

Tuesday, November 5, 2024

To the Council,

My name is Arianne Di Nardo, and I am a resident in Ward 4, as well as a former harm reduction worker. I am writing to express my strong concern regarding the motion proposed by Councillor Esther Pauls to amend the Encampment Protocol, which would prohibit encampments in all Hamilton city parks.

Most people camp in parks because they lack stable housing, reliable income, and adequate support systems. There are currently over 300 people living in encampments and more than 500 experiencing homelessness across Hamilton. The proposed shelter at Barton & Tiffany will only provide space for 80 individuals; the temporary 192 shelter beds are not a viable solution either. Not only are they temporary, but many individuals avoid shelters due to valid concerns about safety, privacy, accessibility, health, restrictive rules, cultural needs, and negative past experiences. Additionally, many shelters do not accommodate families, partners, or pets, forcing people to choose between shelter and staying with their support networks. Respecting individuals' autonomy to choose where and with whom they reside acknowledges their dignity and humanity; rather than imposing solutions that cater more to those with institutional and economic influence than the people directly impacted by homelessness.

Banning encampments only pushes vulnerable community members further to the margins, increasing their exposure to violence and restricting their access to basic needs. This motion criminalizes homelessness and seeks to invisibilize poverty rather than addressing the systemic issues at play. Given the councillor's ties to law enforcement, it is crucial to question whether this proposal is truly motivated by community safety or another agenda. Constant displacement is neither humane nor sustainable, and enforcing such a ban will incur significant costs for the City.

Redirecting funds from enforcement to permanent housing and healthcare initiatives would create sustainable, long-term solutions that benefit everyone. Homelessness is not an individual issue— it's societal, and reflects on all of us. Neighbourhoods are shared spaces, and like it or not, individuals experiencing homelessness are part of our communities.

I urge you to vote against Councillor Pauls' motion.

Sincerely,

Arianne Di Nardo