

August 6, 2024

Open Letter to Councillor Ariel Troster, Somerset Ward (Ward 14)

Re: Recent media comments on social disorder in Somerset Ward

Dear Councillor Troster,

We, the Action Sandy Hill Community Association, are disheartened by your recent comments regarding our hard-won interventions by the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) and other city services in North Sandy Hill and Lowertown.

It is unclear to us why you would criticize our community-driven efforts in favour of what appears to be an unsubstantiated claim about the CORE strategy, which has just started to roll out. The hot spot policing does not even start until September 2024 and there are substantive impact evaluations planned once it does. It is currently too early in the process to draw any linkages as there are multiple potential causes for the increase in social disorder. In fact, in Ward 12, we have been begging the City of Ottawa for help to manage these potential causes – the impact of the toxic and ever-changing drug supply, the overconcentration of frontline services in the downtown core, the lack of affordable housing – and the resulting increases in social disorder and violent crime for over six years.

That is six years too long.

We recognize that policing alone will not solve these problems. Fortunately, it does not exist in a vacuum and there are alternative service, treatment, and housing programs being developed in Ward 12 to complement the increase in police presence. Harm reduction is only one piece of a much larger puzzle. So is policing. **This situation is “all hands on deck” and there is no room for political games.**

With that in mind, instead of criticizing a nascent municipal response, municipal politicians and city officials should work concertedly with residents and people with lived experience to expand efforts to deal with the combined impacts of the overdose and housing crises, such as education and prevention programs, increased housing options, early intervention programs, and developing both typical and innovative treatment and rehabilitation programs. In addition, all services should be available throughout the city, not concentrated within a few blocks in the downtown core. Furthermore, including the wider community in these efforts in Ward 14 could help to identify and develop such important programming. It is also imperative to work closely with provincial and federal officials to implement all of the above approaches.

At this time, however, we have some very specific questions about a number of assertions that you made in your recent interview with CFRA ([linked here](#)). We are aware that disinformation and political gamesmanship among political actors is common in attempts to leverage this crisis for political, personal or even economic gain. However, we need to remember that the overdose crisis has killed over 40,000 Canadians since 2016 and 500 individuals in Ottawa since 2022. **Appended to this letter is a list of timestamped comments from your CFRA interview and our related questions.**

We call on you Councillor Troster to work with the people who live, work and stay in Sandy Hill, Lowertown and Vanier in our quest for holistic approaches and solutions to the impact of

the toxic drug supply and the overconcentration of frontline services in Ward 12, and now, Ward 14. Ideological stances will not help anybody at this point, we need pragmatic solutions with practical support.

Help us find those solutions.

We look forward to your response to the appended questions. Please reach out at any time to strategize and talk about solutions that work for everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CB', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Calla Barnett, PhD(c)
Acting Chair, Action Sandy Hill

Appendix: Timestamped comments and resulting questions from the CFRA Interview

1:30 ‘People who stay in shelter overnight are moving into Centretown’

Please share any concrete evidence of this alleged displacement. Have you done surveys with individuals who are in Centretown? If so, can we have access to those surveys and the results? Additionally, who designed the surveys and what research methodology, and mitigation tools did you use to ensure that the sample of people surveyed was representative and the information obtained was unbiased?

2:00 ‘Hard to say, I have case workers who will be speaking to street involved folks’

According to your [website](#), you have one “caseworker,” not several. Further, this statement implies that, contrary to your earlier claims of having concrete information about who is moving into Centretown and why, you have not yet polled or surveyed people with lived experience. Can you please clarify these apparently contradictory statements?

2:36 ‘Statements from the mayor’s office and in the police about extra surveillance in the Market’

Please provide any relevant press releases, articles, reports, speeches, social media posts that confirm “extra surveillance in the Market,” specifically from the office of His Worship, Mark Sutcliffe, Mayor of the City of Ottawa, or Ottawa Police Services.

In addition. Ward 14 contains the largest number of municipal, provincial and federal law enforcement in the City of Ottawa, including:

- OPS Headquarters at 474 Elgin St.;
- A significant increase in OPS Officers due to demonstrations since October 2023 and Officers at the Provincial Courthouse on Elgin St.
- Regularly circulating Ottawa Provincial Police Officers;
- 200 armed guards of the Parliamentary Protective Service who have jurisdiction from Wellington St. to Laurier Ave. W, Colonel By Drive to Bronson St.; and
- The Governor General’s Foot Guards on Queen Elizabeth Drive, which has full and part time infantry officers of the Canadian Armed Forces.

It is unclear if you considered the law enforcement to which your Ward has access in your calculation of “extra surveillance.”

Specifically, how did you integrate the large increase in OPS officers that Ward 14 received in 2023 in your considerations of displacement and to surveillance? It would also be helpful to know what you have done to curtail the impact of these groups on surrounding neighbourhoods (for example, the Glebe and Hintonburg) given your stated concerns over displacement.

3:38 If they are moving one part of the problem from downtown to another part of downtown that is displacing a problem it is not solving it

What proof do you have that people are being displaced? As you are aware, the CORE strategy has not yet begun. During a presentation to the ASH Board of Directors on June 24, 2024, we learned that the financing would be sent to the provincial government at the end of July with money being transferred in the fall of 2024. The CORE Strategy of deterrence-based policing

is to begin at that time. It is unclear how people are being displaced if the program has not begun.

4:20 We have been very active in using every possible building we can to open up more indoor space in our city

Which indoor city-owned spaces in Ward 14 have been used to provide shelter or housing?

5:40 'Block Leader program has been quite successful in the Market

What proof do you have that this program has been 'quite successful' beyond the self-reporting and media articles of the organisation promoting it?

7:15 CORE strategy being rolled out, the CORE strategy needs to look at the downtown core cohesively

It is our understanding that there is a plan to look at the downtown core cohesively called [Downtown Ottawa Action Agenda](#). Can you clarify if you are now saying that the actions outlined in this report, alongside the CORE Strategy, and the new ANCHOR 211 line all need to be deployed simultaneously in your area? If displacement is a concern, how do you intend to mitigate the potential displacement to neighbouring Hintonburg, the Glebe and Little Italy?