

Dear Regional Councillors,

I am Adam Cooper, Councillor for the City of Cambridge. I urge all of you to read this message to the end.

As you are all likely aware from recent media articles and the influx of concerned resident emails, there have been numerous criminal and dangerous incidents occurring in and around the encampment at 150 Main St, Cambridge.

We have seen numerous fights, tents being set on fire with people in them, assaults with weapons including an axe, knives and machetes. We have seen the disturbing videos of these incidents that are now making the rounds on local news and social media. To those of us that live here, this is nothing new nor are these isolated cases... they are just the tip of the iceberg.

I have spoken to numerous homeowners on Shade St and the surrounding neighbourhood. I have personally seen the horrific circumstances that those living next to this encampment are having to endure day after day, night after night. I have seen video incidents of encampment residents slamming on the doors of local homes, sometimes in groups.

Terrifying experiences of drug-intoxicated campers screaming threats of violence toward the public are a common occurrence, as is children being harassed and traumatized as they go to and from school. I have personally been threatened with having my head cut off just for not complying with demands to hand over money.

I am going to show all of you the courtesy and respect of being blunt and direct with you throughout this message. This situation has become dangerous, uncontrollable, unacceptable, and it needs to end immediately. This encampment needs to be removed for the safety of both campers and local residents alike.

I, along with all of you, have sworn an oath to act in the best interest of those I represent. What is happening at 150 Main St can in no possible way be construed to be in the best interest of either the residents of the encampment or the families of the surrounding community. This is a dangerous place to be. This fact has been demonstrated over and over again to the continuing frustration and anger of the innocent people that have to live with these consequences.

To try to sell the concept to the public and media that this encampment is a place of any kind of safety and refuge for the poor homeless of our community is at minimum a lesson in government ignorance and at worst a disgusting display of abandonment of duty and a shocking indifference to the plight of the very people that we have all sworn to represent.

Anybody that lives anywhere near this location will tell you what can easily be witnessed by simply visiting it, that this place is a lawless haven for extremely violent criminal elements and drug related chaos at a disturbing level. The mass of stolen property sits as clear evidence of the exploitation and victimization of the local community at the hands of criminals that have no fear of prosecution or any consequence whatsoever. These people are preying on our community night after night as they have done since this encampment began a year ago.

It is never right to try to help one group while trampling on the rights and safety of everybody else yet this is exactly what is happening at 150 Main St. The residents in this area have rights and your inaction on this matter will only further endanger them and inflame their growing anger at what the region is forcing them to endure. I ask you all, would you place this outside your own front door? Would you force this on your family and friends? Would you force this on your elderly parents?

Make no mistake, this is wrong and undeniably unacceptable. The question is whether Waterloo Region will acknowledge this mistake and clear it out peacefully and expediently, or will you wait until there is a dead body, sexual assault or another serious violent assault on a local

homeowner or child to motivate you to move on this matter? The other option is that the local community forces its closure. The latter will happen if you fail to act appropriately.

I urge you all to listen to what is happening there and stop the years-long pattern of Waterloo Regional Council and special interest groups deciding from outside of our city just how much danger and trauma the residents of downtown Galt should be willing to endure.

I will always prioritize the rights and safety of the families I represent over those that choose to live off their victimization, as should all of you if you have any level of compassion for our community and truly value the oath you swore last year.

Those with the real power in this community are the people and they will force the removal of this encampment if you do not do it yourselves. Unfortunately, you have completely lost their trust and respect in this matter. This is just the beginning. They will not stop bringing attention to this matter. I highly support them in this cause and will aid them in any way I can until this has been resolved to their satisfaction. What is being done to them is wrong and they deserve nothing less.

Their mental health is at a breaking point and they want their safety and that of their families to be returned. They want to be able to walk outside their front door again without fear. They want their children to walk to school without being terrified as they do so. They want to sleep at night without hearing their property being robbed or awakening to drug-fueled screaming and fighting right outside their front doors.

They also want this to stop before more people get hurt, whether they be local citizens who incur their wrath simply by walking by, or the campers themselves due to their regular violent conflicts with each other.

Judge Valente's decision should not be used as an excuse for inaction against a clear danger to your constituents. His decision applied to the Kitchener encampment and does not apply to 150 Main St for numerous reasons which I won't go into detail here but most notably that there is a clear public safety issue present as well as this statement regarding the Victoria St encampment...

"I find that there is no need in the case of the (Victoria St) encampment to balance their needs with the rights of the Region's other residents.... the Property is not a park or other space designed with the purpose of being enjoyed by the public at large. Instead, the Property is a vacant lot to be used by the Region as a temporary parking lot and lay down construction area at some undefined future date. Therefore, based on these facts, there is no need to consider how the impact of the Encampment residents sheltering overnight may impair the interests and rights of other residents of the Region."

As well as showing a disturbing lack of empathy toward our local community, this statement and its direction to ignore the rights of other residents does not apply to 150 Main St as it is located in a functioning parking lot that is used by the public and many employees of the health services building.

The rights of the residents absolutely do matter and no elected official should need a judge's decision to understand that. It is our job and duty to act accordingly to protect those rights, particularly when the safety of those residents is being threatened.

Waterloo Region's own policy on encampment removal states that "...***In exceptional circumstances, however, more immediate intervention may be required to address public safety concerns.***"

I am respectfully asking all of you to understand that this location has proven itself time and time again to be a public safety concern of the highest degree and it should be acted on as such.

The ball is now in your court. You all need to be on the right side of this situation. Give this community their safety and peace of mind back by doing what is right and closing this encampment before this awful situation gets any worse than it already is.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Adam Cooper
Councillor, City of Cambridge