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To: City Clerk and Members of General Issues Committee
Re: August 14th General Issues Committee meeting on encampment protocols
From: Susie Braithwaite, Executive Director – International Village BIA

As members of the General Issues Committee discuss the proposed encampment protocol at the August 14th meeting, please include this letter as a written delegation.

Below you will see quotes from letters that members of the International Village BIA have sent to Councillor Kroetsch, Hamilton Police Services, and city staff over the last few months. We collected several more letters, but feel these few direct quotes speak best to the issues at hand. As you can see, our businesses are struggling to cope with the ongoing challenges that our BIA now faces on a daily basis. These issues of safety and cleanliness are a constant concern that is negatively affecting their customers and staff. It is important that council understands the severity of frustrations and challenges that these businesses are facing in the current climate. The BIA is doing our best to show support and advocate for our members, but our limited resources simply cannot combat the negative impacts this is having on our BIA. The proposed protocol will not allow for some locations of current encampments, but other areas such as Wellington Park and some parts of Ferguson Station where we have seen most of the encampments, will not be protected by the recommendations in this report. The BIA is not able to animate our event space and has been forced to halt all event planning for the time being in hopes these issues will be resolved.

It is important that the City of Hamilton prioritize the issue of protecting BIAs as much as the report speaks to protecting residential amenities such as dog parks and baseball diamonds. BIA members pay an additional levy to be located where safety and cleanliness should be the primary focus, and that should also be reflected in this proposed protocol report and is not. It is crucial to note that our businesses are still recovering from the fallout of pandemic lockdowns. Things have rapidly declined in our BIA over the last year which needs urgent attention, otherwise we are going to start to see several of our businesses leave or be forced to close-up shop. The revitalization of downtown Hamilton once rested upon the investment of these small businesses one by one, and we need to also consider and protect them in this crisis.

I urge you today to recognize the importance of ensuring that businesses in our BIA can thrive and operate in a safe and clean environment moving forward so that the ongoing decline of our area does not progress further. We are at a critical point now that requires urgent attention and solutions.

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“My lease is up soon and I'm leaning towards leaving the International Village BIA after almost 10 years spent here, and I know many other core businesses in the area have plans to do the same. It's just not possible to make a business thrive here anymore. New businesses that are opening are soon closing, and businesses (and their customers) that have been here since the beginning are being terrorized. The city of Hamilton has given up on us.”

“We've been in business here since 1991, and this is by far the scariest time we've had as a family-owned small business (this includes covid and the 1990s). While covid is “over,” we've never fully recovered from it, and the lack of people coming downtown is only making it all worse.”

“If these issues keep going, we plan to close our business in the beginning or mid-2024 and move back to Toronto for our sake and safety. My wife and I don't feel safe to run the business and live in downtown Hamilton.”

“Our associates reported to have seen an individual with a gun behind the store today.”

“Over the past 8 1/2 years I have seen a lot down here... but nothing like what I saw yesterday. While approaching Ferguson on King Street I saw a man of 75 years of age get randomly attacked while crossing the street.”

I ask that you please look further into at how the City of Hamilton can help protect the livelihoods of our business community in downtown while also managing this crisis. I understand this is a complicated issue however, the needs of our BIA members and business community also need to be seriously considered at this time.

Sincerely,

Susie Braithwaite
Executive Director – International Village BIA

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