

Unsheltered Campaign

<https://civichubwr.org/unsheltered-campaign/>

RE: Public Sleeping at City Hall

To: Region of Waterloo Council & City of Kitchener Council

December 8, 2023

Dear Councillors,

As you know, Unsheltered Campaign is an advocacy group for Region of Waterloo residents experiencing unsheltered homelessness. To this end, several people have approached us with concerns about visitors who fall asleep at Kitchener City Hall after witnessing them being forcibly woken up and removed from the space for falling asleep too frequently.

While we acknowledge that City Hall may be a place of business, it is also a civic space for gathering where Kitchener residents should feel a sense of safety, belonging, and dignity regardless of their economic status. We are concerned that policies and procedures for the use of City Hall space do not currently reflect a human-rights-based approach to homelessness, particularly in the middle of a housing crisis, intersecting health crises, and winter.

We are also concerned that the rules for using the space may be informed by an outdated lens on public sleeping: sleeping in public is often considered an inappropriate use of public space at best and criminalized at worst. The idea that sleeping in public spaces is harmful to the public ignores harm to individuals who lack a secure, safe place to rest. Chronic sleep deprivation has well documented negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of individuals. Kitchener City Hall is one of the few public buildings open in the evenings, with publicly accessible washrooms. Given the reality of the housing crisis, sleeping in indoor public spaces such as City Hall can be a way for members of the unsheltered population to manage specific health or safety needs, choose life over the possibility of freezing to death, and be in community.

We support a compassionate response to sleeping in public spaces that recognizes the action is a result of precarious housing, homelessness, and forced roaming. This is an opportunity to make good use of existing resources to take a human rights approach that will prevent deaths in our city.

Please reach out to us at any time to discuss this issue further. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Unsheltered Campaign