

Submission to the Economic and Community Development Committee

May 29, 2024

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

Maytree has long supported the City in its efforts to address the needs of those living in deepest housing need and poverty, and we believe this is best achieved through a human rights-based approach that centres those whose rights and dignity are most at risk.

This approach aligns with the Toronto Housing Charter, which declares that it is City policy “to move deliberately to further the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.”

Encampments are a result of structural conditions, including the failure of all levels of government to uphold the right to adequate housing. Encampments do not meet the conditions of adequate housing under human rights law, but their existence is itself a claim on the right to housing that has been denied. This fact creates clear human rights obligations for the City.

Where in the past, encampment residents faced dehumanization, we must build a new approach based on empathy and shared human dignity. Therefore, Maytree endorses the proposed updates to the City's Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments. While it is not a perfect document, it represents an important step towards a municipal encampment response grounded in human rights.

The Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments embeds meaningful engagement into the City's approach, recognizes that the City has human rights obligations to support people living in encampments until they move to adequate housing, and establishes a clear and transparent process for bylaw enforcement. Each of these is a step toward fulfilling the right to housing.

As noted in the meeting materials, Maytree was among those organizations consulted on a draft of the Interdivisional Protocol for Encampments. While some of our feedback is reflected in the final version, much of it is not. The Protocol could be further strengthened by clarifying what the City will do to proactively protect the health and safety of encampment residents, embedding meaningful engagement into the encampment response process, and ensuring encampment residents are offered indoor spaces that meet their needs. We look forward to continuing to improve the Protocol, as well as the overall encampment strategy, in partnership with the City.

Maytree urges the Economic and Community Development Committee to adopt the recommendations of the General Manager, Toronto Shelter and Support Services, related to this item. In addition to the Protocol, Maytree welcomes the recommendations calling on other levels of government to increase social assistance rates and invest more in housing programs.

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Maytree