



# MUNICIPAL PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2024 - 2025

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THE McMASTER STUDENTS UNION



# 1. Housing

## 1.1 The City of Hamilton should implement a city-wide landlord licensing program.

Licensing programs are an effective tool to uphold the health, safety, and quality of rental housing in Hamilton. In 2022, The City of Hamilton introduced a two-year Rental Housing Licensing Pilot program in Wards 1, 8 and parts of Ward 14<sup>1</sup>. Following extensive consultations, this initiative was endorsed by the McMaster Students Union, the Mohawk Students Association and Hamilton ACORN. As the pilot program nears its end, the City of Hamilton should permanently implement the Rental Housing Licensing Program across all wards. With the development of the LRT, McMaster students and other renters are increasingly living in neighborhoods beyond the initial three wards involved in the pilot. A city-wide program would ensure equal access to protections against landlord abuses for all renters in Hamilton.

Expanding this program is particularly critical at a time when Hamilton's rental market is reaching a critical breaking point with vacancy rates down to 1.9%—the lowest it has been in the last two decades<sup>2</sup>. The increased demand for rental housing has left vulnerable groups—including students and low-income renters—at greater risk of landlord abuses and rental violations. A city-wide licensing program would provide a consistent framework of accountability to safeguard tenants and enforce rental standards. This framework should also include clear procedures and penalties for landlords who fail to comply with bylaws and safety standards. The implementation of a Rental Housing Licensing Program in other municipalities, supported by evidence from the Brampton Residential Rental Licensing Program, highlights its effectiveness in significantly improving landlord compliance. Since September of 2024, the City of Brampton has issued over 2200 licenses and performed 4700 inspections, resulting in 611 penalties and fines totaling about \$83,500<sup>3</sup>. The City of Brampton's results demonstrate how continuous inspections and accountability measures may help protect rental housing quality.

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1. City launches Rental Housing Licensing pilot program | City of Hamilton. (2024). Hamilton.ca. <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-council/news-notice/news-releases/city-launches-rental-housing-licensing-pilot-program>

2. Mitchell, D. (2023, January 27). Renters in Hamilton are facing the toughest market since 2002: CMHC report. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9440909/renters-in-hamilton-are-facing-the-toughest-market-since-2002-cmhc-report/>

3. The City of Brampton. (2024). City of Brampton improves Residential Rental Licensing Pilot Program. Brampton.ca. <https://www.brampton.ca/EN/City-Hall/News/Pages/News-Release.aspx/1362>

**1.2. As part of the Rental Housing Licensing Program, the City of Hamilton should establish clear, enforceable regulations for turnaround times on essential repairs, with penalties for landlords who do not meet these standards.**

Landlords are legally required to maintain rental properties in good repair, ensuring they meet health, safety, housing, and maintenance standards as outlined in the Ontario Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) and the Hamilton Property Standards By-law<sup>4,5</sup>. However, these regulations lack specific timelines for completing essential repairs, leaving tenants vulnerable to prolonged wait times for critical fixes, such as heating, plumbing, or electrical problems. Hamilton's Municipal By-law Complaint form allows tenants to report issues but does not set parameters for what a "reasonable time" is for repairs, nor does it include transparent accountability measures for landlords. This gap in enforcement disproportionately impacts vulnerable tenants, who may be forced to endure unsafe or inadequate housing conditions without recourse.

Programs like Toronto's RentSafeTO program address these issues by enforcing strict timelines for repairs<sup>6</sup>. Urgent service requests involving vital services such as electricity, heating, and water, must be addressed within 24 hours, while non-urgent service requests must be addressed within 7 days. Non-compliance from landlords triggers progressive enforcement actions, including Notices of Violation, Orders to Comply, Fines and court summons<sup>7</sup>. Modeling after the RentSafeTO program, the City of Hamilton should establish clear, enforceable regulations for turnaround times on essential repairs, with penalties for landlords who do not meet these standards. The lack of awareness and knowledge surrounding tenant rights often leaves renters vulnerable to landlord abuses and rental violations. These violations are often in the form of small, neglected repairs and maintenance or minor breaches of tenant rights, leaving renters unsure about the cost-benefit of pursuing remedial action.

