

Sep 10th, 2024

RE: City of Cambridge Council Meeting, Sep 23, 2025 – Item 10.2

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

My name is Laura Pin, and I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Wilfrid Laurier University. My research focuses on housing policy, and currently I lead a federally funded project on encampments in Ontario municipalities. As data collection for this project, **my research team has surveyed 21 individuals who have lived in an encampment in Cambridge** in the past year, out of a total sample of 40 surveys in Waterloo Region. Additionally, **I have visited encampment sites in Cambridge multiple times and spoken with residents, service providers, bylaw and police.** As such, I have a nuanced understanding of the issue of encampments in the City of Cambridge.

I am writing today to urge City Council to adopt Item 10.2, “Preventing the forced removal of unhoused persons during extreme weather events”, at the Council Meeting on Sep 23rd, 2025. Item 10.2 is a motion for a staff report to better understand the issue, not the adoption of a specific policy change or bylaw.

In soliciting a staff report, **this motion will provide an opportunity for evidence-based understanding of the issues to support future policy action.** Moreover, in light of the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate’s letter to the City of Cambridge in July, a staff report is an important step in the development of a human-rights compliant approach. Regardless of political affiliation or stance, most people can appreciate the complexity of the issue of homeless encampments, as well as the desire for more just housing options for people living in encampments. **Extreme weather, signaled through a weather alert from Environment Canada, poses a unique challenge to people experiencing homelessness in encampments, who do not have secure indoor space for respite from the elements.** For example, a systematic review of the literature conducted in 2021 found people experiencing homelessness are “disproportionately exposed to climatic events (temperature extremes and natural disasters).”¹

A 2020 scoping review on the impact of climate events on people experiencing homelessness further notes, “homeless populations face unique vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities likely lead to serious mental and physical health consequences”.² Vulnerabilities identified in the paper include: heat, cold, humidity, water level, melt, rapid-shifts, storms and vector-borne disease.

¹ Bezgrebelna, M., McKenzie, K., Wells, S., Ravindran, A., Kral, M., Christensen, J., ... & Kidd, S. A. (2021). Climate change, weather, housing precarity, and homelessness: A systematic review of reviews. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(11), 5812

² Kidd, S. A., Greco, S., & McKenzie, K. (2021). Global climate implications for homelessness: A scoping review. *Journal of urban health*, 98(3), 385-393.

I have heard individuals suggest that the most humane option is to remove individuals from encampments during extreme weather events, however, **this assumes that the individuals are being removed from an encampment to secure indoor space, which is virtually never the case.** Our research found that 39 of 40 individuals staying in encampments in Waterloo Region reported **at least one barrier to emergency shelter access**, with many respondents reporting multiple barriers. The most frequent barriers were a loss of personal belongings (n=21), no suitable shelter spaces available (n=20), being unsafe (n=19), and restrictive rules (n=19). Other barriers included a lack of space for couples and/or pets at shelters, substance use, and interpersonal conflicts. These barriers are consistent with other research on homelessness and emergency shelter access.³

Our research findings concerning the inadequacy of shelter spaces are echoed in the Oct 2024 Point-in-Time (PiT) Count of people experiencing homelessness in the Region of Waterloo. The PiT Count documented 1,009 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and 2,371 people experiencing homelessness overall, whereas the entire Region of Waterloo currently has fewer than 400 emergency shelter spaces. **Thus, even if individuals want an emergency shelter bed, they are often unable to access one.** And of course, people staying in emergency shelters are still homeless. There is a broader lack of supportive and affordable housing that makes it difficult for people experiencing homelessness to acquire housing. In sum, the data suggests that while people may wish that encampments would disappear, the unfortunate reality is that they are the only option for immediate shelter for some individuals in the community.

As a result, **when people experiencing homelessness are displaced from encampments during extreme weather events, they do not access secure indoor space, but rather become more at risk of harm and even death from the elements.**⁴

This is because they lose access to shelter (ex. tarps, tents, shade), insulation (ex. cardboard, sleeping bags), water and food supplies, other day-to-day essentials. This puts individuals at risk of severe consequences from extreme weather including heat stroke, hypothermia, dehydration, frostbite, and sepsis, leading to significant harm.

