

Chair Bravo & Committee members
Economic & Community Development Committee
City of Toronto

May 28, 2024

EC13.8 - The City's Encampment Approach and Strategy

I am a long-time street nurse and recent co-editor with Greg Cook of *Displacement City. Fighting for Health and Homes in a Pandemic* (UofT Press). We sent you each a copy. If you did not receive it please let me know. The book is full of what encampment dwellers need. They are the experts.

While this report emphasizes 'Housing First' and a human rights approach, the report is vague on implementation. The report reads like a public relations exercise to 'manage' encampments rather than support them.

A walkabout to encampments by your members and the Mayor's office, accompanied by a federal MP would show a startling array of what are essentially refugee camps. Camps of internally displaced persons – in Canada. There are over 200 encampments in the city ranging from Councillor Holyday's ward to Councillor Myers.

Mayor Chow knows this refugee camp concept well, having worked at Tent City (1999-2002) with me and others and she knows the only resolution to the clearing was providing rent supplements for housing. When housed properly by Woodgreen, none of the Tent City residents asked to go back to the contaminated waterfront lands.

In some cases, today there are multiple encampments in the same park. The current clearing approach just further distances people into new territories. Make no mistake, encampments will increase dramatically this summer.

A human rights response to encampments should include a public health response. Specifically:

1. A commitment to portable washrooms, running water, potable water (or water delivery) at all encampments.
2. A commitment to weekly garbage pick-up.
3. A commitment to fire safety that includes the provision of fire extinguishers, fire blankets, sand buckets and fire bowls/receptacles.
4. The allowance of shelter structures like those that Khaleel Seivwright built and that are being used in other Ontario towns and cities.

A true human rights approach would also include:

1. A 72-hour notice without exception for clearings.
2. Clearing that would only take place when suitable indoor space or housing is provided.
3. Ending the reliance on saying people will be referred to 24/7 respite sites when they are [100% full](#).
4. Re-evaluating the security costs to allocate them to rent supplements.
5. A city campaign that goes beyond letter writing to senior levels of government to implement a fast-track rent supplement program.

While I appreciate the discussion this report is stimulating, until you choose to recognize encampments as refugee camps that are not going away, people will be doomed to further displacement, health risk and death.

Sincerely,

Cathy Crowe, RN (non-practising), O.C.