



Community and Social Services Committee

To: His Worship, Mayor Mark Sutcliffe and Members of City Council

Re: Covering Letter: Submission to City Council for Budget Considerations

Dear Mayor Sutcliffe and Councillors,

The attached document is comprehensive call from Action Sandy Hill to demonstrate what the community expects from the City of Ottawa in terms of its duties to the people who live, work, stay and play in Sandy Hill, and Ward 12, to achieve communal well-being.

We are providing you with this written submission as a source of information so that, as you are considering the City's budget allocations, these coordinated priorities to address the impact of the toxic drug supply and the overconcentration of social services in Sandy Hill and Ward 12 can be considered.

The various elements of the document work together and, as a coordinated effort, would be successful in supporting communal well-being in Sandy Hill, and Ward 12. Please note that the inclusion of a single element in the attached position statement does not indicate a failure on the City's part. Some of the items have been occurring for years, some have been implemented this year, mostly due to the incredible responsiveness of Ottawa Public Health.

Ultimately, it is our view that all the elements in this position statement should be cooccurring so that this community, in all its diversity, will thrive. Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CB', is written over a horizontal line.

Calla Barnett

Chair, Community and Social Services Committee Action
Sandy Hill

City of Ottawa Responsibilities

The Situation	
Issue description:	<p>The City of Ottawa is responsible for ensuring the well-being of all members of this community. However, decisions are being made in the siloed City departments and different levels of government that have intersecting impacts on this community:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The functional decriminalization of illicit drugs, including fentanyl (Federal and Provincial governments).2. The ongoing funding of frontline services with no or minimal oversight or support for community outreach and communal well-being (CSSD).3. Limited enforcement of bylaws and laws, including waste disposal, loitering, blocking the public right of way, social disorder, etc. (OPS, Bylaw, Public Works).4. Refusal to intervene for the safety of People with Lived/Living Experience/People who use Drugs (PWLLE/PWUD) and/or residents (911 dispatch, Bylaw, OPS, OPH). <p>The local economic and social impacts of the toxic drug supply and the overconcentration of social services in Sandy Hill, and Ward 12, has been tremendous. Inaction on the part of multiple departments since the consumption and treatment sites in Ward 12 opened and expanded have created an unsafe environment for all community members, including PWLLE/PWUD who are the target of all these programs. In 2016, ASH wrote a letter in support of the CTS at the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre (SHCHC), provided that certain safety and oversight conditions were met. Those conditions were disregarded by the City of Ottawa and the service provider at the time. They remain unmet in 2024.</p> <p>Service providers typically have and have had more frequent and direct access to the City of Ottawa, especially due to their fundraising requirements and hours of operation. Meanwhile, residents face barriers to accessing these same decision-makers, including work, languages, childcare, lack of information, and more. As such, the influence of service providers on city decision-makers has been greater than that of residents and has put all community members at risk: residents, PWLLE, PWUD, people in recovery, refugees, business owners, business employees, service provider employees, and other community stakeholders.</p>

Community Impact:	<p>There is considerable mistrust in the community. There is fear, anger, and trauma on all sides.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • businesses are losing clients; • other services and businesses are closing or moving, notably a daycare and Steve's Music; • violence toward residents and PWLLE/PWUD is becoming more commonplace; • Some PWUD are loitering in large groups wherever there is space to do so. These groups often block the public right of way on both sidewalks and the street, with consequences for people with strollers and people living with mobility disabilities. These groups also contribute to pockets of illegal and unpredictable activity in those areas, and making it unsafe for residents and other PWLLE/PWUD; • refugees (men, women, children) are exposed to the toxic drug supply and overdose deaths after fleeing war zones; • people in recovery who are suffering from homelessness are surrounded by PWUD and a toxic drug supply; • women, and Indigenous women in particular, are being trafficked openly; • adults, children and youth residents are exposed on a daily basis to the hopelessness, misery and lawlessness that are openly visible on the streets. As these neighbourhoods tend to be occupied by low-income and racialized communities, those communities are disproportionately affected; • illicit drugs are being sold and traded openly; • prescribed alternatives are diverted at alarming rates; • gang activity has increased; • violent crime has increased, with drug or gang-related stabbings shootings becoming commonplace; • children who live in Sandy Hill often attend schools and daycares in Lowertown and the reports from some of those spaces include open sex trafficking, needle-prick injuries, and interrupted recess due to social disorder. • parents are afraid to allow their children to walk to school and just keep them home;
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • daycares have been forced to close due to the risk to staff, parents and children; • fecal matter has been smeared on schools, daycares, businesses, etc. and the City will not help to clean it up; • improperly discarded drug paraphernalia and illicit drugs, including diverted prescribed alternatives, are found in schoolyards, in parks, on sidewalks, in our front yards, in our backyards, etc. • the general dilapidated and unclean appearance of the area affects property values and capacity to rent units at market value; <p>The negative externalities of the concentration disproportionately hurts residents in North Sandy Hill. At the same time, the City puts an unfair and unreasonable burden on residents here, who are overwhelmingly from disadvantaged and marginalized groups, to report and advocate. To respond to community needs, community association volunteers have been forced to take on an access coordination role because the City does not have clear or publicly available access points for all of the responses that have become a daily requirement in the lives of North Sandy Hill residents.</p>
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Position:
Action Sandy Hill calls on the institution of the City of Ottawa to empower the following City departments to take the following proactive actions:

