

Residents of Hamilton
September 11, 2024

Hamilton City Council
71 Main St W
Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

Dear Members of Hamilton City Council,

Between September 8 and September 16, 2024, over 900 residents of Hamilton signed a petition urging the City Council to take immediate action to restore our parks and ensure they serve their intended purpose as safe, clean, and accessible spaces for all residents—especially families, children, and the elderly. Over 900 residents agree that encampments in our parks have deep negative effects on our community, and the City Council must address these issues now.

Our emails to City Council members, the Hamilton Police Service, Unsheltered Hamilton, and The Hamilton Spector have expressed unified feelings of frustration, fear, and disappointment as we have watched public parks like Delta Parkette, Gage Park, and many others become sites for homeless encampments. Homeowners are feeling trapped in a situation where the power has shifted to represent those living in encampments; our homes are damaged from the near-constant attempts of theft and burglary, our properties now face the reality of rats due to the garbage and uncontrolled living conditions in the encampments, our parks are overrun with human waste, garbage, and drug paraphernalia, our parks and streets no longer feel safe, and our children are getting exposed to the harsh reality of addiction, crime and violence far too early in their young lives.

Our petition travelled door to door throughout Delta West and is available online at change.org/RestoreOurParks. As a community that is demanding action, we are consistent in the truth that the presence of encampments in our parks, is compromising public safety, eroding community trust, and degrading the quality of life for all residents by turning spaces meant for families, children, the elderly, and community members into areas marked by fear, disorder, and crime.

Homeowners shared their deep concern about the presence of encampments in our parks, including:

- “City parks are not a good place for tents.”
- “Parks are not the appropriate place for temporary living - there are no support services and open drug use should not be supported near a playground.”
- “Nearby residents should not be subjected to threats of violence, break-ins, robbery, excess garbage, drug use, or anything else connected with these tent encampments.”
- “The encampments are eroding the social fabric that holds our neighbourhoods together.”
- “My children are afraid to go outside of the house.”
- “I don't feel safe.”
- “We want Gage Park back.”
- “I am fed up with the lawlessness.”
- "This is the degradation of the social fabric that holds neighbourhoods together."
- “I'm embarrassed to have friends and family visit from outside of Hamilton because of the state of the city.”

To address these urgent concerns, we call on the City of Hamilton to:

1. **Support ONLY Sanctioned Sites for Homeless Tents:** We propose the establishment of designated areas for tents and temporary shelters away from public parks, private residences, and community spaces. These sites should be secure, with access to sanitary facilities and social support services provided in a controlled environment.
2. **Ensure Transparency in Spending:** It is essential for the City to provide local taxpayers with a transparent, line-by-line breakdown of municipal capital and operating expenses related to housing, homelessness, and shelters. This breakdown should include the total amount funded by taxpayers for the current year (2024), the previous year (2023), and any approved or contemplated funding for the upcoming fiscal year. Furthermore, we urge the City to audit all shelters and encampment sites to ensure Hamilton taxpayers are primarily funding services for Hamilton citizens rather than individuals arriving from other regions within the last three years.
3. **Rescind the Encampment Protocol and Implement a No-Tolerance Policy for Encampments in All City Parks:** The current encampment protocol is failing to keep our parks safe and accessible. We demand the implementation of a no-tolerance policy against camping, tents, and encampments in any city park across Hamilton. Open drug use, prostitution, fires, organized crime, assaults, violence, and the threat of violence have no place in these public spaces. Residents who contribute to our neighbourhood through property taxes, local beautification efforts, and investments are being pushed out. This must end to protect our community's well-being and cohesion.

We urge the City Council to listen to the voices of the more than 900 concerned citizens who have signed this petition and take meaningful action to restore our cherished parks. The safety and integrity of our neighbourhoods are at stake, and we are counting on you to use the leadership you were voted in to withhold.

We look forward to your response and to seeing decisive action taken to protect and restore our parks.