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Sent: September 16, 2024 11:54 PM
To: clerk@hamilton.ca
Subject: Written Delegation for September 18th Meeting

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Dear Mayor Horwath and Council Members,

This council needs to begin to work together to support not only the unhoused population of Hamilton but also those living near encampments. The systems in place are doing a disservice to those that have lived around these encampments for two years and are experiencing both emotional and financial stress as a result.

If the council truly understands the difficulties that both the unhoused and housed communities are facing, they would stop enabling policies and schemes that exacerbate rather than solve any of the problems.

We are well aware that we need help from all levels of government on some of the bigger issues but we also need Hamilton Council to work as a team and deal with the things we are able to fix as a city. I believe policy changes and redirecting a portion of the city budget could help until we are able to secure more money from other levels of government. Council needs to fight harder with all levels of government for policy changes and monetary investments that will end up helping ALL residents. Stop spending money on things that are superfluous, like unnecessary new traffic lights for example. Money must be allocated to what the city actually needs right now.

We should not be pitting ward against ward, with ward 2 and 3 experiencing and suffering the worst of the problems that come as part and parcel of these sites. It was said that the "encampment protocol should be applied equitably to the entire city" and this just is not happening.

As you all know, what the city is doing so far is not working and sanctioned sites without a ban on unsanctioned sites, will not work. We live in a connected world where we are able to find out which policies around the globe have been failures, which have been successful, or at the very least not detrimental. We need to implement things that actually have been shown to work and to stop doing things that have been shown not to work.

Community frustration arises when it looks like zero action has been taken on many of our issues. I believe that myself and many like me have been sorely disappointed in what appears to be a minimising of this problem, especially and specifically in the area surrounding Claremont Access Parkette. Two years is too long for having this unmoved, unenforced encampment. At no point have they left, even for a day, or had the protocol

enforced when their tent numbers increased. There are now just under twenty tents in this small area that used to be a community green space.

I believe in looking after my neighbours and I do not complain about paying taxes. My expectation is that from these taxes a positive impact is created, with access to permanent housing and addiction and mental health services for those in need.

We all care, we all have compassion. What is disappointing is when this care and compassion turns into inaction from our council. When it comes time to vote, this will cause people to vote for the candidate with the least amount of compassion, with whatever negative results they may bring.

While we do not have statistics for Hamilton as to the percentage of the unhoused suffering with substance abuse and/or mental health problems, by looking at similar demographics in Canada and the UK, we can approximate that 1/3 have addiction issues and 2/3 have mental health issues.

We need ALL councillors to recognise that a large percentage of the unhoused are not "employed people down on their luck" and that those living near these encampments experience the effects of these unhoused peoples spiralling addictions and neglected mental health issues every single day.

We hear sanctioned sites are coming but unless unsanctioned encampments are prohibited, they will fix nothing. When the unhoused are faced with a choice between showers, food and treatment, many will choose freedom and addiction instead. We all pay the price of that choice. When these sanctioned sites don't attract people out of their long term encampments, will the council finally acknowledge that addiction and mental health are a major piece of this puzzle?

Without a protocol inhibiting long term unsanctioned encampments, we will still be here in two years.

If this protocol is not followed and these unsanctioned sites are allowed to continue, then they need to be enforced equally throughout ALL of Hamilton. In higher-income areas, tents have been gone within a week, even when protocol compliant. The only difference I can see is the value of these homes nearby. We can drive to any other ward and experience cleaner streets, far less encampments (if any). We have also seen for ourselves how quickly a disruptive person is dealt with and removed from these neighbourhoods.

Councillors say that "Every city is dealing with the same thing" but when I spend time in Burlington, Oakville or Mississauga, it feels like they are dealing with the same problem, in a different way. Streets are clean, tents are not everywhere and I feel safe.

Theft is major problems and we constantly deal with packages being stolen. And while some council members purport that the blame of this theft cannot be placed solely on

the encampments, we have witnessed open amazon packages left in piles, that is, until they put up wall tarps thereby allowing them the privacy to cache their stolen goods, drink and do drugs.

Hearing phrases such as "they make it look nice" in regard to the upkeep of encampments feels dismissive when it's decorated with our stolen items.

