



The Corporation of the Town of Cobourg
Legislative Services Department
55 King Street West
Cobourg, ON K9A 2M2

Delegation Request Form

Please submit the completed Delegation Request Form to the Municipal Clerk in person or by mail to 55 King Street West, Cobourg, ON K9A 2M2, by e-mail to clerk@cobourg.ca, or by fax to (905) 372-7558.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Name of Delegate(s):

Dr. Alyson King

Group/Organization/Business Delegation Represents (if applicable):

none

2. MEETING SELECTION

I wish to appear before:

Committee of the Whole Regular Council Advisory Committee or Local Board

If appearing before an Advisory Committee or Local Board please specify:

Press to Select a Committee of Board

Meeting Date Requested:

Monday July 4, 2022

3. DELEGATION REQUEST

General Nature/Purpose of the Delegation:

(Clearly state the nature of the business to be discussed & provide a general summary of the information to be presented)

Special Council Meeting on Homelessness and Sheltering

Housing is a human right. Viewing the right to shelter as a human right is not a new idea. Nor is the fact that "adequate housing is essential to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion." In 2008, the Ontario Human Rights Commission recognized that housing is an internationally protected human right. In June 2019, a little over 3 years ago, the National Housing Strategy Act received royal assent, bringing Canada in line with international standards. With inflation and the current economic situation, the fallout of the pandemic, and the province's very recent change to allowable rent increases, from 1.2% to 2.5%, the number of unsheltered people in Cobourg will continue to increase unless proactive measures are taken by the Town.

Recommendation to Council/Committee/Board:

(Please indicate below what action you would like the Town to take with respect to the above-noted subject matter)

I urge the Council to be proactive and thoughtful in developing a wholistic, inclusive, and cohesive plan to address homelessness that follows human rights norms and that provides support quickly and efficiently.

Have you appeared before the Town of Cobourg’s Council or its Committees or Boards in the past to discuss this issue?

Yes No

4. PRESENTATION MATERIAL

Will you have an oral or written presentation? Oral Written

Do you have any equipment needs? Yes No

If selecting yes, please indicate the type of equipment needed for your presentation:

Please Select the Type of Equipment

Note: Delegates are required to provide one (1) copy of all background material/presentations prior to the deadline provided in the Delegation Rules and Guidelines below, or it will not be included in the Agenda.

Delegation to Cobourg Town Council, Monday July 4, 2022

Special Council Meeting on Homelessness and Sheltering

By Alyson King

Housing is a human right. Viewing the right to shelter as a human right is not a new idea. Nor is the fact that “adequate housing is essential to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion.” In 2008, the Ontario Human Rights Commission recognized that housing is an internationally protected human right. In June 2019, a little over 3 years ago, the National Housing Strategy Act received royal assent, bringing Canada in line with international standards. With inflation and the current economic situation, the fallout of the pandemic, and the province’s very recent change to allowable rent increases, from 1.2% to 2.5%, the number of unsheltered people in Cobourg will continue to increase unless proactive measures are taken by the Town.

Under international human rights law, the right to housing does not mean that the government must provide everyone with housing. Rather, it ‘recognizes that all people have the “right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity” and that governments must implement reasonable policies and programs which will ensure that everyone has access to adequate housing by one means or another.’ The passing of Canada’s National Housing Strategy Act means that that this commitment to ensuring access to adequate housing must guide housing policy and programs, prioritizing those in the greatest need. One component of this is that governments must: “Refrain from actions that violate the right to housing, such as criminalizing those who are homeless or discriminating against particular groups.”

One interim strategy to dealing with the growing number of people who are homeless is to allow people to live outside in tents. Often, this will develop into encampments. Yet, simply letting people sleep or live wherever they want is not an adequate approach to homelessness. According to Leilani Farha, encampments can be seen as a violation of human rights. At the same time, banning encampment communities is not a solution because stable encampments can allow for a more efficient delivery of supports and services.

As an interim strategy, allowing encampments is viable, but it is only viable if people’s rights are protected. This means ensuring that folks have access to safe and clean drinking water, hygiene and sanitation facilities, resources to ensure fire safety, waste management systems, strategies to support personal safety and food safety, and resources to support harm reduction. Protocols available for working with unsheltered people (see [A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada](#)).

Personally, I continue to find it appalling that town and county governments have done so little to address the question of high levels of homelessness when there are vacant properties available in the town and county. For example, the ongoing vacancy of Brookside or other large buildings in the area. Or the plans to demolish the Golden Plough after the new building is completed.

In the written document I sent in, I've included a list of actions that other communities have used to address homelessness, some of which you may have already begun to implement. In conclusion, I urge the Council to be proactive and thoughtful in developing a wholistic, inclusive, and cohesive plan to address homelessness that follows human rights norms and that provides support quickly and efficiently. I ask you to look for fair and proactive measures to support those who are unsheltered, work to prevent others from becoming homeless or unsheltered, and to rethink the Town's approach to creating truly affordable housing. Thank you for listening.

