

65 Delhi Street

I have lived in the Wolfond neighbourhood area for 34 years. I raised 3 children here. I have seen a lot of programs and ideas come and go and I must admit that it doesn't feel as safe here as it once did. I love this neighbourhood and always been so welcoming to everyone. I am also not naive enough to think there will not be change. I know that changes must happen as our city grows but I also feel that our City and the County must be vigilant with careful community-connected planning to be sure the possibility of transitional housing at 65 Delhi is a glowing success.

I am choosing to speak on the elephant in the room because someone must. There are some important issues our neighbourhood has been experiencing in recent years and there is the potential for an increase in these issues in connection to this proposed project. There are important statistics we will need from planners.

What percentage of those in Ontario who are homeless also struggle with:

1. Recurring and complex addiction or mental health issues
2. Crime
3. Unemployment

And questions to be answered.

1. What percentage of people with these additional issues to homelessness will be housed at 65 Delhi?
2. Are planners going to consult with the homeless population to design something they really will invest in and use?
3. Are planners going to ask the homeless what they need?
4. Why would people from all over Wellington County want to be relocated to our neighbourhood?
5. Will the County be contributing ongoing funds for 24-hour staffing, social services, garbage pickup and grounds maintenance?

More queries to be answered by those who may use this facility and our planners:

6. What specific communities would be sending people to this site? Indigenous, religious, medical or others?
7. How would people be identified as homeless and who would do this?
8. Would there be certain categories of homelessness supported and not others?
9. Would residents be allowed to bring their pets?
10. Would there be expectations for receiving a unit? e.g., Receiving counseling or psychiatry, zero tolerance for drugs and alcohol on site, working towards schooling and employment?
11. Would a resident's stay have a time limit if there was no improvement in addiction or mental health status?
12. How would evictions work if there were real troublesome issues arising like arson or drug use or drug dealing?
13. What would happen to the services offered if future policy providers, governments or community agencies withdraw their funding?
14. What options would the local neighbourhoods have if there were safety issues for people and their families?

If this project is to proceed, we need a co-ordinated effort of community involvement and involvement of those you hope to assist, along with long term investment by the City of Guelph, County of Wellington, Guelph's healthcare system and community agencies. We are hopeful that the Park Motel project, Wyndham House, and the Ignatius Loyola House project can offer input as well.

No one questions that housing is needed but what type, to maximize success? Success being defined as stable housing, employment, integration into the larger community and increased success with health outcomes for improved quality of life. Housing for homeless is needed but we are unsure if this is the best model especially with the numbers of suites being proposed and the lack of information and planning so far provided.

Our neighbourhood already copes with close proximity to:

1. The Homewood Health Centre 650 metres away
2. General Hospital where many with addictions and mental health challenges visit daily 300 metres away.
3. Ontario Addiction Treatment Centre OATC 800 metres away
4. Safe injection site at Guelph Community Health Centre 900 metres away.
5. 14 bed Emergency Youth Shelter Wyndham House 700 metres away

Our neighbourhood has had a long history of both good and challenging experiences with group housing. There was a group home on Derry Street for years that was staffed 24 hours a day and the youth in that program were integrated into the neighbourhood with very few issues. There is Wyndham House Emergency Youth Centre on Norwich Street and there have been some issues with the residents but again the neighbourhood has been very tolerant, welcoming, and inclusive. It is important we consider our community as a whole and not just the needs of people in Guelph and Wellington coping with a loss of housing.

This program is planned to be temporary just until the residents can be moved to longer term housing. I have also read that a resident's stay could be as long as 3 years. This means that those who are placed there may or may not invest in the neighbourhood or have the chance to get to know their neighbours or have pride in their location. We are worried about a "revolving door" model with high density housing for those who might have longstanding, chronic and challenging issues. We may feel surrounded, literally with all the other facilities so close. It also has the potential for high drama, additional policing and social services, and an ongoing struggle with the local community if there are issues that harm the neighbourhood.

We want assurance our crime rate will not increase due to this project. I'm not saying that the residents will be thieves, but we've seen desperate people in our neighbourhood, and shared security camera video with police showing people stealing property or packages, or attempting to break into cars and homes, sometimes in broad daylight. I am sure you can understand that this makes us cautious. We need important statistics and involvement of those who may live there. We do not want this to be a rushed project simply because Loyola House may be completing their commitment and there is the possibility of federal funding.

On our part, we could invite the possible residents to get involved in maintaining the perennial garden in the park. We could invite residents to our potlucks in the park. We are happy to invite them to our skate parties and Earth Day celebrations.

We have long had a relatively quiet peace with facilities with the Homewood Health Centre and General Hospital but lately things have really escalated and the choice of this building and its rezoning needs a lot more thought, transparency and planning from the city and county.

I'm not a proponent of "not in my backyard" but with this choice of location, I feel it's justified to say, "maybe not even more in my backyard".

This is a complex, serious and particularly challenging community issue that needs whole community effort. It cannot be fixed with warehousing.

And on a final note, our neighbourhood could really use a space for seniors and others to gather and have coffee, conversation, games, educational and cultural events. We could use a childcare centre here again, art centre, cultural centre a space for teens to play basketball and other after school activities. This was what the Delhi Street Recreation Centre provided before it was shut down. Especially with some funding and renovations with long-term thinking in mind, this could be a beautiful, welcoming, neighbourhood hub for all, including those currently coping with homelessness.

Susan Bushell