



City of Hamilton
City Hall, 71 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario,

January 6, 2025

RE: The Accessibility of Shelters and Supervised Encampments

Members of the General Issues Committee:

Homelessness is an epidemic in Ontario that is affecting persons with disabilities as never before. Lagging social assistance rates, the commodification of the housing market and the erosion of our deeply affordable housing supply have combined to produce the crisis we are experiencing today.

The population of those unhoused is disproportionately affecting persons with disabilities with some figures showing more than half of have some form of a disability. Forty percent of those unhoused not in some sort of shelter are on ODSP alone.

While shelters serve as a vital safety net and catch those in greatest need, they are difficult to adapt to the needs of those with complex issues. Low barrier does not mean accessible to shelter there. People with mental health issues often do not live well in close quarters with others and seek the safety of encampments to the danger of shelters. This may be difficult to understand for those that haven't experienced the shelter system, but we have to approach this group with empathy and understanding. Forcing them to move along or forcing them into unsafe shelter conditions is not the best approach.

Supervised encampments are a good first step to transition these people into housing, but we need to make them accessible if they are to serve the people currently living in parks. While a lot of focus has been put on to the supervision part, we have to make it a welcoming space for those that have difficulty managing the most basic needs of existence. With 80 units, there will be a percentage of those that need some sort of adaptation for those with disabilities. Communal areas will also need to have accessibility in mind. While we do not expect strict adherence to codes and legislation for temporary accommodations, we do expect the spirit of accessibility to be carried out to the best of our abilities.

The Accessibility Committee for Person's with Disabilities' Housing Working Group is already consulting with the HATS program on ensuring accessibility in such tight and unusual accommodations and we would be happy to work with staff responsible for the Barton and Tiffany Sanctioned encampment to create accommodations on a case by case basis.

The Accessibility Committee for Person's with Disabilities' Housing Working Group further suggests communication with shelter program coordinators to see if we can help make shelters more welcoming from an accessibility perspective. It is our hope that if we build them better, they will come. There are many agencies involved in this work and we should leverage that local knowledge. We would respectfully request that accessibility be given more consideration when deciding these matters.

Regards,

Accessibility Committee for Persons with Disabilities