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Sent: Saturday, January 11, 2025 3:03 PM
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Subject: Urgent Action Needed: Compassionate Shelter Policies During Extreme Cold

CAUTION: External E-Mail

Evictions during extreme cold are life-threatening to individuals experiencing homelessness. Subjecting the homeless with exposure to subzero temperatures can lead to hypothermia, frostbite, and death. For those who use substances, the lack of a safe space can increase the likelihood of dangerous, isolated use, further compounding the risks. I am writing to share some insights on shelter management, drawn from other's personal experiences and best practices that have proven effective in creating safe, inclusive, and well-functioning spaces for individuals in need.

1. A key lesson is that shelters thrive when they treat all residents with dignity and respect. This includes:

- Ensuring privacy through appropriate spacing and partitions.
- Creating a welcoming, non-judgmental atmosphere where everyone feels valued.

(This means not giving out 7 day evictions on some of the coldest days of the year so far - as has been reported)

2. Shelters operate smoothly when expectations are clearly communicated:

- Develop and post clear rules for residents that promote safety and harmony.

(Who would knowingly want to live out in the cold with very limited or no access to heat, running water, washrooms; electricity? If a number of people

continue on a regular basis at failing to work with expectations, the expectations are likely not clear enough, or they are asking too much or people are incapable of understanding/following them)

3. Addressing the broader needs of residents strengthens their path to stability:

- Provide access to caseworkers, mental health counselors, and employment resources.
- Facilitate workshops or training sessions on life skills, financial literacy, and job readiness.

(Have these types of services been provided? I recognize it is early days- but maybe if all services aren't in place maybe discipline for failures should wait?)

4. Are Regularly held resident meetings or anonymous surveys being done to understand concerns and areas for improvement?

(This kind of feedback is of course very helpful to refine policies and services, ensuring the shelter will evolve with the needs of its residents)

I am writing with these suggestions because of my grave concern after hearing about recent evictions of individuals from the shelter due to opioid use, particularly as we face some of the coldest days of the year. While I understand the need to maintain safety and order within the shelter, I urge you to consider the life-threatening consequences of eviction during this extreme weather.

Evicting individuals for substance use during these dangerously cold conditions puts lives at immediate risk. Without access to shelter, people experiencing homelessness are exposed to hypothermia, frostbite, and potentially fatal outcomes. For those struggling with substance use, the risks are compounded by the lack of safe spaces to stabilize.

To address this urgent issue, I can only recommend adopting a harm-reduction strategy that balances the safety of the shelter with the need to preserve life:

1. **Create a Safe-Use Zone or Policy:**

Designate an outdoor or well-ventilated area where individuals can use substances safely without risking eviction. This keeps substance use out of living spaces while allowing access to shelter services.

2. **Establish Immediate Support Pathways:**

Provide on-site or referral-based access to counselors, peer recovery

specialists, and harm-reduction programs. These resources can help individuals move toward stabilization and recovery without the trauma of eviction.

3. **Temporary Crisis Protocol:**

During extreme weather, consider suspending eviction policies for non-violent rule violations. Instead, focus on de-escalation and keeping individuals indoors, where they are safe from the elements.

The Moral and Practical Imperative

As councilors, you have a profound opportunity to lead with compassion and pragmatism. Shelters exist to protect our most vulnerable, especially during crises like extreme weather. Evictions that endanger lives undermine this mission. By implementing harm-reduction policies, we can save lives, reduce harm, and create a safer environment for all residents and staff.

The consequences of these evictions extend beyond individual harm; they strain emergency services and burden communities when preventable tragedies occur.

I respectfully urge you to advocate for these changes and work with shelter leadership to implement them immediately. Lives depend on our collective ability to act quickly and thoughtfully.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to this critical matter.

Submitted by

Linda MacKenzie-Nicholas

[REDACTED]

Sent by: **LM-N she/her**

I am located on the traditional territory of the Anishinabek. I respectfully acknowledge that the Mississauga Nation and all indigenous peoples are the stewards and caretakers of Mother Earth today and for all future generations.

I recognize that land acknowledgements are not enough.

To that end, I will continue to make every effort available to me, to help achieve the implementation of all 94 Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. I will remain forever committed to learn, know and understand our colonialist history, the devastating destruction it caused and the ways it still continues to damage the lives of so many.

I will work diligently each day to ensure the prosperity of all peoples.

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world would do this, it would change the earth.” – William Faulkner