

Because the City's [September 2020 COVID-19 Interim Shelter Recovery Strategy: Advice from the Homelessness Service System](#) does not adequately address the concerns of encampment residents, ESN has compiled a list of recommendations based on the past 14 weeks of serving encampments daily.

Recommendations for Encampments:

(1) END EVICTIONS

First and foremost, the City of Toronto should not clear encampments and respect people's decision to stay outside if they are not presented with a satisfactory indoor housing option. Having a consistent place to stay, without being forced to be displaced around the city due to police and security guard evictions is crucial. This is particularly important for public health during COVID (as per CDC recommendations) but should always be the case.

(2) AN END TO POLICE HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE IN ENCAMPMENTS

- Law enforcement should cease the illegal search, entry, and seizure of tents or belongings of people who live outside. Any search, entry or seizure is illegal unless law enforcement have a warrant.
- Law enforcement should exercise discretion not to enforce bylaws related to people living outside or trespassing orders where people do not have an alternative place to live.
- Law enforcement should exercise discretion not to search, detain, or arrest people for the possession of sale of alcohol or illicit substances in line with public health approaches to addiction.
- The City should instruct their private security force to stop surveilling and policing people who live outside.
- City employees and law enforcement should recognize that people who live outside have the same rights as housed people, including the right to privacy and the Charter right not to face government action that puts them in a less safe situation.

(3) CONSULT WITH ENCAMPMENT RESIDENTS

The City of Toronto should firstly consult people in encampments about strategies and policy decisions around encampments, and further pay people for their consultation as a recognition of their expertise. Strategizing should be grounded in the lived experience of those who are most directly affected, rather than so-called "experts" employing objectified knowledge.

(4) MAKE A CLEAR AND PUBLIC WINTER PLAN AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE LIVING IN ENCAMPMENTS

- a) The City must publically and transparently announce a plan by October 15 for how

they will support hundreds of people living in encampments throughout the winter. At this point, we have heard of no plan from the city for people in encampments come winter. This makes it impossible for people to plan.

b) This plan should be available in written form and posted as notice in encampments so that people can access it. It should be updated regularly and list clear benchmarks and time lines

c) While shelter hotels work for some people, we hear predominantly from the people for whom they haven't worked, as they return to encampments. Many people are evicted from shelter hotels for what they relay as small issues: missing bed checks, playing music too loud, verbal altercations with staff. As for those who choose to leave shelter hotels, people state that the rules, regulations, surveillance, lack of harm reduction competency and concentration of people at shelter hotels feels like institutionalization. People want their own apartments, where they can have autonomy. In the immediate, the city could give encampment residents rent subsidies so that they can occupy currently vacant condos and apartments across the city. Streets To Homes staff should support transition from encampment to apartments if required by encampment residents.

d) The city should take this unprecedented moment to increase the supply of RGI housing by rapidly expropriating unused buildings for the purpose of permanent housing in the downtown core, including vacant apartments, and unused business space, in and around encampments so that encampment residents can live in their communities of choice and access pre-existing supports and services.

e) In any plan, the city should be specific about how much indoor space will be made available, the location of available space, and the parameters and type of indoor space, making the distinction between whether it is shelter or housing people are being offered (i.e. shelter hotel, shelter bed, permanent RGI housing).

(5) IMMEDIATE INTERIM MEASURES

In the interim, while people have no offer they deem suitable for housing or shelter, and for those who choose to stay outside, the city must consult with encampment residents about their basic needs for winter, and provide listed items to residents. The fact that this report blatantly overlooks any mention of winter demonstrates that the city does not value the lives and well-being of people living in encampments.

(6) PROVISION OF SURVIVAL GEAR AND FIRE SAFETY TO ENCAMPMENT RESIDENTS

Operating under the guise of preventing the entrenchment of encampments, the city of Toronto continues to enact violence toward people living in tents by withholding basic sanitation - this impacts the mental health and physical health of encampment residents. It is so depressing we have to tell the city what to provide people in encampments in the first place, let alone during the winter. But we have to, and this is happening, because of systemic neglect and the city's attitude that poor people are disposable.

- a) The city of Toronto should provide material aid to people living in encampments, in accordance with the Faulkner report, including but not limited to: **Water, food, sleeping bags, weather resistant tents, gift cards, winter clothing, wool socks, carafes for hot liquids, warming huts and hand and foot warmers.**
- b) Encampment residents should be given generators that work in the cold.
- c) The city should provide encampment residents with fire safety.
- d) Locations for hot showers should be open with adequate protection from COVID and sanitation.
- e) Hot meals should be provided to encampment residents, and the city could both support commerce and struggling local restaurants as well as encampments by paying for restaurants to make the meals.

