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Sent: July 5, 2024 11:48 AM  
To: [clerk@hamilton.ca](mailto:clerk@hamilton.ca)  
Cc: Ward 4 <[ward4@hamilton.ca](mailto:ward4@hamilton.ca)>  
Subject: Public submission on proposed changes to encampment policy

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To Council at large, and to my Ward 4 Councillor Tammy Hwang:

My name is Chad Chabot, and I live on Ottawa North in Hamilton, in Ward 4.  
I am a father, property owner, employer, and business owner in our city.

I am not in favour of further efforts by Council members to criminalize poverty, and expose residents of encampments to further harassment - and worse.

My family attends many events in Gage Park, walking and biking around the neighbourhoods near us, as well as much of the "lower city".  
One of my children attends a school within 500 meters of Gage Park.

During those often daily outings over the last 5 years, we have seen a great many people who have - through circumstances in or out of their control - found it necessary to take refuge in tents or encampments on lands that are not their own. Much of the time it seems the lands selected & available are park lands and other lots that are owned or administered by the City of Hamilton via one of its many departments.

These encampments have created what some might call "eyesores" due to their very existence and composition - simply seeing a tent on public land is often enough to offend someone. While I am sympathetic with concerns people have when driving past a group of tents and belongings strewn about in a public park or other plot of green space, I am far more concerned with the unmet base needs of people in such a tenuous situation. People that feel their best option - or perhaps their only option - is to live in such precarity, exposed to the elements and violence of poverty, uncaring neighbours, and the Hamilton Police Service.

Over the 5 years or so that I and my family have lived in Hamilton, not once has anyone from an "encampment" ever threatened us, despite daily exposure to those neighbours. Nor have we ever had any fear or discomfort from their presence, aside from the most minor of inconveniences such as having to carry our waste to another garbage can because the most conveniently available bin was overflowing due to encampment residents collecting & disposing of their waste in the bin.

Or having to answer inquisitive questions from our 5 year old about who these people are, and why they are living in tents in the city.

I suspect that is the truly uncomfortable part of this situation that many people want to avoid: having to confront and deal with the continuing and exacerbating cost of living crisis that we are all facing, particularly when it comes to housing affordability. The people seeking more punitive measures against encampment residents want to criminalize poverty. They want to further punish people who have next to nothing, and no other options.

The residents of these encampments are our neighbours, whether they lay down to sleep in a tent or a building. They deserve dignity & respect regardless of their bank balance.

Forcing them to move, destroying what little personal property they maintain, or incarcerating them does nothing to address the causes or conditions that lead to their presence. All that does is moves them along to another location, making them someone else's problem. I suspect that's the hope of those in favour of further restrictions on encampments: that some how those residents will decide "I guess I'll leave Hamilton".

Enacting increasingly punitive measures to push them further from the public eye will do nothing to address the root problem, only embolden opponents of encampments - and police - to do further harm to the residents of encampments.

I say again that in the 5 years that I have lived in Hamilton, not once has a resident of an encampment done me or my family any harm, nor have we ever felt unsafe due to their presence or existence. I contrast that with the interactions my family has had with HPS where many of their members have been uncaring at best, ignorant and bullying as a baseline, or outright threatening at worst.

If further punitive measures are enacted by Council, to be carried out by HPS, I fear that the residents of these encampments will be victimized yet again.

This time, however, it will not simply be "due to unfortunate economic circumstances", but will happen through further weaponization of HPS to satisfy a group of residents - and councillors - who have resorted to fear mongering and seem to have lost their capacity for empathy toward the most vulnerable of our neighbours.

Thank you.  
Chad Chabot