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4. Landlord and Tenant Board. (2018). Brochure: Maintenance and Repairs Information in this Brochure. [https://tribunalsontario.ca/documents/lrb/Brochures/Maintenance%20and%20Repairs%20\(EN\).pdf](https://tribunalsontario.ca/documents/lrb/Brochures/Maintenance%20and%20Repairs%20(EN).pdf)

5. Taylor, S. L. (2022, January 11). CITY OF HAMILTON BY-LAW NO. 10-221 PROPERTY STANDARDS BY-LAW Being a By-law to Prescribe Standards for the Maintenance. [Canadacommons.ca; >. https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/3477874/city-of-hamilton-by-law-no/4278320/](https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/3477874/city-of-hamilton-by-law-no/4278320/)

6. City of Toronto. (2023, April 26). RentSafeTO for Tenants - Service Requests, Complaints & Investigations. City of Toronto. <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/housing-shelter/rental-housing-tenant-information/rental-housing-standards/apartment-building-standards/rentsafe-to-for-tenants/rentsafeto-for-tenants-service-requests-complaints-investigations/>

7. *ibid*

The existing reporting methods are not intuitive or accessible, namely the Municipal By-law Complaint form for Tenant By-law complaints- which is not to be confused with the Tenant Complaint Form<sup>8,9</sup>. Despite these barriers, all tenants deserve access to safe and quality rental housing that are free from landlord abuses. As such, the City of Hamilton should create an online reporting system that is accessible and intuitive to all renters.

**1.3. As part of the Rental Housing Licensing Program, the City of Hamilton should develop an online reporting system that is accessible and intuitive to all renters to report landlord abuses and rental violations.**

The City of Mississauga has modelled success in this system through the Mississauga Apartment Rental Compliance Program (MARC) pilot program. The 5-year pilot program offers an intuitive online reporting form where tenants can report any rental concerns, including delays in repairs or health and safety maintenance<sup>10</sup>. Once received, a City Officer is assigned to investigate and ensure compliance. This allows for an accessible avenue for tenants to seek remediation of landlord abuses which clear accountability measures.

The City of Hamilton should model the online reporting system under the MARC program to provide an accessible system that is easy to navigate for tenants. This can easily be integrated into the permanent implementation of the Rental Housing Licensing Program to capture broader landlord non-compliance. The City of Hamilton should further collaborate with relevant partners such as ACORN and the McMaster Students Union to increase awareness of tenant rights regarding new and modified landlord reporting avenues.

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8. City of Hamilton. (2024). Register a By-law Complaint | City of Hamilton. Hamilton.ca. <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-council/by-laws-enforcement/register-by-law-complaint>

9. City of Hamilton. (2024b). Tenant Complaint Form | City of Hamilton. Hamilton.ca. <https://www.hamilton.ca/form/tenant-complaint-form>

10. City of Mississauga. (2024, June 27). Report an issue with your rental building. City of Mississauga. <https://www.mississauga.ca/services-and-programs/community-support-programs/report-an-issue-with-your-rental-building/>

#### **1.4. The City of Hamilton should pass an Adequate Temperature By-Law that mandates landlords to install and maintain permanent, safe, and operable air conditioning systems.**

The impacts of climate change are undeniable as demonstrated by the harmful mental and physical health effects from rising heat waves<sup>11</sup>. In Quebec (2018) and British Columbia (2021), residents have died from the impacts of extreme heat indoors<sup>12</sup>. Despite the existing Adequate Heating By-law requiring adequate heating for tenants, no such cooling by-law exists to combat increasingly dangerous extreme heat. Every renter has the right to live in safe and comfortable conditions, whether it is protection from extreme cold or heat.

