



Unsheltered Campaign Winter 2021-2022

November 30, 2021

To The City of Waterloo

Re: Sanction Encampments NOW

Dear Mayor Jaworsky,

The Region's recent 'Point in Time Count' showed homelessness in Waterloo region is on the rise with at least 750 individuals who are not supported through housing and homelessness services. Unsheltered Campaign contribution to the 'Point in Time Count' showed that the unsheltered and hidden homeless remain voiceless, criminalized and displaced all the while there are no adequate and affordable options for them to live and shelter in. Now that winter weather has arrived, we, as residents and outreach workers in the City of Waterloo, and members of the Unsheltered Campaign, are increasingly concerned about the people who are without an appropriate home and forced to find shelter in doorways and crevices of the city.

The long-term solution is to provide adequate affordable and supportive housing and prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. However, we cannot wait for this strategy to be developed and enacted. We must respect the human rights of the homeless by addressing their immediate and urgent needs immediately.

There is no emergency shelter facility available within the city of Waterloo. The one transitional housing program that does exist, operated by the Working Centre on University Avenue, cannot accept people through Prevention and Diversion service. Consequently people are turned away every night. Our public spaces and parks have been made unavailable to overnight tenting. Washrooms in the parks are closed for the season, portable washrooms in two of the parks have been removed, and washrooms in City Hall and the Adult Recreation Centre are open only during daytime hours. Left with nowhere to go, those without shelter are vulnerable to further criminalization, systemic violence and deeper trauma.

Unsheltered Campaign advocates for a stop to evictions of encampment homes, and for creative leveraging with all responsible partners to designate sanctioned spaces for people to tent on, live on and use public properties, until viable and acceptable housing options are available. We have to prevent forceful evictions such as the one in Kitchener on November 26th.

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of the most hard to house, the absolute inadequacy of social assistance rates and income support programs, the outdated bylaw regulation, the failed process to create and apply appropriate encampment protocols in the region, we wish to put an immediate stop to harmful practices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

- Adopt a moratorium on enforcing by-laws (By-Law 13-050, By-Law 16-023) , specifically those to do with obstruction of passageways and loitering in the City of Waterloo 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.

Yours sincerely,

Angie Mercer (Waterloo resident, Ward 7)

Alexandar Pavlov (Waterloo resident, Ward 5)

Barbara Spronk (Waterloo resident, Ward 7)

On behalf of the **Unsheltered Campaign Team**

cc. Councillor Sandra Hamner
cc. Councillor Royce Bodaly
cc. Councillor Angela Vieth
cc. Councillor Diane Freeman
cc. Councillor Jen Vasic
cc. Councillor Jeff Henry
cc. Councillor Tenille Bonoguore
cc. Director of Bylaw Nicole Papke
cc. Executive Officer to the CAO Sandy Little

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

