

July 30, 2020

Good morning.

We wanted to start by saying thank you to all of you who wrote letters, made phone calls, and reached out to support over that last 48 hours as we worked to stop people from being displaced from the FirstOntario Centre and Ferguson St encampments. The efforts of people to stand with those living in encampments and for a City where everyone has access to dignified housing is heartening.

We would like to clarify a few things:

We and others were clearly informed on Tuesday that there was a Friday deadline for people to accept offers of shelter, hotel, or housing or be moved on. This was walked back quite a bit after a flurry of exchanges between our team, the City staff, and our respective lawyers on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning. However, ultimately we were not able to obtain written assurance that no one would be removed against their will.

This lack of assurance and all of the experience we and others have had trying to support people in encampments, only to lose contact when people are displaced, put in motion legal proceedings that we have long been talking with the City about avoiding. To be clear, we are thrilled if people are offered shelter or housing options that suit their needs. We have and will continue to work with the city and agencies to support those transitions.

Our lack of confidence in the plans for Friday was bolstered by the extremely short notice that we and others were given about the July 31 “hopes to have people chose other options,” the lack of clarity about what options were being made available that, to date, had not enabled them to move out of encampments. In addition, we could not get the city to agree to give housing and outreach workers and our team more notice before another planned deadline.

We reiterate what Wade Poziomka has said about hiding behind by laws to justify moving people with nowhere else to go: “Laws and bylaws can sometimes lead to unfair results and cause harm. That is precisely why staff have discretion in enforcing these bylaws. To simply point to a bylaw and say it must be enforced, despite the harm, shows frightening lack of understanding of municipal governance”.

We have many times requested information about the Encampment Task Force and have only received a one and a half page “report” which essentially lists the membership of the task force and its “mandate” to engage people before moving them on.

We have throughout this very public debate about encampments maintained that we hope for people to be able to access shelter and housing that meets their needs. We have, contrary to Councillor Farr’s suggestion, been working closely with the city and other agencies to facilitate this. Keeping Six has provided peer support at the encampments in coordination with agencies most closely linked to them. HAMS MaRT and Keeping Six have shared supplies with city, agency and community based outreach teams. We have established an encampment support coordination group. In addition, K6 and HAMS MaRT have been at the table with city and agency staff weekly, working collectively to ensure that people living rough and in shelter are adequately protected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We did not start with handing out tents and legal action against the city. We have been engaging with anyone and everyone ranging from the folks living in tents to the General Manager of

Healthy and Safe Communities. We have delegated to the Emergency and Community Services Committee and clearly laid out our position, including why shelter is not an option for some. We have been completely transparent about our plans all along, informing City staff at each step of the way how we intended to act in the interests of the people that we support, and have always tried to diffuse instead of ramp up tensions.

All that we are saying, and all that we have ever said, is stop the inhumane practice of moving people on from encampments who have nowhere else to go. We are calling for time for outreach and housing workers to engage with people and support them to move when and where they will succeed. If that is working against the city, as Jason Farr is insinuating in his response to concerned constituents, then we hope that more people will see the need to join us in asking for a reconsideration of the City's approach to encampments.