



Dear Regional Chair and Council,

We are Kitchener's Lived Expertise Working Group. We are twelve community connectors with a diverse range of lived expertise, who are advising the implementation and evaluation of the Housing For All Strategy. Our work arises from a two-year pilot collaboration between the Social Development Centre of Waterloo Region and the City of Kitchener to model long-term lived expertise engagement.

Over the past few weeks we have been reviewing the recommendations put forward in the Interim Responses to Homelessness. Through our conversations several themes have emerged that we encourage staff and council so that your toolkit can be as effective as possible.

**1. Lived expertise should be included throughout the process**

We are excited to see the Region already incorporating lived expertise into this process. The wisdom we share is indispensable and should be incorporated throughout this process: from strategizing on the master plan to co-managing interim solutions like the hybrid/outdoor shelter model.

**2. Hire people with lived expertise as advisors and Peer Support Workers**

We are happy to see lived and living experience and Peer Support being built into the evaluation framework and encourage the region to invest in this meaningful engagement to build trust and understanding across the housing continuum. For example, replacing security and other supports with people with lived expertise and Peer Support teams with outreach workers can build trust, skills and strengthen community.

**3. Leveraging community and resources already in unsheltered communities**

Encampment communities are already self managing and organizing to take care of each other. From harm reduction systems to conflict resolution processes, people in unsheltered communities are trying their best to create safer spaces to live. Staff should work alongside these communities and resource them through co-managed communities to ensure the success of the Hybrid/outdoor model.

**4. Hybrid/Outdoor model needs to be expanded to ensure success**

Unsheltered communities desire to have more stable and safe permanent housing. However, until supportive affordable housing can be built the Region needs to respect and support people living in tent communities. The current budget only accommodates for 50 people in the Hybrid/Outdoor model. We are concerned that this means many people will remain outside Region supported housing options. We want staff to be empowered to leverage more land and buildings in the region to provide temporary interim housing infrastructure.

**5. Interim measures require decriminalizing homelessness to ensure success**

We believe that the biggest and most expensive barrier to providing interim housing solutions is the criminalizing approach that the Region is currently using. For example, many people do not stay in shelters because there are strict rules, no accommodations for families, and no 24/7 access. Similarly, the region relies on security and police to do the work of outreach and peer support workers, at a far greater cost. These actions break trust with communities and add layers of stress and harm. We are happy to see that staff have already added evaluation criteria like trauma-informed and 24/7 access to their toolkit. However, these solutions require further



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decriminalization such as a temporary moratorium on encampment evictions and the reallocation of funds from police/security to outreach workers.

#### **6. Withdraw the court case**

We believe that the Region's current court case against the residents of the 100 Victoria court case is not in line with the Interim Housing Decisions staff are proposing. We are worried that the region will struggle to get buy-in from unsheltered communities when they are concerned about being criminalized and losing their current housing. Withdrawing the case is an important act of good will to foster trust and build collaborative relationships with these communities.

We believe that Regional staff have taken some strong first steps to expand their toolkit and lay the groundwork for a new approach to homelessness. We are hopeful that our recommendations and continued feedback will help the Region achieve the full potential of these measures.

Thank you for your time.

Kitchener's Lived Expertise Working Group on Housing