

Re: Deputation, Item 16.8

I would like to thank the Committee for your time and attention to the disturbing reality of homelessness in our city. My name is Nico Elliott-Armstrong. Committee Chair Bailao, I live in your Ward, Davenport. I am a concerned neighbour, and a volunteer with the Encampment Support Network. I do outreach visits to the encampment in Councillor Perks' riding, Ward 4, Parkdale - High Park.

For the past 14 weeks and counting, I have been one of many volunteers visiting a handful of encampments each day. We bring with us donated supplies to assist encampment residents with meeting their basic survival needs. There are so many more encampments across the City that our network of volunteers does not reach.

Through my conversations with encampment residents at Queen St. West and Dufferin St. and around Lamport Stadium in Liberty Village, I have come to know that:

- People living in the encampment are already struggling through the cold nights.
- There is no possibility that everyone in encampments can find suitable shelter in the existing respite centres or shelter hotels established in response to COVID-19.
- Many people wait every morning hoping a City service like Streets To Homes will return to help them enter emergency shelter hotels. Week after week I hear from residents that they have not been visited by the City.
- Residents often return to the encampment from shelter hotels because they do not feel safe or they cannot meet their essential survival needs.

I am pleased to see the ambitious targets for housing in Item PH.16.8 and the associated reports. However, in recognition of the complexity of the ongoing housing crisis and the time it will take to secure enough hotels and rental units to accommodate all the people in encampments, we still need an emergency plan to keep everyone warm, and move everyone inside, immediately. We cannot watch our neighbours freeze.

I ask that the Committee add to this Item PH.16.8 a dedicated commitment of resources combined with an expeditious timeline to initiate an emergency response to the crisis of homelessness, until the proposed mid to long term housing solutions are up and running.

An emergency response should include additional resources dedicated to improve outreach, communication and accountability by City agents like Streets To Homes to encampment residents, in order to connect residents with information and opportunity to seek shelter suited to their needs.

Emergency accommodations should be designed with meaningful consultation with encampment residents. effective solutions are those that are grounded in the lived experience of those who are most directly affected. The emergency plan should be made available to all encampment residents across the City as soon as possible.

Until satisfactory indoor housing options are available, the City must respect people's decision to stay outside if they are not presented with a safe and adequate shelter. The City must be forthcoming about the lack of housing options available and work with police and bylaw enforcement to ensure resident's are not harassed or penalized for living outdoors.

As long as people continue to live outdoors, the emergency response should also include provision of supplies to meet the basic outdoor survival needs of encampment residents. Items like: tents, tarps, winter wear and emergency heat sources, food and water.

Thank you for your consideration.

Nico Elliott-Armstrong