

Getting rid of the encampment protocol isn't a solution

CAMERON KROETSCH

Last month, the Ontario Superior Court ruled the City of Hamilton didn't infringe on the Charter rights of a group of more than a dozen people who were forced to live outside between 2021 and 2023.

In his ruling, the judge upheld a previous decision stating the city can't evict people from parks overnight — he didn't say the city should get rid of its encampment protocol in favour of an enforcement-based approach.

Despite the attention it received, this ruling didn't move things forward, change the situation we face as a city or offer up any solutions. And getting rid of the encampment protocol, as some of my colleagues are suggesting we do in the coming weeks, won't do anything to help alleviate homelessness.

This is a serious issue in our city and I understand why everyone's frustrated. As downtowners, we see and experience the impacts each and every day and every Hamiltonian has a right to express their feelings and opinions about this, respectfully. Everyone agrees there should be easy access to our parks. No one, including those forced to live outside, thinks the current state of things is a solution of any kind.

The encampment protocol was put in place to help to begin to manage encampments. It's not a solution to homelessness. While it's fallen short in many ways, it's provided some stability, allowing the city to continue to allocate resources to outreach and support. It has the potential as a framework, if improved with the advice of those deprived of housing, to mitigate harm until much needed housing can be secured.

As we've seen in the recent past, having no protocol at all leads to an expensive enforcement-based approach. It will bring back an era of chaos and harm for people living without housing and a return to empowering authorities to chase people from park to park. This approach is costly, both morally and financially, and doesn't house anyone. We need solutions, not weapons.

Those solutions should never include bulldozing encampments to send our homeless neighbours searching on a cold winter day for a different place to sleep at night. Council has an obligation to respond to community members who need help surviving day to day. The court ruling gives us neither permission to disregard people's needs nor to put comfort over matters of survival.

The city, with council's support, is opening 272 indoor and outdoor shelter beds. In fact, the judge recognized that Hamilton is trying and it's not for the courts to weigh in on how that work should be done.

In the meantime, cities will continue to be forced to manage these crises, a challenge Hamilton has consistently tried to tackle. Over the last few years, Hamilton has outspent the provincial and federal governments combined when it comes to housing and homelessness here. There are still many more people deprived of housing than there are safe and accessible shelter spaces available.

We need to continue to work toward the local solutions we're able to manage. We can't shirk that responsibility. That means measuring the progress we're making to ensure we're getting somewhere before increasing investments; continuing to push for new developments that include significant amounts of affordable housing; and leveraging the city's own affordable housing provider, CityHousing Hamilton, to keep units maintained and people housed.

It's easy to cherry pick court decisions for one-liner arguments or try to position the recent court ruling as the answer to our problems. Easy isn't always right and courts will continue to weigh in on the technical and legal aspects of this crisis. As elected leaders, we must continue to demonstrate we understand our role in government. We were elected to represent every single person who calls Hamilton home, not interpret court decisions to grind political axes.

We must continue to put people first, whether they have housing or not, and find a balance that upholds our collective humanity. Hamiltonians expect councilors to focus on solutions not point fingers and punch down. Every Hamiltonian has a right to exist and council must do everything it can to ensure the policies we enact reduce harm, not create it.

Getting rid of the protocol wholesale is not a solution. CAMERON KROETSCH IS THE WARD 2 CITY COUNCILOR.



THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Everyone agrees there should be easy access to our parks. No one, including those forced to live outside, thinks the current state of things is a solution of any kind, Coun. Cameron Kroetsch writes.



HANNAH FROESE PHOTO

Thomas Froese with his daughter Hannah, now 19, in this 2024 photo from Stanhope Beach, P.E.I.

Make a resolution to get to 'the beach' more this year

THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Before I get to New Year's resolutions, here's Child No. 3, Hannah.

The other day she was the conversation topic around the table. At my turn, I shared what I appreciate about my girl, our girl, the birthday girl. I shared that, like a fun-loving otter, she gets me out of myself.

Get out of yourself. There's a thought for 2025, especially when the world whispers in one ear or the other, or both, in stereo, that you are (that I am) the centre of everything.

It's not true. For starters, as the cliché goes, it takes all types. And all types are around.

There are the beavers, those focused, creative types always working on one project or another. And the golden retrievers, also quiet, those people so very steady and faithful. Then the lions among us, not so quiet, but happy to lead and, you know, are not easily crossed.

Finally, those extroverted, fun-loving otters, not because of any flippers or whiskers — Hannah has nothing like that — but because of that playful, sociable temperament. If you're anything like me, with serious beaver-like ways, you appreciate the Hannahs of the world who come along with a playful nudge.

This is Hannah, the girl, now a

university student, who's always laughed easily. She reminds me to get to the beach. That's my own resolution for 2025. Like last year. Actually, I resolve this every year. Get to the beach, man. The beach. The beach.