City of Ottawa Departmental Responsibilities	
City Manager's Office:	Coordinate between the different City of Ottawa departments that contribute to, and can help manage, the impact of the toxic drug supply and overconcentration of social services in Sandy Hill, and Ward 12.
Ottawa Public Health:	Ensure that coordination between the different frontline service providers in Sandy Hill, Ward 12 and across the City of Ottawa is occurring.
	Develop guidelines and best practices to manage the mental and physical health-related impacts of frontline services.
	Include all members of the community in consultations rather than limiting consultation to service providers and people they have selected.

	Ensure that City Councilors are updated when a not-for-profit or for-profit service is planning an operation that could impact the health of the whole community.
	Coordinate with other City of Ottawa departments, with the leadership of the City Managers Office, to ensure that the public health impacts of their decisions are being considered and so that potential negative impacts are mitigated.
Ottawa Police Services:	Focus on protection. Protect children, protect refugees, protect PWLLE/PWUD. Protect all residents.
	Focus on de-escalation. Police should be consistently present and responsive to deter violent crime.
	Respond to the people as well as the emergency or potential crime in progress by ensuring that witnesses are protected/shielded from trauma (especially children), directing traffic appropriately should someone be unwell in the street, and participating with the whole community in the interests of communal well-being.
Ottawa Paramedics Services:	Expand the Mental Health Response Team to a 24/7 service and allow residents to request a Mental Health Response directly when they call 911 (at least in Ward 12).
	Work with the City Councillor, residents and service providers to implement appropriate traffic calming measures on Daly Ave. between King Edward Ave. and Cumberland St. so that the residents and children who live on that block are not in danger due to excessively speeding vehicles.
911 Police Dispatch:	Listen to what callers are asking and treat them with empathy and respect. Callers are scared and need help.
Bylaw Services:	Take a proactive approach to enforcement of all bylaws.
	If Bylaw officers are uncomfortable in a situation, engage the Ottawa Police to address it alongside them. Do not simply ignore a complaint or a request for help.
	Develop and implement a Good Neighbour Bylaw that applies to all frontline social services agencies and substance use clinics (both non-profit and for-profit) in line with the Good Neighbour Commitment developed by the Sandy Hill Community Liaison Committee.
Public Works	Engage with service providers to oversee and fund their clean-up efforts.
	Ensure that clean-up on private property occurs when improperly discarded drug paraphernalia and human waste are present.
	Develop a program to ensure that our daycares, schools and other non-City community spaces are cleaned by trained professionals at no cost to the daycare, school, etc. in question

