

25 June 2024

To the mayor and councillors of Hamilton, Ontario:

Good evening. Hope this finds you well. I write as a life-long Hamiltonian and as a resident in Ward 8, one who has spent 14 years in the neighbourhood of Centremount.

On 24 Jun 2024, Richard Leitner reported in the *Hamilton Spectator* that \$10,000 of ward funds was unanimously approved by council to defray the start-up costs of an online neighbourhood watch application that, in the words of its designers, was part of the thinking “about how we can be the eyes and ears to the police” (“Neighbours band together to fight crime - Online watch initiative in Waterdown puts modern twist on a traditional idea”). I ask that council immediately reverse this decision and return the \$10,000 to the ward.

In his essay, “Ur-Fascism,” published in 1905 in the *New York Review of Books*, Umberto Eco listed 14 traits of fascism. The 5<sup>th</sup> trait is the fear of difference and, as Eco writes, “the first appeal of a fascist or prematurely fascist movement is an appeal against the intruders” (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/umberto-eco-ur-fascism>). It is clear, in Leitner’s article, that there is an appeal made against those who intrude, to “ward off people up to no good.” The 6<sup>th</sup> trait is the appeal to a frustrated middle class, “frightened by the pressure of lower social groups,” and it is this appeal, too, that is connoted in Leitner’s article. I worry that these traits are being exhibited, in some measure, in the Mountainview Heights suburb.

What is much cheaper than \$10,000 public dollars from tax-payers, however, is the free, but longer and more difficult, work of getting to know one’s neighbours. One of the application’s technicians is quoted in Leitner’s article, saying, “People also often don’t know their neighbours, making suspicious visitors less likely to draw attention.” Such long, difficult work is also deeply rewarding and embeds trust in one’s neighbours and in one’s self as one who is capable both of caring for one’s own self but also, at best, for others nearest. Instead of constantly turning to policing services to address these issues, \$10,000, to start, if not the entirety of the \$214,800,000 dedicated to policing services in this year’s budget, would be better spent in arranging times and places for neighbours to get to know one another, whether in Waterdown or elsewhere in the city. As calls for service from policing services decrease, so too would the 20% of every property tax dollar dedicated to policing services decrease, with hope to 0%.

Given this rationale, I ask that this city’s council reverse its decision to fund this online neighbourhood-watch application with \$10,000 of public dollars and return that money immediately to the ward’s fund. Thank you for your time and attention in these regards.

Respectfully,

Joshua Weresch