My name is Andrew Wheeler. I'm a resident of Guelph and own a business in downtown where I work most days. I am personally and economically invested in seeing a diverse and vibrant community thrive here in Guelph.

I'm writing to voice my support for Mayor Guthrie's bylaw proposal that would ban encampments in downtown Guelph.

I believe downtown Guelph is a place where all folks should be welcome regardless of socioeconomic status. We all need to live together and accommodate one another as much as possible.

However, I do not believe any person or group should be able to claim public spaces for long periods of time for any purpose.

When encampments are allowed or cannot be removed after a reasonable amount of time, the security and well-being of downtown residents and visitors is compromised. People stop frequenting areas where they no longer feel safe. As a result, the whole community suffers—residents, businesses, civic and cultural activities.

I see downtown Guelph suffering. Residents feel less secure and are less willing to visit when they are confronted with garbage, vandalism, human waste, drug paraphernalia, and ramshackle shelters taking over public spaces. Indeed it is inhumane and unsafe for those who are living in encampments to experience these conditions.

People who work and live downtown shouldn't feel unsafe walking to work and back. Businesses are owned by people like myself who struggle daily to keep their livelihood and those of their employees afloat and they shouldn't forced to struggle to attract customers who are reluctant to visit downtown. The city itself should not look like a dump.

Admittedly there are no simple solutions. A balanced approach is required. And I'm happy to see the mayor's revised motion seeking a report on how alternative housing solutions can be provided. While the city takes measures to keep downtown safe and clean, it must also work to ensure the needs of those living with poverty and mental illness are provided with better alternatives.

Andrew Wheeler