

Unsheltered Campaign

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

RE: Closure of Encampment at 150 Main St. in Cambridge

RE: Ending of Motel Shelter Program

To: Region of Waterloo Council & Regional Housing Services Staff

We are writing to express our dismay about two recent actions: the involuntary closure of the encampment at 150 Main St. in Cambridge, and the ending of the motel shelter program. Based on our current understanding of these actions, we find that they raise human rights concerns and will cause harm to our unsheltered neighbours.

While the closure of the 150 Main St. encampment is being presented as voluntary, we are aware that residents felt pressured to leave, and that some previous residents of 150 Main [continue to live unsheltered](#). This speaks to the absence of accessible and adequate shelter options for people experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region. Justice Valente's January 2023 court ruling concerning 100 Victoria St. noted this absence as a key reason why evicting residents sheltering on public lands violated their S.7 Charter rights. The closure of 150 Main was an action contrary to the spirit of the 100 Victoria court ruling and a human rights approach to housing, due to both the pressures exerted upon residents to leave *without having secure adequate alternative shelter* as well as the prohibition on any future sheltering of people experiencing homelessness on these public lands.

The closure of 150 Main comes at the same time that the Region of Waterloo is discontinuing its funding of [50 motel shelter spaces for residents experiencing homelessness](#). Motel spaces are not permanent, adequate housing. However, we echo the concerns of other community advocates: discontinuing the funding of the motel shelter spaces *before* accessible and adequate housing options have been secured for residents will *directly lead to more people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and exacerbate pressures on encampment sites*.

As we have done in the past, we once again call on the Region of Waterloo Council and regional staff to adopt practices consistent with a human rights approach to homelessness and housing, including:

- Recognize a right to shelter on regional lands;
- Stop evicting and criminalizing encampment communities;
- End neo-vagrancy by-laws;
- Provide ample access to public restrooms and other amenities outside of a few central locations in the region;
- Eliminate hostile architecture that forces people to not use public amenities (like park benches);
- Reallocate funds from downstream programs to upstream services such as transitional housing for unsheltered and hidden homeless

As immediate next steps, Unsheltered Campaign requests the following from the Region:

1. Provide transparent information to Unsheltered Campaign and service organizations in Cambridge about how the encampment was closed, and what services and supports people were offered leading up to the closure - both the process over the last few months, and in the days leading up to the closure.
2. Clarify how the closure of 150 Main meets the requirements set out by the court ruling that encampments cannot be evicted without assuring the quantity *and* nature of the shelter options available - Kevin Boutilier's comments in this [news article](#) raise serious concerns on this matter.
3. Provide Unsheltered Campaign with transparent information about next steps for residents who have been staying in motels. We request information that does not reveal individual identities, but provides adequate information that includes the number of people who were sheltering in motels prior to defunding, and their trajectories.

Sincerely,

Unsheltered Campaign