Our survey of people in encampments found that, excepting those staying at 100 Victoria in Kitchener, **most people had been forcibly displaced from an encampment at least once, and almost all of those who had experienced displacement experienced harm as a result of that displacement.** Documented harms included were the loss of personal property, the loss of connection to friends and family, and a decreased ability to access health and social services. The expressions respondents used to describe these experiences included being left “high and dry” and being “bulldozed”.

³ Olson, N., & Pauly, B. (2023). ‘Forced to become a community’: Encampment residents’ perspectives on systemic failures, precarity, and constrained choice. *International Journal on Homelessness*, 3(2), 124-138.

⁴ Chang, J. S., Riley, P. B., Aguirre, R. J., Lin, K., Corwin, M., Nelson, N., & Rodríguez, M. (2022). Harms of encampment abatements on the health of unhoused people. *SSM-qualitative research in health*, 2, 100064.

The experience of forcible displacement undermines the hard work of service providers to build relationships with individuals and support their housing searches.

Moreover, on a very practical level, it frequently results in the loss of essential documentation needed to secure housing or social service supports, such as identification. Following displacement, individuals may relocate to remote areas to avoid detection, and/or become fearful of service providers, out of concerns that engaging with these individuals may lead to forced removal, outcomes that are contrary to the goal of securing housing for people staying in encampments.⁵

Another objection I have heard is that a staff report concerning displacement during extreme weather events would be redundant, because the City of Cambridge already has an informal policy of not forcibly removing people from encampments during extreme weather. If this is the case, then perhaps a staff report will help identify gaps in the application of this policy, as with my submission **I am including copies of two eviction notices that were issued to people living in encampments during heat waves this summer.**

Encampment responses are complex matters. Part of the complexity is that encampment responses involve multiple departments both within the City of Cambridge, as well as at the Region of Waterloo, including bylaw, outreach workers, social service workers, police officers, public health officials, and emergency services. A staff report will help identify gaps in responses, and support service coordination. A staff report will help support the entire community, not just people in encampments, in understanding the nuances of the issue and possible pathways forward, **including ways to better connect individuals to appropriate housing options.**

Thank you for your consideration of my submission. Please include this correspondence as part of the package for the City of Cambridge Council Meeting on Sep 23rd, 2025.

Sincerely,




Dr. Laura Pin

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Wilfrid Laurier University
Principle Investigator, Realizing the Right, SSHRC Insight Development Grant

⁵ Mayer, M., Mejia Urieta, Y., Martinez, L. S., Komaromy, M., Hughes, U., & Chatterjee, A. (2024). Encampment Clearings And Transitional Housing: A Qualitative Analysis Of Resident Perspectives: Study analyzes responses from former homeless encampment residents and their experiences with transitional housing. *Health Affairs*, 43(2), 218-225.

Eviction notice – issued June 20th, 2025, with residents informed of intended enforcement June 23rd, 2025, with a high of 36C, humidex of 46C, and heat warning issued by Environment Canada.

 CAMBRIDGE CANADA
PEOPLE-PLACE-PROSPERITY

Corporate Services
Municipal Compliance Division
50 Dickson Street
Cambridge.

ON, N1R 5W8

Tel: (519) 623-1340 ext. 7907 E-mail: bylaw@cambridge.ca

DATE:	JUNE 20, 2025
TO NAME:	[REDACTED]
ADDRESS:	NO FIXED ADDRESS

HAND DELIVERED BY: [REDACTED], MUNICIPAL BY-LAW COMPLIANCE OFFICER

RE: Notice prohibiting entry pursuant to the *Trespass to Property Act*.

Please be advised that it has come to The Corporation of the City of Cambridge's attention that you have been camping on property owned by The Corporation of the City of Cambridge at [REDACTED] Cambridge on a long-term basis for a period of time beginning no later than March 27, 2025. The site has been continuously occupied by you, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. In doing so, you have engaged in the following prohibited activities under Section 3 of the City of Cambridge Parks By-law No. 162-10 (the "By-law"):

- Dwell, camp or reside in a park, without a permit from the municipality or the consent in writing of the Director (contrary to sub. 3(m)), and
- Place, install or erect any temporary or permanent structure in park (contrary to sub. 3(n)).