	when improperly discarded drug paraphernalia, human waste and discarded illicit substances are present on the property.
Community and Social Services Department (CSSD): Housing and Shelter	Develop best practices and requirements for supportive housing contracts based on the Options Housing model. Regardless of cost comparisons, if these elements are not present, do not award the contract to the service provider.
	Stop supporting/funding new megashelters for men and calling it a solution to solving homelessness. People in megashelters are not housed and face violence and exploitation in those shelters. Mega shelters (25+ beds) are <i>not</i> a solution to homelessness, they are an emergency response to mitigate the impact of homelessness.
	Invest in an alternative emergency shelter model as outlined below and invest in <i>true</i> Housing First solutions. Gradually phase out the megashelter model.
	Food insecurity and housing insecurity have the same root causes. If a food bank and/or soup kitchen is in a neighbourhood, a 6-25 bed emergency shelter should also be present in the area in order to meet people where they are.
	All small emergency shelters should be open 24/7 and function as a free hostel, including access to a lock box, showers, and a shared space with a kitchenette. Treat people like people.
	All existing or planned megashelters should be required by the City to keep their doors open 24 hours/day
CSSD: Funding Frontline Services	Review the City of Ottawa's shelter standards and ensure additional oversight of the concentrated megashelters in Ward 12. Stop allowing shelters, day programs and other service providers to act with impunity and enforce the Good Neighbour Policy located therein. Fund the required changes.
	Ensure that funding for new frontline services are not co-located in a "containment area" and spread them out across the City of Ottawa so that everyone can have their needs met.
CSSD: Community Engagement	Create a centralized, neighbourhood-based call centre at the new Neighbourhood Operations Centre so that residents can request non-police intervention services as needed. Specifically, a centralized line to call to access the different clean-up and security services being provided by the service providers and the City of Ottawa in the area.
CSSD/OPS: Community Safety and Well-Being	Build safety/protection into the main objectives of the community safety and well-being plan. To this end, develop an Equity Index as a tool to help communities, planners, and decision-makers identify disparities or equity concerns across our city. This would

	support more responsible decision making including priority setting and resource allocation.
	Include all members of Sandy Hill and Ward 12 when you refer to “community members,” instead of exclusively referring to PWLLE/PWUD.
	Conduct an intersectional, gender-based analysis of the impact of the impact of the toxic drug supply and the overconcentration of services in Sandy Hill and Ward 12 on both housed residents and PWUD/PWLLE.
	Conduct an annual survey of housed residents and PWUD/PWLLE that includes key indicators on the well-being of all community members and adjust services, funding and support accordingly.
	Conduct a study on the impact of the toxic drug supply on asylum seekers and refugees who have arrived only to be forced into the mega shelters.
	Prioritize relocating high acuity services and ensure equitable distribution of services to support the needs of PWLLE & PWUD in all parts of the City of Ottawa.

Position:

Action Sandy Hill calls on the City Manager's Office of the City of Ottawa to lead the following coordination efforts:

City of Ottawa Coordination Responsibilities Led By City Manager's Office	
CSSD/OPH	Use the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) and any other data collected by shelters, day programs, OPS, bylaw, OPH, and CTs to collect information about where people suffering from homelessness lived <i>before</i> they lived downtown so that services can be provided in appropriate areas across the City of Ottawa or in the cities where people lived so that they don't have to leave their communities. Open new services in the appropriate neighbourhoods, based on <i>data</i> .
	Change the narrative related to people suffering from homelessness. The services are not downtown because this is where all the people suffering from homelessness stay. They stay here because the services are co-located as an unofficial “containment” strategy.
Ottawa Police Services; Bylaw Services; and 911 Police Dispatch:	911 Police Dispatch and even the non-emergency reporting line, disregards, misrepresents, dismisses and ignores calls from Sandy Hill and Ward 12. Sometimes, the dispatcher hangs up on us. Sometimes, they send the wrong emergency responder

	<p>(ambulance in lieu of police). Sometimes, they tell us they have sent the police when they have not. Sometimes, they insist that we put ourselves in harm's way by telling us to deal with the situation ourselves or refusing to send help until we do what they say. Sometimes, we are left afraid and alone in our homes because they deem a situation to be a non-emergency (including attempted break ins, death threats, muggings, and open human trafficking).</p> <p>When a resident, service provider or PWLLE/PWUD calls 911, please take it seriously. Residents have been asked to report crime as we see it. However, it is imperative to respond with respect when crime is reported as requested.</p>
CET/CSSD, OPH, Public Works	Expand the data collection being conducted by CET so that all those outreach and collection workers on the street are tracking the same information at all times.
All Departments:	Be transparent with all community members and City Councillor about data collected, complaints filed, crime information, assessments carried out, meeting minutes when a city department, including OPH, participates, whether the meeting is led by the department or not, and planned changes in the landscape of frontline services.
	Stop targeting low-income and racialized neighbourhoods for "containment areas" and the overconcentration of front line services.