

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Please make our waterfalls more accessible instead of blocking them off!

From: Marie Keresztyen

Sent: January 11, 2023 12:03 PM

To: Office of the Mayor <Officeofthe.Mayor@hamilton.ca>

Subject: Please make our waterfalls more accessible instead of blocking them off!

To Andrea Horwath, and councillors,

Hamilton is blessed to have over 100 waterfalls, but the bylaw enforcement of popular falls is holding them back from the potential they have.

The previous council approved this pilot in 2021, which continued into 2022. It's expected you will debate whether it'll be permanent beyond 2023.

While parking enforcement should continue, visitors should be able to access the bottom of the falls, particularly Albion and Smokey Hollow, without worrying about a \$75 trespassing ticket.

Current bylaws prohibiting access aren't effective, as people regularly ignore the signs and go off trail anyway. A google search of Albion, Chedoke, etc.. will give you tons of pictures down there.

At the same time this punishes responsible hikers who previously hiked down with no issues, but can't anymore due to the new rules. This petition with 2590 signatures also wants access to be improved: <https://change.org/dontblockthefalls>

The base provides the best views, views the viewing platforms simply don't have. If the viewing platforms had the best views, you wouldn't have people constantly going off-trail.

Global News found the enforcement last year costing \$360,000. This money shouldn't be spent on guards patrolling the waterfall, and should instead fund programs that allow viewers to safely access the falls' base.

A guided/self guided tour to the bottom every couple of weeks would allow viewers to legally access the bottom, and is cheaper than building infrastructure like stairs. It could be done on days where there's no flash flood chance, and only done in the summer/fall months.

Visitors could pay \$5-10 to be part of the tour group, and sign a waiver to protect the city's liability. That is much better than a \$75 ticket.

This could be first piloted where Albion falls' base is open to the tour, and if the program is successful, expand it to other off-limits falls like Chedoke, or even Tews/Websters if the HCA is on board.

The program can ensure visitors have the right equipment to hike these areas, as well as hazards to look out for. With proper education and programs, these areas can be safely hiked.

Covid taught us to embrace our natural areas, as they're essential for one's mental health and wellbeing. For some, it's as simple as hearing the falls up close and feeling the mist of the water.

If the enforcement program remains unchanged, expect the same result where people keep ignoring signage, and bylaw struggling to keep them out. This will get worse over time, as the GTA/Hamilton area keeps growing and blogs further advertise these locations.

I appreciate you taking the time to hear my concerns. With the right ideas, we can safely improve the access of our waterfalls, and make Hamilton a more liveable city.

Regards
M Keresztyen