

To the mayor and councillors of Hamilton, Ontario's council:

I write as a resident in Ward 8, regarding the reported ban on encampments in seven down-town parks.

I, first of all, want to thank Councillors Kroetsch and Alex Wilson for their votes at the recent general-issues committee's meeting against banning encampments in those seven parks down-town. Their reasoning and rationale are sound. Indeed, before Councillor Nann moved to exclude seven parks in her ward, other councillors, notably Ward 8's Councillor Danko, have already attempted to have parks in their wards excluded, too, as Council and the public are aware. Thankfully, those exclusions were withdrawn. On a related note, I would be very eager to know why all of the councillors of the wards up-town (Wards 6, 7, 8, and 14) were absent from that general-issues committee's meeting.

While it is certain that none, neither a home owner, such as myself, nor a tenant in Hamilton, wants encampments in public parks, their presence indicates not a failure of people, as conservative ideologies would have you believe, entirely but of policy and, particularly, of policy that is rooted in a politics of care and compassion. I am afraid that Council's endorsement or adoption of the general-issues committee's report will only exacerbate the serious issues often connected to people who are living in encampments. Those serious issues are not addressed, either, by the paper of record's imputation of fault and blame upon encampment residents who have nowhere else to live but the emergency exit of a recreation centre; neither care nor compassion are afforded people in need when their struggle to live is pitted against the struggles of law-abiding parents who are simply trying to raise their families, a struggle I can sympathize with as my wife and I have 4 children of our own.

Moreover, serious concerns have been raised by peoples in encampments about the shelters in Hamilton. Violence in shelters as well as the safety of people's belongings are concerns. Because shelters are not places where people can safely use drugs, either, overdoses and attendant public-health concerns are an issue, too. Many people are unwelcome due to pets and being partnered in relationships, which is part of the reason why the tiny shelters are being proposed for the polluted site

at Barton St and Tiffany Ave, a solution which will house only 80 of those living in encampments, not all, and one which has been rightly decried by Gessie Stearns, a homelessness researcher. In short, shelters are not the answer and the lack of a long-term plan by Council is, indeed, worrisome.

For some reason, Council has, at large, lacked the political will to house people in need in dignified housing. It has lacked the will to use its authority under the provincial *Expropriations Act* to expropriate housing, vacant units, and hotels downtown, for example, on a temporary, emergency basis. It has lacked the will to take that expropriated housing and place it permanently in the hands of CityHousing Hamilton, for example, as dignified housing for people in need is much more important than hotel rooms for a tourism industry. It has lacked the will to re-direct the considerable amount of money spent on policing services away from those very services and toward paying some money toward the 'owners' of that housing, vacant units, and hotels for their sacrifices for the sake of the public good and toward supporting social and wrap-around services for people in need at those very locations. I hope Council musters the will to do the difficult, right thing for people in need.

Council can begin to do that right thing by amending the general-issues committee's report so those seven down-town parks continue to have encampments on them. It can continue by way of expropriation and the re-direction of policing services' budget to support those most in need. The death, every ten days, of a homeless person is a death too many and is, more often than not, avoidable.

I look forward to your good actions in all these regards.

Respectfully,

Joshua Weresch