I once heard of a father who wrote his children annual birthday letters. I've since done this, writing about some change I've observed in the birthday girl, or boy, something to encourage, or challenge, or maybe just recall a memory from the past year so that, with any luck, the letter is both a birthday greeting and keepsake.

Yesterday, Jan. 10, for her 19th, Hannah got her letter reminding her of, for one, our 2024 trip to some Canadian maritime beaches.

Today, for some teaching, I fly to Uganda, East Africa. It's Hannah's birthplace, where, three years after this beautiful girl entered this world, my bride and I, at a Ugandan orphanage, found her, or she found us, just at the moment when such a finding was needed by all concerned.

Travelling to the developing world, that is the majority world, is a different business.

Challenges with education or politics or health care or anything are magnified much more than here. But these places (my family lived in East Africa for the better part of 12 years) do get you out of yourself.

So this idea of "the beach" isn't a literal place. It's about seeing the world as someone else might, with

different eyes. This is why, along with travel, story is so powerful. (If you're a reader, some of you fathers might take a few minutes to read "A Father's Story," by Andre Dubus, a story about what one father does out of love for his daughter.)

I realize a bit of embarrassment might come with some of this, writing a letter and all. Then again, some fathers can walk onto any street, or beach, and say, "Hey there, people, I'm my children's father," and that's embarrassing enough. Ask my kids.

Even so, write that crazy letter. And remember to tell your loved ones that, well, you love them. Often. You get the idea.

Life is short. Be intentional. And understand that the beach means various things because we're all different.

Thus the expression, "If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it's stupid." Too often we try to jam others into our expectations (or ourselves into others' expectations) which only leads to discontentment, or anger.

So, happy birthday to Hannah. And Happy New Year, dear readers. Fathers, be who you are. Daughters, same deal. Everyone else, you know.

Go to the beach. No, really. The party is not complete without you. THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. HE'S AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM

We can now stop blaming Trudeau

LOIS TUFFIN

What a relief that Justin Trudeau is finally heading off into the sunset.

Unlike his many critics, I don't curse his name. I'm just tired of the infantile name-calling and vile flags that will soon become redundant.

Countless Canadians blame Trudeau for a series of problems without looking at how his team kept groceries and masks readily available during a health crisis. In a recent Toronto Star commentary, David Olive also summarized how the Liberals reduced poverty and grew the economy.

Yet, it's so much easier to blame someone on Parliament Hill for all our ills.

Principally, people have been fixated on how housing is seemingly harder to secure than ever. Since things became more dire in recent years, it's simple to blame the most recent government.

As someone who has sounded the alert — and created affordable housing — for years, I assure you there are many players who should hang their heads. Yes, a national housing strategy would have helped but remember our prime minister didn't start one either.

Why do we see so many people unhoused?

Let's look at the main culprits:

- The province which refuses to increase Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program payments. What single person can live on \$733 a month? A single parent receives up to \$1,218 while a couple with two children gets \$1,795. Do the math. It's impossible.
- Ontario's Health Services Restructuring Commission recommendation to divest psychiatric care to public hospitals. When you see people having a mental health crisis on the street, that's the result of this decision. After couch surfing with family and friends, these individuals often end up unhoused without the supports they need.
- Opioid manufacturers and suppliers who made the situation worse by adding a new layer of addiction for those dying to tame their demons or manage their pain.
- NIMBY neighbours who oppose affordable housing projects drive up legal costs and building costs due to delays. In some cases, they force the reduction in the number of units offered as a compromise, leaving more families with nowhere to go.
- Bad tenants make life as property owners unbearable. The damage and drama they cause led to countless property owners to cut and run

when the real estate market was hot.

- The province made it easier to drive up rents in new buildings in the past four years. In a bid to support these buildings' owners' bottom line, they pushed out tenants who had signed on to leases they could afford.

- Inflationary forces and supply chains that make it harder to build housing and get your money back. These days, it costs \$450 per square foot. Next time you think a new building should offer cheaper rent, work with that number in mind.
- People living in homes with four bedrooms when they only need one. That's a lot of space to hang onto in case your adult kids come home for a visit.

- People who bought overpriced houses and drove up costs. And those who build monster homes that eat up more space than needed.

- Big corporations who seize the opportunity to buy up apartments and hike up rents, plus the laws that allow this to happen.

- Finally, the public who oversimplify this issue and point fingers in one direction.

On a positive note, thank you to all the fair and reasonable landlords who do not take advantage of the current dynamics. You offer some stability at a time when we truly need it. Sorry if all this logic makes your next anti-Trudeau rant more complicated. Actually, I'm not sorry at all.

LOIS TUFFIN IS A FORMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF PETERBOROUGH THISWEEK.