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To: Region of Waterloo Council  
Regional Housing Services Staff

Re: Report to the Committee of the Whole on August 10th, 2021  
[Responding to Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments](#)

Asks from the delegations that were not addressed:

**Decriminalization of Encampments**

**Sanctioning Public Locations for Unsheltered Communities**

The undersigned agree that supporting homeless encampments and communities is an important and necessary aspect of the Region's strategic directions and actions to address and end homelessness. Each community initiative that provides for basic needs and safety of the unsheltered population is dedicated to ending homelessness, not perpetuating it. The Region and the community have the care, safety and dignity of the homeless residents as a priority and understand that it is a precursor to stabilizing their living situations required for successful transition to stable housing. Decriminalizing homelessness and poverty is a major step and outcome of this process.

The *Region of Waterloo 2019-2023 Corporate Strategic Plan* outlines partnerships, equity, efficiency, effectiveness as strategic imperatives that need to be actioned and practiced.

These imperatives, as presented in the staff report, are not at odds in case of support for unsheltered and hidden homeless. Not addressing unsheltered homelessness costs the whole social infrastructure (health, security, courts, social services, productivity, etc.) many times more than supporting people where they are, as evidenced by numerous studies since the 90s. Not addressing unsheltered homelessness places social groups in conflict and disrupts relationships and community capacity of all residents. Not addressing homelessness is a death sentence for many residents who fall victim to unjust and inequitable social and economical systems which we are slow to transform. Staff concerns about the cost of addressing homeless encampment and hidden homelessness fall short of both financial and human rights arguments.

The focus areas of the Strategic Plan include: 'Healthy, safe and inclusive communities' and 'Responsive and engaging public services'. Current efforts in increasing the supply of affordable and supportive housing for the homeless population are not meeting the community's needs, either in terms of quantity or quality.

People without homes are not allowed to be in public spaces through law enforcement and/or they are indirectly denied access to public spaces due to the lack of amenities, like bathrooms, showers and safe storage. Seeking a safe shelter results in police or bylaw officers forcefully evicting unsanctioned encampments, which only increases the risk of violence, loss of possessions, and incarceration, and perpetuates long-term trauma. This increases their difficulty in finding stability in many areas such as access to health and social services, addictions treatment, employment, and family or community participation. The current shelter system does not have capacity to support diverse populations, Indigenous traditional healing and diverse family compositions, and it rejects or is rejected by the most marginalized and hard to house.

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In addition to the Regional long-term plan to end homelessness, there is an immediate need for deeply affordable and free dwellings. As long as there are residents who remain distrustful or unwilling to access shelters, because of lack of safety, recurring trauma, zero tolerance, lack of harm reduction, expectations that they abandon trusted persons or animals, cultural dissonance, and the racism and homophobia inherent in the shelter system, transformational solutions must be a priority in addressing homelessness. We must make available places, buildings and amenities on underused lots, parking lots, park areas where unsheltered and hard to house residents can be supported and completely legal, respectful of Indigenous and diverse cultural approaches, identities and spirituality, and not requiring council's continuing permission, or enduring ongoing judgment and control.

Tiny towns, sanctioned tent or trailer cities, repurposed unused buildings can follow the local and proven model of A Better Tent City, which is fast to implement and cost-effective. Stability necessitates establishing deep relationships and trust, and allowing for self-organizing with privacy and safety. We need to give residents and the community back their dignity and all the stability possible to pursue the lives they want to live.

**The community is asking for:**

- a stop to evicting and criminalizing encampment communities,
- ending neo-vagrancy by-laws,
- ample access to public restrooms and other amenities outside of a few central locations in the region,
- eliminating hostile architecture that forces people to not use public amenities (like park benches),
- re-allocating funds from downstream programs to upstream services such as transitional housing for unsheltered and hidden homeless

The role for the Regional government and Housing Services is clear. The Region must enhance its Emergency Shelter Framework, and individual service planning, alongside the joint encampment pandemic response protocol aimed at "providing people experiencing homelessness with support to secure alternative places to live" (staff report g. 6). Local municipalities and the broader community are already taking action. With Regional support, the movement will be truly transformational, to ensure access to more resources and to become far reaching across both rural and urban communities.

**Unsheltered Campaign with the support of:**

50 by 30 Waterloo Region  
Alliance Against Poverty  
Awareness of Low Income Voices  
Disabilities and Human Rights  
Divest Waterloo  
Fair Vote Waterloo Region  
Food Not Bombs  
Green Light Arts

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Ground Up WR  
KW Community Co-op Kitchen  
KW Urban Native Wigwam Project  
MT Space  
Neruda Arts  
People's Action Group  
Reception House Waterloo Region  
Scaled Purpose  
Shamrose for Syrian Culture  
Social Development Centre Waterloo Region  
SPECTRUM  
Spiritual Heritage Education Network  
People's Action Group  
Peace for All Canada  
Waterloo Region Community Garden Network  
Waterloo Region Yes In My Back Yard ...

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