Actions that the Town of Cobourg can take to support a significant reduction of homelessness in our community (based on the [policy scan by *The Shift*](#)):

- 1) **Create a human rights infrastructure** by:
 - a) Recognizing the human right to housing in local charters, declarations, or ordinances, as was done in the [Toronto Housing Charter](#) or [Victoria's Housing Strategy 2016-2025](#).
 - b) Implementing local accountability and enforcement mechanisms to secure the right to housing, such as a Housing Commissioner or Ombudsperson.
 - c) Collecting real-time, person-specific data capable of assessing progress towards realizing the right to housing locally, including in relation to homelessness and core housing need. [Medicine Hat, Alberta](#), is a strong example of success in this area.
- 2) **Take progressive and positive steps to address unacceptable housing conditions** by:
 - a) Adopting rights-based budgeting across city departments and divisions, seeking to use maximum available resources to address the housing of needs of those most marginalized. Existing mechanisms like [Equity Responsive Budgeting](#) in the City of Toronto can serve as models.
 - b) Training municipal staff to understand the human right to housing and meet their human rights obligations, including in departments like urban planning and parks and recreation.
- 3) As required by international human rights law, **ensure the meaningful participation of those experiencing housing need** by:
 - a) Developing municipal infrastructure that embeds the meaningful participation of people with lived expertise into all policy development relevant to housing and homelessness.
 - b) Adopting the [Lived Experience Advisory Council Principles](#) within local policy making processes related to housing and homelessness, seeking to ensure equitable decision-making power is allocated to people with lived expertise.
- 4) **Ending homelessness and the criminalization of homelessness** by:
 - a) Re-deploying city-owned land and buildings, and acquiring existing distressed properties, to create permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness on an urgent basis. The NHS's

[Rapid Housing Initiative](#) has supported many cities to do just this, including the [Tl̓ich̓o Region](#) of the Northwest Territories. Other cities have chosen to sell city-owned properties to non-profit housing providers, such as Winnipeg (MB), who [approved selling 15 properties for \\$1 each](#) in order to create new affordable housing units.

- b) Implementing local anti-discrimination campaigns focused on eliminating stigma and discrimination on the basis of housing status.
 - c) Adopting a human rights-based approach to encampments, using [A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada](#) to guide the development of a local strategy.
 - d) Ensure that local homelessness and Violence Against Women (VAW) housing and service providers have the training and supports they need to employ a rights-based approach to service delivery.
- 5) Look for ways to **improve equality for marginalized groups and prioritize those most in need** by:
- a) Setting local targets, timelines, outcomes, and indicators that redress systemic barriers to adequate housing experienced by those most in need.
 - b) Conducting Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), rights-based audits of local policies and programs relevant to securing the right to housing.
 - c) Engaging in interjurisdictional and cross-sectoral cooperation in order to transform public system policies that undermine the right to housing.
- 6) **Regulate the Private Sector and Address the Financialization of Housing** by:
- a) Embedding the right to housing in urban planning processes and practices.
 - b) Preserving the existing stock of affordable housing through community-based, non-market acquisition of distressed housing. A good example of this is the [Right of First Refusal](#) bylaw adopted by the City of Montreal in 2020, which gives the City the ability to exercise a right of first refusal (a pre-emptive right) to purchase properties for social housing.
 - c) Maximizing land use, zoning, and other bylaw opportunities to increase the availability of affordable housing and preserve existing affordable housing units. BC, for example, adopted a [Speculation and Vacancy Tax](#) that contributes to turning empty homes into affordable housing initiatives.
 - d) Regulating short-term rentals, such as Airbnb and VRBO, as is being done in Toronto with the adoption of a 4% [Municipal Accommodation Tax](#) on all registered short-term rentals.
- 7) Because eviction into homelessness is considered “a gross human rights violation” and forced evictions are prohibited under international law, Cobourg can **work to prevent evictions and prohibit forced evictions** by:
- a) Developing screening programs to identify individuals and families at risk of eviction, providing immediate interventions to stabilize housing. The City of Toronto’s [Eviction Prevention in the Community \(EPIC\)](#) is a great example of such a program, with [evaluation data](#) indicating 90% of EPIC clients were stabilized in their current housing during the first year of the program.
 - b) Investing in emergency financial supports for tenants at risk of eviction, such as rent banks or emergency cash relief programs.
 - c) Improving access to legal information, advice, and representation for persons at risk of eviction. Examples of organizations that provide strong eviction prevention and legal supports include the [Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation](#), [Pivot Legal Society](#), and [Justice for Children and Youth](#).