

Ottawa city councillor concerned over sprung structure debate as protests continue

Sunday marked the latest in a series of protests against plans to build tent-like "sprung-structures" to house asylum seekers in Ottawa. Protesters lined up the street on Woodroffe Avenue beside the site of one of those proposed structures. The protest was organized by a group of residents from Merivale Gardens, including Robert Carberry who is asking the city to find a different location.

"This is an environmentally sensitive piece of the Greenbelt. It just it doesn't make sense for so many reasons," said Carberry.

"Putting 300 people where 300 people live just doesn't seem to work."

One Ottawa city councillor says these protests are becoming more politically charged as the debate over the sites rages on.

"My ward is screaming for more resources and more help from upper levels of government," said Rideau-Vanier Coun. Stéphanie Plante.

"Those conversations have to be measured. They must be nuanced, and they have to not be weaponized to help further other people's political ambitions."

Plante took to social media highlighting concerns about a planned protest later in the week that is asking residents to sign up to attend by asking for phone numbers and emails.

"They sort of identified themselves as concerned residents. And that's a bit weird to be asking that much personal information from people," Plante said.

"I have been to a million community meetings over the years. You don't need that kind of personal information to organize a community meeting."



At the Ottawa Mission, shelter space has reached a breaking point. The Mission said in its latest impact report that about 61 per cent of the shelter population is made up of asylum seekers.

Mission CEO Peter Tilley says something needs to change.

"It's been an incredible pressure, an incredible push on our capacity in terms of meals, frontline services, medical services" Tilley said.

"We can understand the city coming up with one of the solutions being sprung shelters where that has to go. That's not our decision. But we do appreciate that the City of Ottawa is trying to find solutions to this overcrowding process."



The City of Ottawa shows off examples of sprung structures. (City of Ottawa memo)

Another protest on Woodroffe Avenue is planned for Thursday as the debate continues. Meantime, there are many who support the structures. This month, hundreds of people, including Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe attended a rally (opens in a new tab) in support of asylum seekers. The city says there are 600 asylum seekers currently using Ottawa's shelter spaces. The sprung structures are expected to have on-site services such as translation and asylum claim assistance for those who come through its doors.

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A protester at a demonstration against sprung structures in Ottawa on Nov. 24, 2024. (Josh Marano/CTV Ottawa)