the proposed encampment protocol.



Encampment Protocol Process Meeting
Monday February 27, 2023 at Hamilton City Hall

In Attendance:

HAMSMaRT Program Coordinator

HAMSMaRT Housing Policy Consultant

Keeping Six Peer

Angela Burden, General Manager, City of Hamilton,

Mike Jones- City of Hamilton Encampment Response Lead

Michelle Baird, Director, Housing Services, City of Hamilton,

Monica Ciriello, Director, Licensing & By-law Enforcement, City of Hamilton,

Representatives of the Good Shepherd, the Salvation Army Hamilton, the Living Rock and

Womankind Addiction Services

Background

This meeting was called in response to the February 1st, 2023 GIC motion to consult with delegates from the January 18, 2023 GIC meeting re: Coordinated Encampment Response and Encampment Pilot Evaluation. The motion named HAMSMaRT, Keeping Six, and other community stakeholders to be consulted and solicited for feedback regarding an encampment response in keeping with a human rights-based, health-focused response. In short, it is our understanding that this meeting was designed as an opportunity for city staff to gain and utilise insight from us, as experts, to meaningfully inform upcoming funding deliberations and considerations.

These notes reflect our participation in one meeting, held on March 27, 2023. Michelle Baird, Director Housing Services outlined at the meeting's outset that we were invited to participate in this specific meeting, one of a series, where findings per session were withheld and would not be utilized to inform our discussions in real time. As such, participation was limited to discussions held on February 27th siloed from the whole of related input.

Summary of recommendations to be brought forward by staff to council, as understood via verbal summary:

- Re-implementation of the 2020 encampment protocol (5-8 tents in a green space) without the use of the VI-SPDAT

- Cooperate with encampment residents, Keeping Six and other people with lived experience to keep sites clear of excessive debris staff will work to find funds and collaboration within the city's budget for the provision of waste-related materials (i.e. bins, pick-up, ect.).

Summary of City's Key Messages:

- Most complaints received by the city and bylaw are about waste and debris.
- City staff are interested in discussions around a "housing-led outreach approach" attached to any future encampment protocol.
- The connection between obtaining long-term, accessible, rent-geared to income, rights-based housing options were not welcomed and would not be addressed in the current discussions about encampment enforcement and protocol. Rather, the "housing-led approach" appears to remain connected to employing seconded outreach workers, that in turn, provide basic needs items and, if/where space available and accessible, refer to shelter. Here, it is our understanding that some will be referred to Housing First community service providers/programs who maintain a primary focus on finding housing via the private market.
- Concerns about city liability raised primarily by other community service providers (i.e., Good Shepherd, Salvation Army, etc., representatives).
- Concerns and questions about how to address complaints made about encampments if a new protocol permitting tents is enacted (i.e., tent size, number of tents, number of people residing in individual tents, ect.).

Discussion and response to City's concerns:

Dismantlement is not a solution

We were unequivocal in our opinion that **encampment enforcement should end immediately**. We stressed that this has always been our position. We reiterated concrete examples of our past willingness to discuss, negotiate, and come to agreement with city officials, and **made clear the long record of our group's engagement with the city toward ending encampment enforcement imminently to reduce harm on community members**.

Garbage and cleanliness of encampments

We discussed the involvement of people working with and experiencing homelessness to maintain clean and safe environments in park and green spaces to ensures their utility for all members of the Hamilton community. We discussed the success K6 and HAMSMaRT have had with paid cleaning positions for people with lived-experience, many currently unhoused. We offered that peer-led work can be a viable alternative to current enforcement endeavours, and serves to build instead of divide community. **HAMSMaRT and Keeping Six are willing to support the City in implementing paid, peer-led positions to support the maintenance of clean encampments**.

We also reminded those in attendance that while the process of addressing encampments is complaint based (complaints that come from housed community members against unhoused ones) that **hate-based actions have previously and are actively being endured by encamped residents** and that this must not only be made known/visible, it should be regarded as official hate incidents, recorded, and attended to as such. As some of the most materially deprived members of our community, people living in encampments are community members with the right to an equitable modicum of safety, security, and peace. It is not okay that this concern persists and remains invisible.

Access to recreation centres for personal hygiene

Maintaining personal hygiene is very difficult when one is deprived of housing. **Keeping Six proposed that people deprived of housing in Hamilton be provided with City Recreation Passes in order to access shower and toilet facilities** in City run and funded recreation centres. All present at the meeting observed there is only one place for women deprived of housing to shower in the city and none for men.

Discontinue use of the VI-SPDAT

To this end, we also discussed the previous protocol's use of assessment tools (i.e., VI-SPDAT, SPDAT) as a rationale for determining encampment stay/eviction. We reported that **the tool requires asking invasive and intrusive questions, creates further harm to people already deprived of housing, and mentioned the growing research supporting its ineffectiveness, racial and gender bias, and issues with its validity**. One member of Keeping Six (present at the meeting) took great care to explain the harm they know and have experienced because of being coerced into providing information intensely personal to them (done via what is often understood by officials and service providers as general assessment practice) just to be able to remain sheltered or in place.

No solution without housing

We brought forward concerns about the ability to adequately address encampment response as a limited and siloed goal when discussed outside of a plan for obtaining long-term, accessible, rent-gated to income, rights-based housing options. Our group made clear that it understands the **matters of encampment and housing to be inextricably connected**. In short, we unequivocally know that housing that is affordable, rights-based, and accessible to people living in encampments is the primary foundational material resource needed. Without this primary resource, all encampment protocols are merely management strategies that continue and grow a harmful status quo. For example, city concerns about parameters related directly to encampment size, the community complaint process, and the need to cap the number of people living encamped at any one location is directly related to an ability to procure and provide appropriate housing to address the growth of encampments more generally. We made known our opinion that the number of people encamped is directly related to the availability of housing.

Creating an enforcement protocol siloed from this assertion will continue to cause harm to people at risk of and experiencing homelessness in the absence of a broader municipal housing plan.

Sanctioned sites, but not to defer on ending displacement

We engaged in conversations about the possibility of creating sanctioned encampment sites, **but also shared our concern that sanctioned-site plans could prolong the current enforcement conditions.** We made clear that, as always, an end to current encampment enforcement should happen imminently and without delay, and that creating a sanctioned-site plan should not prolong the enforcement experience further for people living unhoused.

Housing as a human right

To this end, we also reminded attendees of the February 23rd, 2023, announcement of the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate (the current federal review of encampment and human rights violations of residents based on previous research, some specific to the city of Hamilton). This included the following excerpts:

- “All levels of government have an obligation to end this crisis” ,
- To uphold the rights of encampment residents, governments must: “stop the use of policing and law enforcement as a response to encampments”
- governments upholding these rights must “address the conditions within encampments and provide access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation facilities, electricity and heat” .

While we appreciate this opportunity to discuss and work toward community led responses to encampments, the severe lack of housing for our most vulnerable community members, many who are today, still being moved through the current encampment enforcement pilot is unacceptable. We must end by sharing our frustration that we are no further ahead from where we started close to three years ago, when we negotiated a very similar approach to what we are again being asked to consider. We have previously spent hours at similar tables discussing these questions, providing input, tabling viable options and offering the human resources to support our recommendations. We believe it is important to note that some of us are the very people impacted most centrally by enforcement, that there is a difference between actual housing and a ‘housing-led approach’, and that an end to encampments requires our governors and City of Hamilton staff be mindful of their responsibility and interest in funding the kinds of practices and programs that listen and, in good faith, envision an end to the experience of homelessness through thoughtful and decisive policy aimed at ameliorating the material conditions of everyone in our community.