



Unsheltered Campaign, Winter 2021-2022

November 30, 2021

To the City of Cambridge

Re: Homeless Encampments in Cambridge

Dear Mayor Kathryn McGarry,

The Point in Time (PiT) Count, conducted in September 2021, found a total of 1,085 people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region, with roughly 412 individuals living rough outside and more than 300 identified hidden homeless who can experience frequent episodes of unsheltered homelessness. Homelessness has tripled in the last three years, and has become increasingly prevalent and visible in Cambridge. While the municipality and the Region of Waterloo work towards creating more supportive housing for those who are unsheltered, certain actions must be taken now, to ensure the situation does not worsen. We know the supply for housing will not keep up with demand as we continue to lose affordable units day by day. Some individuals who sleep outside have been on waiting lists for multiple years. Services are struggling to keep individuals safe and healthy in order to keep them housing ready and are struggling to provide culturally appropriate and harm reduction support.

We imagine as city leaders, you must have had lots of conversations, emails, and complaints about the housing crisis and those who are unhoused. The City is in a never ending cycle of responding to complaints about encampments. Our current Municipal Code By-laws and police officers spend an enormous amount of time and resources repeatedly removing and destroying the same individuals' encampments. This does not solve homelessness. It does not address the public safety concerns. Moving the same individuals from backyard to backyard only fuels the NIMBY in our communities. Not only is this ineffective, it is harmful and dangerous for those already lacking stability, as they are driven to hide, which makes providing essential services

more difficult. This is a public health concern as individuals are at risk of limb and life loss due to hypothermia and overdose.

Due to the lack of shelter and housing spaces, lack of services that can address challenges of the most hard to house, the absolute inadequacy of social assistance rates and income support programs, the outdated bylaw regulation, the failed process to create and apply appropriate encampment protocols in the region, we wish to put an immediate stop to harmful practices of evicting and moving encampment homes as a grave form of violation of human rights and life threatening practice to those who depend on our understanding, service and supports.

Unsheltered Campaign advocates to the City of Cambridge to change policies and legislation that criminalize homelessness, such as offence types under the Municipal Code Bylaws. Specifically By-law No. (10) 162-10 Parks, and By-law No. (08) 165-08 Public Nuisance. People experiencing homelessness are residents of the city and have the same rights to protection and government support as any other resident.

We urgently call on the City of Cambridge to:

- Adopt a moratorium on enforcing the above named by-laws in the City of Cambridge until shelter beds are available for those who want them, or alternative accommodation, adequate units or cabins, as transitional housing for others.
- Designate sanctioned spaces for people to tent within the city by making available unused public properties, thereby ensuring that unsheltered residents have 24-hour year round access to water, washrooms, critical care and garbage disposal.
- Put written protocols in place with enforcement agencies such as the police and the regional bylaw, who would closely coordinate the support with outreach workers and community agencies, and provide health and life stabilizing services to people in encampments.
- Contribute to the existing shelter agreements with hotels and motels.
- Act with the regional staff and council and other community development agencies serving homeless populations to create more transitional housing specifically within city limits with direct input and hands-on engagement of the unsheltered populations.

30 organizations have already signed the call to the region, and are now directing their ask to the cities to sanction encampments. People legally, and jurisdictionally, have nowhere to go and are only put through further criminalization, systemic violence and deeper trauma, depriving them from any life stabilization efforts, without successful connection to services and

supports, and asserting their rights to organize and lead the life they chose, until we collectively find immediate and long term, solutions for adequate housing for all.

Sincerely,

Paule Charland

Serena Somali

On behalf of the **Unsheltered Campaign Team**

cc. Councillor Donna Reid

cc. Councillor Mike Devine

cc. Councillor Mike Mann

cc. Councillor Jan Liggett

cc. Councillor Palm Wolf

cc. Councillor Shannon Adshade

cc. Councillor Scott Hamilton

cc. Councillor Nicholas Ermeta

cc. Acting Supervisor of ByLaw Division Elisageth Leal

Appendix

Signatures collected since the August 13th 2021 to the Letter to Region of Waterloo Council:

50 by 30 Waterloo Region

A Better Tent City

ACCKWA

Alliance Against Poverty

Awareness of Low Income Voices

Canadian Federation of University Women

Community Legal Services Waterloo Region

Conestoga Students Inc.

Disabilities and Human Rights

Divest Waterloo

Fair Vote Waterloo Region

Food Not Bombs

Green Light Arts

Ground Up WR

KW Community Co-op Kitchen

KW Urban Native Wigwam Project

MT Space

Neruda Arts

Peace for All Canada

People's Action Group

Reception House Waterloo Region

Sanguen

Scaled Purpose

Shamrose for Syrian Culture

Social Development Centre Waterloo Region

SPECTRUM

Spiritual Heritage Education Network

Waterloo Region Community Garden Network

Waterloo Region Yes In My Back Yard