

From: Media Relations <media@toronto.ca>
Sent: April 22, 2022 4:48 PM
To: A. J. Withers <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: Questions about Trinity Bellwoods clearing

Hello Dr. Withers,

Please find below a response to your inquiry from Brad Ross, Chief Communications Officer, City of Toronto.

Best regards,

Anthony Toderian for Media Relations

Dr. Withers,

The City of Toronto has stated, repeatedly, that camping in City parks or on rights of way is both unsafe and illegal. The City has continually offered safe, indoor space to anyone living outdoors, where they will receive medical care, meals, a bed, shower facilities, laundry, and importantly, access to a housing worker. It is inside where people are safest and well cared for. Fires, of any type or size, are not permitted in City parks, unless by permit. None of the fires cited by the City, via data from the Toronto Fire Service, in its many public statements concerning the safety of those occupying encampments, as well as the general public, were permitted fires.

After several weeks of posted trespass notices in parks, as well as daily engagement by Street to Homes staff to encourage those illegally occupying encampments to avail themselves of the City's offer of safe, indoor space, the City enforced its laws with an operational plan that neither communications staff nor the mayor's office was party to. Parks are for all residents of the city, including those experiencing homelessness. People illegally occupying encampments were given daily opportunities to avail themselves of multiple services and offers of safe, indoor space. Thankfully, many did, including with offers of permanent housing. The presence of illegal encampments in City parks, however, meant that not all residents could safely enjoy the many amenities their parks provide.

Enforcing the trespass notices was done in a way to ensure the safety of all – encampment occupants, City staff, and the public, including members of the media. When it became clear that advocates and protesters would not permit the safe enforcement of the trespass notice by City staff, police were required to assist in enforcing the law and keeping the peace. In explaining the City's position on enforcing its laws, as well as the safe, indoor space available, multiple interviews with the media occurred with print, online publications, on radio and on television – both live and taped. That day, and in the days that followed, the City continued to clearly explain its position with respect to the need for encampments to be vacated; the availability of safe, indoor space, for those illegally occupying encampments; and for parks to be restored for use

by all residents of the city. These interviews were conducted remotely, as all media interviews have throughout the pandemic, to ensure the safety of all concerned. Police also conducted interviews to explain their role.

Finally, it is not the role of City staff to debate issues with advocates in the media, or anywhere else, but rather to clearly explain City decisions so that all residents of the city are well-informed.

Brad Ross

From: A. J. Withers [REDACTED]
Sent: April 21, 2022 7:37 AM
To: Media Relations <media@toronto.ca>
Subject: Questions about Trinity Bellwoods clearing

Hi,

I am writing an article about the June 22, 2021 Trinity Bellwoods encampment clearing for Briarpatch Magazine. I am focusing on the City's approach to the media at and leading up to this event. My deadline is first thing Monday morning. Therefore, I need a reply by the end of the day Friday afternoon.

1. Why does Strategic Communications conflate fires and fire events in multiple press releases about encampments (for example: June 18th, 2021: "There have been 111 fire events in encampments so far this year... In 2020, Toronto Fire Services responded to 253 fires in encampments"; Brad Ross on [CityNews](#) June 22, 2021: "this year alone we've seen 114 fires in encampments")?
2. The difference between the number of fires requiring suppression (132) is nearly double those of fire events (253), which include false alarms and pre-fire conditions, for 2020. Has Strategic Communications been intentionally inflating the fire numbers to make the perceived risk of fire more concerning?
 - a) If yes: why?
 - b) If no: with such an obvious and repeated error, how can the public trust the information coming out of your office?
3. DCM Tracey Cook signed off on the media exclusion zone for the Trinity Bellwoods encampment clearing in the operational plan.
 - a) Were journalists' Charter rights considered in making this decision?
 - b) Was Strategic Communications involved in this specific decision?
 - c) Was the Mayor's Office involved in this specific decision?
4. Was Strategic Communications involved in conversations about or relating to the drafting of the Trinity Bellwoods operational plan?
5. Did anyone from the Mayor's Office ever see a version of any draft of the operational plan that contained the provision that media must not be allowed inside the fenced area.

6. I have information that Brad Ross has refused to go on television at the same time with unhoused people and/or homeless advocates. What is the justification for this?
7. Moving forward, will Strategic Communications commit to relay the number of actual fire numbers in encampments: either only those requiring suppression or excluding false alarms and pre-fire conditions and communicate to the public what “fires” means?
8. Is there anything you want to add?

I can be reached at this address or by phone (647-884-2290) if you want to discuss any of these questions further.

This is a journalistic interview and is not covered by institutional ethics review.

Thank you,

A.J. Withers, PhD
School of Social Work
Adjunct Faculty, Critical Disability Studies
York University

Pronouns: They/Them

[*Fight to Win: Inside Poor People's Organizing*](#), by A.J. Withers

[*A Violent History of Benevolence: Interlocking Oppression in the Moral Economies of Social Working*](#), by C. Chapman and A.J. Withers

[*Disability Politics and Theory*](#) by A.J. Withers

I live and work on the traditional territory of the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat, and the Métis. The current treaty holders of this land as the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region. I acknowledge and follow the Gusweñta, or Two Row Wampum Belt Treaty.