In 2023, the Adequate Temperature By-law motion received unanimous support from Hamilton's Public Health Committee. This follows advocacy efforts from the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) from their "Beat the Heat" campaign<sup>13</sup>. Despite this, no definitive bylaw has been passed or implemented, leaving residents without cooling measures. The McMaster Students Union strongly recommends the City of Hamilton pass the Adequate Temperature By-Law, as moved by Councillor Kroetsch and seconded by Councillor Hwang to provide permanent, safe, and operable air conditioning systems to keep rental units below 26°C. Through this by-law, the City of Hamilton has the unique opportunity to be a leader among Canadian municipalities and champion efforts for tenant protections from extreme heat.

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11. Canadian Climate Institute. (2024, July 23). FACT SHEET: Climate change and heat waves. Canadian Climate Institute. <https://climateinstitute.ca/news/fact-sheet-heat-waves/>.

12. Geenen, K. (2024, January 2). City of Hamilton looking at implementing by-law requiring landlords to provide air conditioning. The Hamilton Independent. <https://hamiltonindependent.ca/city-of-hamilton-looking-at-implementing-by-law-requiring-landlords-to-provide-air-conditioning/>

13. ACORN Canada. (2023, May 15). ACORN and allies win first steps towards Hamilton passing a maximum heat bylaw! - ACORN Canada. ACORN Canada -. <https://acorncanada.org/news/acorn-and-allies-win-first-steps-towards-hamilton-passing-a-maximum-heat-bylaw/>

## 2. Transit

### **2.1. The City of Hamilton should consult students and local groups about the creation of more bike lanes around campus that are accessible and safe for cyclists, motorists, and pedestrians of community spaces and businesses.**

With the new partnership between the McMaster Students Union and Hamilton Bike Share, there is an increased bike ridership among McMaster students. Research on bike lanes in the City of Toronto has shown that bike lanes can reduce cyclist-motor vehicle collisions up to 38%, while reducing carbon emissions and promoting healthy exercise<sup>14</sup>. Despite new legislation with Bill 212 requiring approval for the implementation of bike lanes that reduce lanes of traffic, the need to improve biking infrastructure remains pressing<sup>15</sup>. The City of Hamilton should create more dedicated bike lanes in high traffic areas around campus and surrounding areas, following provincial legislation when approval must be requested. Currently, there is an absence of dedicated bike lanes near McMaster University, forcing cyclists to share routes with cars and buses, thereby increasing the risk of accidents. There are a few notable streets surrounding campus that lack proper bike lanes. On King Street West, the dedicated bike lane is inconsistent, disappearing as bikers turn into Westdale and forcing them to suddenly merge into vehicle traffic. While there is only one lane of traffic, there is potential for a dedicated bike lane between the vehicle lane and street parking. On Main Street, the proposed bike paths have been threatened by LRT developments but remain important to create accessible transit options that allow students and Hamiltonians to access their city in their preferred methods of transit. This development would require approval from the province as outlined by Bill 212, but it is crucial to create efficient bike lanes that connect the city. To address these gaps, we recommend seeking approval and developing dedicated bike lanes on Main Street West and King Street West. This would offer safe and convenient routes for students commuting to and from McMaster University.

14. ACORN Canada. (2023, May 15). ACORN and allies win first steps towards Hamilton passing a maximum heat bylaw! - ACORN Canada. ACORN Canada -. <https://acorncanada.org/news/acorn-and-allies-win-first-steps-towards-hamilton-passing-a-maximum-heat-bylaw/>

15. Legislative Assembly of Ontario. (2024). Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024. Legislative Assembly of Ontario. <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-43/session-1/bill-212>

Hamilton's Victoria Avenue cycle track resulted in a significant increase in bike share usage after completion, proving that well-designed infrastructure encourages more individuals to choose cycling as a preferred means of transportation<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, the City of Hamilton's plan to invest \$60 million in cycling infrastructure by 2028 underscores the city's commitment to cyclist safety and sustainable transportation<sup>17</sup>.