(7) STREETS TO HOMES ACCOUNTABILITY AND FOLLOW THROUGH

Follow-through regarding commitments made to encampment residents by Streets to Homes is essential for building meaningful, trusting relationships.

- Direct lines of communication between specific workers and encampment residents is essential. Awareness that encampment residents are not always in possession of phones is important.
- Therefore, scheduled and regular visits to encampments with updates on shelter and housing options and city plans are essential.
- S2H processes for housing people should be made clear for encampment residents.
- Provide residents clear information about the rules and conditions of the accommodations available to them, and give them enough time to consider the feasibility and make an informed decision about their future.
- Posting physical notice of plans and shelter availability would be helpful to people.

(8) FOSTERING A CULTURE OF CARE NOT HATE IN TORONTO

The City should directly combat the stigma surrounding the encampments (to which it has contributed) among housed residents. Part of this includes, but is not limited to, being forthcoming about the absence of viable, dignified alternatives being offered by the city. The

perception that encampment residents are turning down (non-existent) offers because “they don’t know what’s good for them” is a clear and logical result of dishonesty on the City’s part.

Hello,

I'd like to thank the Chair and also the Committee for having me here today. Councillor Bailao you are my city councillor. Good to see you. I'm speaking to item 16.8

My name's Simone Schmidt. I'm a musician. Since Covid I haven't been able to gig, so I've been coordinating the encampment support network also known as ESN - ESN has 140 volunteers, some of whom you've heard from today, and they deliver basic humanitarian aid to people living in encampments in 6 neighborhoods in the city daily. We have spent \$83,000 in the past 14 weeks delivering water, tents, sleeping bags, fire extinguishers, snacks, and ice to encampment residents to whom the city has refused water, washroom access and fire safety equipment.

We talk to residents every day. We learn about city activity in the encampments, and ask them what they need. There is this one ask that I remember from early July that sticks. It was from a man who needed a first aid kit, because a scrape on his leg had gotten so infected that he was passing through multiple pairs of pants. This is one thing that happens when you refuse people water and basic sanitation.

Last week I got a text from a young man who's 4 months into his time being homeless. The words were flanked by these emojis - the freezing blue emoji - you know the ones with icicles coming off their face and the teeth chattering? The text read: "Can you connect me with Streets To Homes. Winter's coming.

I'm getting worried." I actually can't connect him with S2H and if I could, S2H likely wouldn't have an offer for him. Their messaging is inconsistent, but last week S2H told us there are no new shelter beds and to call central access.

Item 16.8 does not account for the fact that there are not enough shelter beds every winter, and while I commend you for the emergency measures taken to open the new shelter hotels for physical distancing, according to my math, the shelter system currently has between 800 and 1250 fewer beds than it did prior to COVID. (If I'm wrong about this, could the city please clarify how many beds have been lost between now and January 2020?)

So it's with a terrified heart that I feel compelled to recommend improvements to encampment conditions by the city, because nowhere in the plan is it made clear what people living in encampments are going to do in the immediate future. ESN has been filling this gap for the city, we know people who have died in it, and we fear people will freeze to death in it soon.

My recommendations for the city are as follows:

The City should

- Consult with encampment residents as to what they need.
- Stop evicting people from encampments when there is no space inside that they deem adequate or safe. The City should respect the communities people create for themselves and not scatter people.
- End police harassment and violence in encampments. We are watching tents get slashed and young men beaten up by police. Defund the parks ambassadors who participate in this harassment as well.
- Provide clean and safe power sources to people living in encampments and/or places to store generators safely.
- Provide flame resistant survival gear, including sleeping bags and tents, and fire safety equipment as per the faulkner report.
- Provide people with warming stations and cooking centers
- Provide people with access to hot showers and clean washrooms near encampments.
- Allow people to erect the makeshift structures that will guard their tents from the wind.

In no way am I suggesting that there should be a city sanctioned or city run encampment. Ever.

[In my written submission I've attached a recommendations from ESN regarding encampments.](#)

If you really want to get people out of encampments provide them with a housing option- not shelter. People want to move into places that provide the autonomy that many people take for granted. They want apartments in their own communities, close to their families and services.

In order to do that, and in line with the item's goal to "minimize the flow of people into traditional emergency shelters," I recommend that in the immediate months, temporary rent subsidies be given to unhoused people, so that they can move indoors. And if you need a business case, the city could at once help out landlords who have taken a hit during these unprecedented times.

There is indoor space, and it should be used. No one should freeze to death in toronto.

