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4th March 2023

Reference: The Ghettoization of Ward 12 and its Safety and Security Impacts

Dear Mayor Sutcliffe:

We are writing to you today to share with you our concerns in relation to the shooting / homicide that took place on February 21, 2023, on York Street. This tragic event is yet another ever-growing security concerns unfolding in Ward 12, and more specifically in the Lowertown/Byward market area. The Lowertown Community Association (LCA) prides itself on its citizen engagement efforts and keeps a watchful eye on all activities happening in its neighbourhoods. We are witnessing that many violent crimes tend to occur in proximity to emergency shelters.

Ottawa's approach to providing aid to individuals experiencing homelessness, substance abuse, and other mental health issues have concentrated the city's residents most in need into one area. The Rideau-Vanier Ward has 12 emergency shelters with the addition of two hotels that serve a similar function. The Bernard Grandmaître arena is also scheduled be converted into another emergency shelter for the 2023 summer season. This over-concentration is unfortunately facilitating predatory actions in the vicinity (e.g., drug dealing, gang recruiting, pimping/prostitution, reckoning, trafficking). To put it simply, this approach is enabling wolves to prey upon the vulnerable.

The LCA participated in the Social Services Budget Consultation on February 28, 2023 and we were astounded at the number of delegations expressing serious concerns about their safety and security in Ward 12. A few examples among many:

- The General Manager of Les Suites Hotel walking staff to the LRT at night as they are too afraid to go out on their own (and the hotel has lost significant long-term tenants);
- Fitzroy Harbour Youth with mental health issues being driven to George Street in the Byward Market (and finding the program full);
- The Theo University residence at Rideau & King-Edward finding human feces regularly at its entrance and expending massive amounts to try and add security to the building;

- Young Rideau Centre employees who refuse to use the stairwells (feces, urine, sexual activity, people shooting up), who cannot get in the elevators when others are present and who are harassed, threatened and assaulted.

It is unbelievable that residents and businesses in the downtown core of the capital city of Canada have to live in fear. It's even worse for the vulnerable who are preyed upon.

Your leadership is required to ensure that all citizens of the city of Ottawa are safe and secure, especially those who are in a precarious situation. Mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness are a citywide challenge. All wards have a duty of care towards their citizens and must share the responsibility if we are truly going to provide proper aid and care (with long-term success). Studies show that small-scale centres that deliver social services across a city foster better outcomes on the short, medium, and long-term. As such, we are calling upon you to initiate a new way forward by working with your city councillors to:

1. Establish by the end of 2023 an action plan to de-cluster the city's approach to mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness;
2. Implement, as part of this action plan, a prioritizing framework where all wards are considered and ranked on the introduction of new social services. Mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness, especially with the current housing crises, do not discriminate. Every ward in Ottawa is facing these challenges and implementation of social services across the 24 wards must be achieved. It is no longer reasonable nor responsible to ask the Rideau-Vanier ward to exclusively assume this responsibility; and
3. Adopt new dedicated funding streams to ensure long-term success of the identified milestones pertaining to the action plan. Lack of funding can no longer be a hurdle that inhibits the progressive care your citizens require.

We thank you for your time and we are open and willing to provide any assistance to support a positive change.

Yours sincerely,

Sylvie Bigras
President
Lowertown Community Association/Association communautaire de la Basse-Ville

Cc.
Stephanie Plante, Councillor Ward 12
City of Ottawa Councillors
Kalin McCluskey – City of Ottawa Mayor's Office
Mona Fortier – MP
Lucille Collard - MPP