## **2.2. The City of Hamilton should expand de-escalation and conflict management training for HSR bus operators to ensure safe ridership.**

Over the past several months, there have been increasing complaints of racism, transphobia, and abusive comments on Hamilton Street Railway (HSR) transit<sup>18</sup>. Such incidents have highlighted the need for drivers to have effective methods and strategies to manage conflict in a way that ensures the safety and well-being of everyone on board. The City of Hamilton should implement an enhanced de-escalation training for HSR bus operators to address safety concerns.

The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) have similarly extended their de-escalations training to thousands of their employees to ensure that they can safely manage challenging issues<sup>19</sup>. In Vancouver, a Transit Police team manages a comprehensive program on promoting public awareness, providing de-escalation training for frontline staff, and investigating violence on transit systems<sup>20</sup>. Following models from The City of Toronto and Vancouver, the City of Hamilton should create a de-escalation curriculum with simulation-based training, allowing drivers to practice addressing real-life conflict events in a controlled setting. Collaboration with local crisis prevention specialists or mental health groups such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) should inform the curriculum.

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16. Veghel, V., & Scott, D. M. (2024). Investigating the impacts of bike lanes on bike share ridership: A holistic approach and demonstration. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 115(0). <https://trid.trb.org/View/2342205>

17. Sarfraz, A. M. (2024, February 28). How these two cities are making the wheels turn for cyclists. *Canada's National Observer*. <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2024/02/28/news/how-these-two-cities-are-making-wheels-turn-cyclists>

17. Nickerson, C. (2022, August 5). Bus driver "followed policy," city says after transphobic hate incident on Hamilton transit. *CBC*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/hamilton-bus-driver-transphobic-hate-1.6541621>

19. Toronto Transit Commission. (2023). TTC, City recognizing Transit Worker Assault Awareness Day in Toronto. *Www.ttc.ca*. <https://www.ttc.ca/news/2023/December/TTC-City-recognizing-Transit-Worker-Assault-Awareness-Day>

20. Metro Vancouver Transit Police. (n.d.). Reducing Frontline Workplace Assaults. *Transit Police*. <https://transitpolice.ca/about-us/our-priorities/reducing-front-line-workplace-assaults/>



### 3. Harm Reduction

**The City of Hamilton should provide envelope funding for harm reduction groups and initiatives such as YWCA's safer-use program, Positive Health Network's Van program, and Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre's Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) hub and prescribed alternatives and outreach (PAO) programs.**

From January 1, 2024, to October 20, 2024, Hamilton Paramedic Services responded to 639 suspected opioid overdoses, highlighting the growing opioid crisis<sup>21</sup>. There is an even more critical need for increased harm reduction initiatives given the provincially mandated closure of supervised consumption sites. Most opioid overdose-related incidences are concentrated in Downtown Hamilton, negatively affecting the perception of the area, despite a thriving community and BIA<sup>22</sup>.

The City of Hamilton should provide envelope funding to harm reduction groups, such as YWCA's safer-use program, Positive Health Network's Van program, and Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre's Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) hub and prescribed alternatives and outreach (PAO) programs. Envelope funding provides important financial flexibility by allowing resources to be rapidly assigned to the most effective programs as demands change. This funding should be distributed in consultation with the relevant harm reduction groups, in a model similar to Hamilton Food Share. Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre may have capacity for funding allocation given the closing of their supervised consumption site and evolving organizational structure<sup>23</sup>. A detailed cost-benefit analysis should be conducted to highlight the economic efficiency of investing in harm reduction.

