

Re: Homelessness vs camping and transitional housing

July 16, 2022

Dear Chair and members of the CPSC,

Homelessness in London continues to be a growing challenge with a great demand for both transitional and permanent housing. For people sleeping in the rough, we have numerous policies for where they cannot stay but few options for where they can. There are multiple demographics experiencing homelessness and to be successful we may need to tease apart the challenge and assist those demographics individually with transitional housing. London may benefit from a spectrum of transitional housing types. As a means of providing more options I am accepting staff's invitation to bring forward a motion to CPSC and look for your support.

### **MOBILE TEMPORARY TRANSITIONAL HOUSING UNITS**

The idea of the housing first model was to provide "the right housing at the right time with the right supports". We may want to expand our thinking beyond the perception that right housing always means an apartment. For someone who slept on the sidewalk beside a shopping cart of belongings last night, the right housing at the right time could be a Conestoga Hut tonight. These modest mobile shelters and the more elaborate ones built by Andy Spriet provide privacy, security and storage capacity well beyond that of a tent. It would be helpful if, in any situation and for any individual, we could offer them an accommodation superior to what they presently have in a way that reduces the challenges associated with homelessness both for themselves and the community at large.

Conestoga Hut



Mobile Shelter



In the past, we declined to pilot of this type of lodging ourselves and in retrospect we may have missed out on the opportunity to gather much useful data for future initiatives. I suggest that we reconsider the idea of a pilot focused on assisting high-risk individuals and do so in a way that could be replicated in other communities. I say this because solving homelessness in London could be a self-defeating proposition if more and more individuals experiencing it come or are sent here from other communities they because believe we have it figured out and they can't follow suit.

Such a pilot would fit in with our strategic plan in terms of STRENGTHENING our Community as we are assisting our most vulnerable, CREATING a Safe London for Women and Girls as we anticipate a gender lens that prioritizes those who recognize the additional vulnerabilities they share, and LEADING in Public Service since many municipalities are struggling to innovate homelessness solutions.

At present, our own community is taking on the role providing this kind of shelter. I see this as good because the corporation never had and never will have the resources to address the challenge on its own. However, because this is a new strategy, organizations and individuals may be looking for us to provide guidance and clear expectations for their efforts to help.

## **CAMPING**

When you consider that camping is an attractive recreational activity, it is not surprising that people might choose this option when finding themselves homeless.

One obvious way to introduce helpful structure to the situation is to build a campground with sufficient amenities to act as an enticement to use that location. To be helpful, this must be different from a typical tent city. It is very unlikely that a one size fits all policy would maximize the benefits and minimize the risks so it may be wise to tailor the approach to those with common needs.

I understand that there are working people who sleep in tents at night, pack them into their vehicles in the morning, drive to work, and in the evening set them set their tents up again. There are more options to accommodate these individuals because facilities could be established in less transit accessible locations, with fewer supports and potentially a nominal fee for some cost recovery. Helping to stabilize this demographic would provide instantaneous improvements to the shortage of workers and assist with our strategic goal of GROWING our Economy.

I realize that there is no broad and quick fix to our homelessness challenge but the following motions may result in concrete improvements and valuable learnings.

- a) That staff BE DIRECTED to conduct a pilot of temporary mobile shelters for at-risk individuals experiencing homelessness as for the purpose of discovering effective strategies that could be implemented further here and in any municipality.
- b) That staff BE DIRECTED to conduct the pilot of a campground with amenities for working individuals living out of their cars for the purpose of discovering effective strategies that could be implemented further here and in any municipality.
- c) That staff BE DIRECTED to create a document with permissive guidance and expectations for those assisting with sheltering efforts.

Sincerely,

Michael van Holst  
Ward 1 Councillor