

His Worship Mayor Cam Guthrie and Guelph Council Members  
1 Carden Street, Guelph, Ontario  
N1H 3A1

November 22, 2023

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I am writing this letter in response to the agenda item. 9.2 "Encampments within the Downtown", currently scheduled for the November 28 City Council Meeting.

Tents are not safe, especially for winter habitation. If you remove the tent, however, the occupant then has no shelter, no matter how slight. Please don't take the tents away without offering a viable alternative. Yes, Guelph has shelters for the homeless, but a shelter is not a home. A communally shared sleeping space inside is not always viewed as a viable alternative, to sleeping alone outside, by the unhoused person. I know Guelph is working on long term, permanent affordable housing, which is the ideal, but until we have enough of that housing, we will have people dying from sleeping outside. This city is innovative, and I have faith that Guelph will find a solution to help prevent this from happening.

Please provide an alternative to shelters to help keep people warm in the winter. Before the pandemic, we had a 24 hour indoor warming site downtown in the winter for people to use. For those who were living rough, this provided relief from the cold without the rules and restrictions of a shelter. Another alternative is to park a "warming bus" downtown at night, which allows people to sit and come and go as they like.

The best option might be to build a community of tiny homes within the downtown area. Perhaps on land along the river, such as the strip of land below the "Matrix" apartments, off Eramosa and extending south to the "River Run Centre. A tiny home community, although temporary until permanent housing is available, will keep people warm and safe through the winter. Supervision would be needed, but we do have all the other supports, such as mental health and addiction support, and places to eat already in place downtown. If the areas outside the tiny homes were kept clutter free, (with nearby storage for belongings), this could be a safer, warmer and more aesthetically pleasing solution to tents. Rent for the homes would be geared to income, when there is an income, and, of course, would go directly to the city.

Guelph could even cover the cost of building these homes by opening up sponsorship of the homes to businesses. They could display their logo or business name on the tiny home, or they could have a small sponsorship plaque on the home. I know as a consumer, I would be more inclined to shop somewhere that was directly trying to help the homeless situation.

Once we have enough affordable permanent housing built, the tiny homes could be relocated or auctioned off. I have read articles with figures that show it is cheaper to house an individual, than it is to pay for the extra emergency services that are involved in responding to concerns with that individual when they are "sleeping rough". Other countries who have demonstrated a "housing first" intervention, have shown that housing is a key first step to solving the issues surrounding unhoused individuals. There is still time to get these set up this year before we are hit with winter. So please offer either some sort of 24 hour downtown warming centre, open to all without restriction, or even better, put these tiny homes up and offer them as a preferable alternative to living in a tent. I believe with this measure in place, you will see social problems downtown improve and death rates from exposure decrease.

Thank you for your time,

Wendy Presant

