

GIC Delegation from Anthony Marco - Ward 7 Resident

Hamilton City Council members.

I am writing to you as a resident of Ward 7 in opposition of the motion to “*prohibit overnight camping (tent encampments) in all City of Hamilton parks*” upon meeting a threshold of alternate sites. This measure is not only misguided but, quite frankly, insulting to unhoused Hamiltonians. It disregards the complexities of poverty and offers a “solution” that is neither just nor effective. Quite plainly it is one further step to making poverty a criminal offense.

First, let’s acknowledge that banning encampments does not solve homelessness; it only hides it. Forcing people out of parks where they have taken refuge does not make the problem disappear—it merely pushes them to more dangerous, isolated, and less accessible areas. What message are we sending if we’re willing to turn a blind eye to the real struggles of those without housing simply because we don’t want to see them in our parks?

One particularly absurd aspect of this motion is the idea that we would allow people experiencing homelessness to occupy public parks—as long as they do not have tents or structures. Think about that. On one hand, we’re saying, “Yes, you are allowed here as a person,” but then in the same breath, we’re adding, “But you can’t bring anything that provides you shelter or protection from the elements.” Why is the mere presence of a tent—the most basic form of shelter—so offensive that it would justify criminalizing people’s existence in our parks?

Imagine the hypocrisy here: a housed person can bring tents, chairs, umbrellas, or even build elaborate picnic setups in a park, but a houseless person attempting to protect themselves from the rain or the cold is treated as a criminal. We need to recognize that having a tent is not an act of defiance; it is a simple and desperate response to having nowhere else to go. The problem is not the tent; the problem is the lack of safe and dignified housing options in our city.

I understand that parks are public spaces intended for everyone’s enjoyment, and yes, they are an important community resource. But we must remember that unhoused individuals are part of this community too. They are entitled to public spaces just as much as anyone else. Our parks should serve as a refuge for all, especially those who need it most, not just those who can afford housing.

Furthermore, what are the alternatives that this motion offers? Have we invested in sufficient housing and social services that allow us to truly say we have done everything possible to reduce homelessness? In reality, we haven’t. Until we can offer permanent and compassionate alternatives—such as expanded transitional housing, mental health services, and job placement programs—this proposed ban is simply an attempt to punish people for their poverty. It’s a slap in the face to those struggling with systemic issues far beyond their control.

And to those who argue that homelessness in parks creates safety concerns or damages the appearance of our city, I want to say this: real safety comes from ensuring that people have their basic needs met. When people are constantly uprooted, told they cannot stay in one place, they are destabilized further, and it becomes harder for them to access services, maintain any form

of stability, or even find a pathway out of homelessness.

Other cities have shown us that there are better, more humane ways to handle this. By providing designated safe camping areas, investing in tiny home communities, or developing “housing-first” policies that prioritize access to stable housing, we can help people transition off the streets without resorting to criminalization. These approaches not only show compassion but are also proven to be more cost-effective over the long term than endlessly cycling people through our justice and emergency health systems.

I would argue, however, that if you choose to criminalize “encampments” in public parks, you should not target the victims but instead reconsider where such charges or fines could really be laid. How about an alternative approach where we direct the police to ticket, fine, or lay charges on those responsible for poverty: politicians who treat those living in poverty like parasites and corporations who avoid billions in taxes through tax loopholes?

Show me where, in the Criminal Code, people have a right to walk through a park and not see a tent. Hamilton’s unhoused people are not “camping”. They are desperately trying to survive in a city that is becoming the best place to become a criminal if living in poverty.

I have lived my entire life in Hamilton and am dismayed at how encampments have become a normalized experience in the city to the point where there is more talk about managing them than to talk about solutions. The federal government is failing us. The provincial government is failing us. And this Council is failing us. But you have a chance to not compound that failure today and protect those living in poverty who are most vulnerable.

I would also suggest that anyone who is unhoused and staying in a public park should assert their right under the Canadian Human Rights Code to “Freedom of Peaceful Assembly” and “Freedom of Association” if with a group of others. I have been on 24/7, overnight strike lines with tents, abutting sidewalks and public roads and I have never been charged or removed for “camping”. Consider every tent a peaceful protest against those people who have failed them.

I urge the Council to vote against this motion and redirect our focus toward real solutions. Criminalizing homelessness does nothing to address its root causes. Let’s work on approaches that reflect our city’s values of dignity, compassion, and justice. Because the people in our parks are not just “problems” to be swept away; they are our neighbours, and they deserve the same respect, safety, and rights that each of us here enjoys.

We all have a universal right to shelter. We do not have a universal right to be free from discomfort at the economic state of our city and nation.

Anthony Marco
Ward 7 Resident