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June 17th, 2024

To: Members of General Issues Committee
From: Susie Braithwaite – Executive Director International Village BIA
CC: Herb Wodehouse - Chair International Village BIA
RE: Encampment Protocol

Dear Members of Council (General Issues Committee):

At the last GIC meeting that spoke to the encampment protocol on May 15th, the chair of our board Herb Wodehouse offered some recommendations and comments regarding the encampment at Wellington Park in a written delegation. As long-standing Executive Director of International Village BIA, I would like to echo his feedback as well as add my own comments surrounding this issue. Now that City of Hamilton staff are recommending that encampments are not allowed within 100m of funeral homes, I want to express my support of this recommendation and speak to how the encampment at Wellington Park has negatively impacted our BIA.

Everyday, the BIA is dealing with issues arising from this encampment. The most concerning issue is how this encampment is negatively impacting our businesses and especially Dodsworth and Brown Funeral Home in which the encampment is located directly in front of. The funeral home has lost a massive amount of business in funeral services as people simply do not want to mourn their family members where there is a lack of cleanliness and often drug use and illegal and threatening activities happening in broad daylight. We are constantly hearing from other businesses in that area that they are also losing business due to these mis-managed issues that have been placed on their doorsteps.

Often there are more tents than the encampment protocol states are allowed. The grass is extremely long and the BIA has had to ask that the City of Hamilton cut it where they can so to avoid ticks and uncleanliness of the area especially being located right beside one of the busiest bus stops on the B-line. Speaking of cleanliness, there is always personal belongings and garbage strewn throughout the park from the encampments which is greatly concerning especially considering this encampment is located at the entranceway to both our BIA and Downtown Hamilton. When the BIA asked why there is a fire-pit allowed we were told to respectfully contact Hamilton Fire about that.

This park was meant to be a place where family members and friends of those who have passed on can sit by the fountain and gardens and take a moment to grieve their lost loved ones and for seniors from First Place to get outside to soak up some sun and enjoy the park across the street. This encampment has taken those options away from them as they do not feel safe doing so anymore given these circumstances especially over the last 12-14 months.

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Today, I ask members of council to accept the recommended amendment to the encampment protocol to treat funeral homes as you have cemeteries so to avoid having encampments like Wellington Park encroach on similar spaces. Dodsworth and Brown has been a huge part of our community in downtown since 1867 for over 157 years. They have volunteered on our board for decades and are a large contributor to our community. If something isn't done soon, we are very worried about the future of this staple in downtown.

We understand that people are homeless and need a place to go, but it seems cruel to have them located in an area where they are subject to long grass and unkempt surroundings right on the doorsteps of businesses that don't have the means to properly manage this crisis. And it is unfair to ask these businesses to try to deal with these issues that they are constantly having to manage. Daily, they are forced to clean up human feces, garbage, personal belongings and needles from their properties all stemming from this encampment location at Wellington Park.

Better management of this situation needs to be considered by the City of Hamilton regarding encampments so that all parties involved can succeed. I urge council members to accept the recommendation presented today to not allow encampments within 100m of funeral homes and to try to find a better solution for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Susie Braithwaite".

Susie Braithwaite
Executive Director - International Village BIA
Cc: Herb Wodehouse, Chair

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