21. City of Hamilton. (2024a). Hamilton Opioid Information System | City of Hamilton. [www.hamilton.ca. https://www.hamilton.ca/people-programs/public-health/alcohol-drugs-gambling/hamilton-opioid-information-system](https://www.hamilton.ca/people-programs/public-health/alcohol-drugs-gambling/hamilton-opioid-information-system)

22. *ibid*

23. Fung, N. (2024, August 28). Hamilton safe drug use site says it plans to pivot to model touted by province to prevent full closure. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/consumption-and-treatment-services-closure-group-responds-1.7307169>

## 4. Policing

### **The City of Hamilton should engage in targeted consultations on the implementation of body-worn cameras.**

The 2023 Hamilton Police Service (HPS) Use-of-Force report revealed over-representation of Black, Middle Eastern, Indigenous, and East/Southeast Asian in use-of-force incidents during arrests and apprehensions<sup>24</sup>. Compared to the previous report, there is an increase in the over-representation of Indigenous and Middle Eastern populations<sup>25</sup>. The racial disparities documented by the HPS Use-of-Force inquiry strongly support the reality that racial bias exists and must be taken seriously.

The recent death of Erixon Kabera has reignited advocacy for accountable policing aligning with the approval of 500 body-worn cameras for frontline officers in the HPS<sup>26</sup>. However, the consultation process for the policy outlining body-worn camera use has been limited, inaccessible, and untargeted. The feasibility of having community members read the 60+ page policy and email their thoughts is un conducive to meaningful consultation. The HPS and City of Hamilton should conduct purposeful consultation such as through focus groups with the McMaster Black Students Success Centre and Indigenous Student Services. Community groups should also be consulted including (but not limited to) the Race and Identity-Based Data Strategy Community Advisory Panel, Hamilton Anti-Racism Resource Centre, CMHA Hamilton, Hamilton Centre of Civic Inclusion, and the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council.

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24. Service, H. P. (2024, June 28). Hamilton Police Release 2023 Use of Force Data. Hamilton Police Release 2023 Use of Force Data ; Hamilton Police Service. <https://hamiltonpolice.on.ca/news/hamilton-police-release-2023-use-of-force-data/>

25. Hamilton Police Service. (2023). 2022 Use of Force Statistical Report. Hamilton Police Service Board. <https://www.hamiltonpsb.ca/media/e12exset/2022-year-end-report-use-of-force.pdf>

26. Rosas, A. C. (2024, October 18). Should Hamilton police be wearing body cameras? The police board wants to know what you think. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/hamilton-police-asking-input-on-body-cameras-1.7351636>

## 5. Employment

**The City of Hamilton should collaborate with Engage Hamilton to create an Urban Fellows program.**

Despite the significant student population, the City of Hamilton lacks structured opportunities that allow students and new graduates to gain meaningful, project-based experience in municipal governance. This gap has potential long-term impacts- without local opportunities, young talent may seek professional experience elsewhere, leading to a loss of talent and skilled professionals within Hamilton.

The City of Toronto's Urban Fellow program has proven to be an impactful model, providing students and new graduates with a structured introduction to public administration through full-time work placements, seminars, and workshops<sup>27</sup>. This comprehensive approach has allowed many professionals to gain valuable insights into public service while contributing significantly to Toronto's policy and research efforts. Recognized with the City Manager's Award in 2013, the program has enhanced Toronto's workforce by bringing in skilled, motivated individuals who contribute new perspectives and innovative ideas.

The City of Hamilton should collaborate with Engage Hamilton to create an Urban Fellows program modelled after the City of Toronto's. Partnering with McMaster University and Mohawk College to attract applicants would establish a strong foundation of talent for the Hamilton Urban Fellow program. Additionally, the program would strengthen young professionals' connections to the Hamilton community, creating a sense of civic engagement and long-term commitment to the city's future. By opening a pathway into municipal government, Hamilton would be positioning itself for a vibrant future by shaping the next generation of leaders.

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27. City of Toronto. (2017, December 8). Toronto Urban Fellows. City of Toronto. <https://www.toronto.ca/home/jobs/information-for-applicants/recruitment-initiatives/toronto-urban-fellows/>

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