



Unsheltered Campaign, Winter 2021-2022

November 2021

To City of Kitchener

Re.: Homeless Encampments in Kitchener

Dear Mayor Berry Vrbanovic,

Homelessness is on the rise. With a nip in the air this is not a time to get cold feet. Many marginalized individuals face harsh options for sheltering. We applaud the City of Kitchener for recognizing the ongoing shelter and housing crisis by supporting various projects under its "Housing For All" strategy. A Better Tent City stands out for its innovative and meaningful approach to an immediate sheltering crisis. Its success would not have been viable without the City's support. We also commend the City of Kitchener for its collaboration with TheShift, an organization that provides a human rights framework to housing. We agree that a long term response is to provide adequate, affordable, and supportive housing solutions, and to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. However, we cannot wait for this strategy to be developed and enacted. We need to address the urgent needs of the unhoused and to respect their human rights. We call on you to continue the good work, and take further actions to end homelessness in our city.

If the City intends to continue its work on the right to housing, you need to call an immediate moratorium on removing encampment homes. Criminalizing and stigmatizing unsheltered people must end immediately. You can achieve this by putting a moratorium on bylaw offence types under the Municipal Code Bylaws Chapter 270, Parks and Chapter 467 Public Nuisances, which criminalize poverty and homelessness.

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of the most hard to house, the absolute inadequacy of social assistance rates and income support programs, the outdated bylaw regulation, the failed process to create and apply appropriate encampment protocols in the region, we wish to put an immediate stop to harmful practices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.

To this end, we call on the City of Kitchener to

- Adopt a moratorium on enforcing by-laws, specifically those to do with public nuisance and overnight park regulations until shelter beds are available for those who want them, or alternative accommodation, adequate units or cabins, as transitional housing.
- 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 regional government. People legally, and jurisdictionally, have nowhere to go and are only put through further criminalization, unable to assert their rights to organize and lead the life they chose, until we collectively find long term solutions for adequate housing for all.

It is in that spirit that we seek urgent action on our requests. We welcome an opportunity to speak with you and members of your team, and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Char Lee, Ward 6
Lesley Crompton, Ward 7
Paule Charland, Ward 9

On behalf of the
Unsheltered Campaign Team

cc. Councillor Scott Davey
cc. Councillor Dave Schnider
cc. Councillor Christine Michaud
cc. Councillor Kelly Galloway-Sealock
cc. Councillor Paul Singh
cc. Councillor Bill Ioannidis
cc. Councillor Margaret Johnston
cc. Councillor Debbie Chapman
cc. Councillor Sarah Marsh
cc. Director of Bylaw Gloria McNeil
cc. Manager, Strategic Business and Planning Karen Cooper
cc. Engagement and Program Manager – Affordable Housing Strategy, Andrew Ramsaroop

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