

To : Karen Redman; Berry Vrbanovic; Elizabeth Clarke; Tom Galloway; Michael Harris; Geoff Lorentz; Kathryn McGarry; Helen Jowett; Karl Kiefer; Dave Jaworsky; Jim Erb; Sean Strickland; Sandy Shantz; Les Armstrong; Sue Foxtan; Joe Nowak; Scott Davey; Dave Schnider; John Gazzola; Christine Michaud; Kelly Galloway-Sealock; Paul Singh; Bil Ioannidis; Margaret Johnston; Debbie Chapman; Sarah Marsh; Donna Reid; Mike Devine; Mike Mann; Jan Liggett; Pam Wolf; Shannon Adshade; Scotte Hamilton; Nicholas Ermeta; Sarah Hanmer; Royce Bodaly; Angela Vieth; Diane Freeman; Jen Vasic; Jeff Henry; Teneille Bonoguoire;

Re: Victoria Homeless Encampment

Our communities stand with and support our neighbours who reside in the encampment at Victoria and Weber, and in other encampments situated within the Region of Waterloo that are under threat of forced eviction. Any action to evict or harass those currently residing in encampments is unlawful and inhumane as per treaty rights, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, international law, and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Homelessness is a multipronged issue that disproportionately impacts historically disadvantaged identities and communities. There is common cause between affordable housing activists, social workers, sex workers, healthcare providers, climate change activists, outreach workers, food security activists, menstrual equity activists, queer rights activists, and those who are calling for decolonization, Land Back, and to defund the police to refund social supports. All of our communities are affected; we must improve the relationship with our neighbours without housing. Failing to address the needs of people in encampments represents a failure and fundamental conflict with the interests of all of our communities and the aforementioned rights affirmed in law.

We hold up the work of Leilani Farha, former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing. Her recently published [“the Shift Directives: from Financialized to Human Rights-based Housing”](#) states that

“The right to housing is understood as the right to live in peace, security, and dignity. It extends to all persons, irrespective of income or access to economic resources, and is interdependent with several other human rights, such as the rights to life, non-discrimination and equality, health, and water and sanitation. Certain conditions or practices are violations of the right to housing and are strictly prohibited such as forced evictions, evictions into homelessness, and homelessness.”

Flowing from this Human Rights-based housing approach are 8 principles from [A National Protocol on Encampments: A Human Rights Approach](#). We call on our elected bodies with the Region of Waterloo to adhere to these 8 principles to honor the human rights of encampment

residents, and particularly, Principle 3: “to prohibit the forceful evictions of homeless encampments”.

We call on the Region of Waterloo and affiliated municipalities, such as, City of Kitchener, City of Waterloo, and City of Cambridge, to implement the following:

1. **Stop any and all actions to evict encampments.**

Forced evictions are a violation of human rights. It furthers the displacement of Indigenous peoples on their own [stolen] land. Forced evictions add to encampment residents’ trauma. Forced evictions breed distrust of the authorities who supposedly protect people, and the supportive institutions that are connected through you to those evicting them. This is a huge step backwards in getting people the supports and housing they need.

2. **Permit encampments.**

Encampments are not ideal, but we must be realistic: we don’t have enough adequate housing. Encampments will continue to exist. Encampments can be vastly improved for everyone simply by being permitted, giving residents some security, and allowing services to support residents. A Better Tent City is a successful example. Insecurity and threat of eviction is a large part of what makes homelessness traumatic, dangerous and difficult to escape. Give them a place or allow them to stay now!

3. **Provide immediate support to mitigate the harms of homelessness.**

Encampments do not have direct access to restrooms, water, food, electricity, garbage collection, or health and social supports; residents must go elsewhere to access them which is often the direct cause of friction with surrounding business. Providing these supports and basic services mitigates the harm to residents and mitigates conflicts with neighbours of the encampments. The Weber/Victoria encampment is currently well situated due to its proximity to St. John’s Kitchen, transit, and other community services.

4. **Collaborate with the encampment residents, supportive communities, and front-line workers to create short-term and long-term sustainable, life-affirming solutions.**

Encampment residents have a vested interest in the success of housing initiatives. The community is filled with people already doing the work and who have relationships with those you purportedly want to help. Work with us so we can help each other. In particular, the Region’s Encampment Risk Assessment Framework needs to be made public so it can be co-created with those most at risk.

Encampment residents are neighbours. Yet municipal insistence that the provision of essential services, such as restrooms, require constant surveillance or added security is paternalistic and criminalizes their existence. Meet our calls to action in an open spirit of collaboration and non-judgment and we can work together to improve the wellbeing of our whole community.

Signed: **Unsheltered Campaign and the following groups concerned about encampment evictions:**

Alliance Against Poverty
Climate Justice Laurier
Community Fridge KW
Community Kitchen Cooperative KW
Food Not Bombs Kitchener Waterloo
For A Better Waterloo Region
Fossil Free UW
Going Mobile KW
GroundUpWR
Healing of the Seven Generations
KW Council of Canadians
KW Urban Harvester
K-W Urban Native Wigwam Project
Laura Mae Lindo, MPP Elect Kitchener Centre
Laurier Students' Public Interest Research Group (LSPiRG)
MyMotherNamedMeSunshine.ca
Nickolas Rollick, CFO for Candidate on Record (Green Party Waterloo)
Out Of The Box Counseling & Collaborations
O:se Kenhionhata:tie Land Back Camp
Our Place Family Resource and Early Years Centre
Rainbow Reels Queer and Trans Film Festival
Reallocate WR
Shefaza Esmail, Candidate on Record (Green Party Waterloo)
Social Development Centre Waterloo Region
SPECTRUM Waterloo Region's Rainbow Community Space
Sex Workers' Action Network of Waterloo Region
Waterloo Region Climate Initiatives
WR YIMBY

The calls to action in this letter are rooted in the work and calls to action published by the Unsheltered Campaign, which have been ongoing and unmet since 2020 when COVID-19 lockdowns resulted in outrageous and unlawful treatment and neglect of the homeless. This coalition would not exist without the groundwork laid by them, nor would it exist if their calls to action were addressed.

For more information on the work of the Unsheltered Campaign and how to get connected, please visit civichubwr.org/unsheltered-campaign or email unshelteredcampaign@gmail.com.

