

Hello,

My name is Robyn Loree. I am writing this email to the Guelph City Council regarding the bylaw about encampments in downtown Guelph.

I have lived in Guelph for 33 years. Currently I live and work in downtown Guelph. I am partner at Millennium Clothing Company on Yarmouth Street. I volunteer with and support programs downtown that help with food insecurity and with housing and support for young mothers. I have extensive personal experience with mental illness, and the challenges that accompany it.

I am tremendously concerned with the continuous decline of our downtown core. Businesses are leaving and storefronts are vacant. Our beautiful city is dirty—literally: public drug use is rampant, drug debris, food scraps, old clothes, makeshift ramshackle tents, garbage, human waste, weapons, individuals passed out on the street. It's terrible and not improving. It makes me sad, on both a personal level and as a business owner.

I don't think having a homeless encampment in the downtown core is the goal of a healthy and developed city. I don't understand why many of the drug/mental health/outreach programmes are not set up near the two hospitals on Delhi Street. We keep hearing "addiction" and "mental health" but I don't see many programmes running that positively impact this cluster of challenges.

I walk to work, plus I walk my animals daily. I see ambulances and police on my street weekly, if not more frequently. I encounter impaired (either chemically or with mental health issues) individuals screaming, fighting, swearing, hallucinating daily. I have been accosted on my dog walks and followed/threatened more than once. I have had men expose their genitalia to me in the middle of the day.

Our customers are mostly women. They are afraid to come downtown. It is "frightening." It's "scary, dirty and feels unsafe." I have had to lock our store door on occasion to ensure the safety of our customers. I have walked people to their vehicles because they are afraid. Families are afraid to bring their children to hockey games in the evenings.

I have called Welcoming Streets in the past with no response, and I end up calling the police about intoxicated and violent people.

If the small businesses that populate downtown fail, leave and are not replaced, our unique and vibrant downtown core will die. And our businesses will continue to decline if public vagrancy, drug use and housing insecurity continue.

I frequently hear that we need "to educate and inform" people to help them "understand" and that "most of the people are harmless." I don't think this is an appropriate or sensible response. It's condescending. It's dismissive. And it doesn't make our downtown healthier.

I am opposed to allowing vagrancy and encampments to continue in the downtown area. Our fine city is being hurt, and our citizens are suffering.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Robyn Loree