On top of the gaslighting the only "help" we are ever offered is to email "unsheltered@hamilton.ca" or call the police, which since they can't do anything, is a waste of their resources.

As for "unsheltered", while it's great for council to be able to say "this is the mechanism within the City of Hamilton that helps action resources to our unhoused individuals", the only outcome we get is a little garbage clean up, which while we appreciate, is the bare minimum.

I agree that more funding is needed for "Unsheltered" but with that funding we would need to see actual action and enforcement.

A direct quote from a Claremont Parkette encampment resident October 2023 in Hamilton spectator was "This isn't a bad setup. This place is nice and safe" It was said that he had "a short spell without work due to his boss falling sick that left him unable to pay for his room at a motel where he'd stayed for four months" I only wish I could feel safe, both in my home and in my neighbourhood. But with regularity, incredibly unsafe situations are almost daily occurrences.

One could say our experience is "first world problems" but Covid also hit us hard like it did many, with me losing my business of 15 years and my partner's business being closed for 14 months. We have our own issues and struggle to make ends meet. It keeps being stated that "these people are our neighbours" but it's not very neighbourly when one side continually harms the other.

Every decision we make we have to factor in the encampment residents.

This costs us time and money that we simply don't have. From paying \$250 per year for a UPS mailbox or cementing and chaining down garden decorations, at time and cost. It's not only financial, but the mental load of always having to think ahead of what will be stolen, what will be destroyed, what steps need to be taken to guard my home and property? It's exhausting.

I am curious how many council members have to factor encampments into their day and with every decision they make with their own houses?

We have put our time, effort and money into transforming our previously neglected house into a home and our garden into a joy, not only for ourselves but also for our community. I lived in Hamilton years ago and when we arrived we quickly felt a part of the community with wonderful neighbours. This was going to be our forever home. Now we are just counting the days until we can afford to move away from Hamilton. Myself and my neighbours may have roofs over our heads through home ownership and renting but not many of us in the area are "well off". Most of us are struggling to keep

our heads above water, trapped in a neglected area of the city where only the needs of the few are considered.

We bought our house at the height of prices and we expected prices to go down, which they did. However, recently we had our house valued and while it wasn't surprising that the economy affected our home price, it was surprising the encampment brought our home value down by an extra 10%. How is this acceptable? While this situation is affecting us all differently, the financial burden being carried by homeowners is also valid and should be taken seriously. Hamilton has not bounced back like the surrounding areas. Encampments and open air drug use is the reason for this. Yes, we are lucky to have homes, in spite of hardships overcome, our home is hard won. The choices I make, my garden, my relationships with my neighbours, I do all these to elevate my community. All of this can feel futile at times, like nothing we do matters, that we are paying a hefty price that will be felt for years to come by moving to Hamilton. Hamilton has such promise, filled with incredible people but when nothing improves, many are going to get fed up and move on when they can. It would be such a great waste.

If it is decided that the needs of the unhoused supersede the concerns of those living near the encampments, at the very least we will need more services allocated to our area for the housed population to mitigate the damage caused by homelessness.

There are ideas that have worked in other jurisdictions such as extra garbage bins, garbage patrols, effective street cleaning, increased foot patrols in high-crime areas, and possibly privately funded self-cleaning, charge toilets with advertising that brings revenue. As well as redirecting volunteer/charitable efforts toward programming and services that reduce the need for homeless encampments rather than enabling them.

I do not have the solution for all the issues that we face in 2024, however, I do know that this high tolerance and "anything goes approach" is not working.

We cannot continue to preach about the human rights of the homeless while enabling them to become more deeply entrenched in a world filled with addiction and despair. Since 2023, the Vancouver method of using only harm reduction has increased both addiction and crime. As per the Ontario website with statistics taken directly from the police, crime doubled, tripled and quadrupled in Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa in the "harm reduction" areas. This has had absolutely dire consequences for everyone. None of this is fair. Not to the public and not to those on the streets.

Enabling is not the solution. We must rehabilitate, not facilitate.

After two years, I do not think that we are asking for too much when we ask you to prohibit unsanctioned sites and support sanctioned sites for the unhoused to help those with addictions and mental health issues rebuild their lives and to get the services they so desperately require.

Thank you.