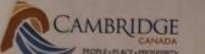
The erection of shelters on City lands is not permitted. The City has attempted to connect the site occupants with appropriate resources to offer alternative shelter, as follows:

- On March 27, 2025, City staff attended the site with Waterloo Regional Police, who provided you with contact information for outreach workers from the Region of Waterloo for the purpose of obtaining housing supports. You were advised at that time that camping on City property is not permitted;
- On June 10, 2025, City staff attended the site with Waterloo Regional Police. You confirmed that you were in contact with the Region of Waterloo to obtain housing supports, but that you did not wish to access shelter spaces.
- On June 17, 2025, City staff attended the site, at which time you again confirmed that you did not wish to access shelter spaces. City staff advised you that a notice under the *Trespass to Property Act* would be issued on June 20th.

Effective immediately, you are required to dismantle all structures and remove all personal property from the following location in the City of Cambridge:

- [REDACTED] CAMBRIDGE

you are further prohibited from placing, installing, or erecting any temporary or permanent structure or leaving any belongings on the above-noted lands between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. Failure to comply with this direction issued pursuant to the *Trespass to Property Act* may result in charges being laid against you.

 CAMBRIDGE CANADA
PEOPLE-PLACE-PROSPERITY

Corporate Services
Municipal Compliance Division
50 Dickson Street
Cambridge.

ON, N1R 5W8

Tel: (519) 623-1340 ext. 7907 E-mail: bylaw@cambridge.ca

This will further confirm the authority of the Waterloo Regional Police Service to act as agent for The Corporation of the City of Cambridge to give effect to this notice of trespass.


If you have any questions regarding the foregoing, please contact Cameron Lattanville, Supervisor of Municipal By-law Compliance, at 519-513-6548.

Yours truly,

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

cc: Waterloo Regional Police Service

Eviction notice issued July 16, 2025 for enforcement July 16th, 2025, with a high of 32 C, humidex of 40 C, and heat warning from Environment Canada.

 CAMBRIDGE CANADA
PEOPLE • PLACE • PROSPERITY

Corporate Services
Municipal Compliance
50 Dickson Street
Cambridge, ON, N1R 5W8
Tel: (519) 623-1340 ext. 7907
E-mail: bylaw@cambridge.ca

DATE:	JULY 15, 2025
TO NAME:	[REDACTED]
ADDRESS:	NO FIXED ADDRESS

HAND DELIVERED BY: [REDACTED], **MUNICIPAL BY-LAW COMPLIANCE OFFICER**

RE: Notice prohibiting entry pursuant to the *Trespass to Property Act*

Please be advised that it has come to The Corporation of the City of Cambridge's attention that you have been camping on property owned by The Corporation of the City of Cambridge at [REDACTED], Cambridge on a long-term basis for a period of time. The site has been continuously occupied by you, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. In doing so, you have engaged in the following prohibited activities under Section 3 of the City of Cambridge Parks By-law No. 162-10 (the "By-law"):

- Dwell, camp or reside in a park, without a permit from the municipality or the consent in writing of the Director (contrary to sub. 3(m)); and
- Place, install or erect any temporary or permanent structure in park (contrary to sub. 3(n)).

The erection of shelters on City lands is not permitted. The City has attempted to connect the site occupants with appropriate resources to offer alternative shelter.

Effective immediately, you are required to dismantle all structures and remove all personal property from the following location in the City of Cambridge:

- [REDACTED]

You are further prohibited from placing, installing, or erecting any temporary or permanent structure or leaving any belongings on the above-noted lands between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. Failure to comply with this direction issued pursuant to the *Trespass to Property Act* may result in charges being laid against you.

This will further confirm the authority of the Waterloo Regional Police Service to act as agent for The Corporation of the City of Cambridge to give effect to this notice of trespass.

If you have any questions regarding the foregoing, please contact [REDACTED] Supervisor of Municipal By-law Compliance, at [REDACTED].

Yours truly,
THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
cc. Waterloo Regional Police Service