

Dear Councillors and Mayor,

I am a citizen of Guelph. This city means a great deal to me. I choose to live here because it is a city that cares about its citizens, about the lands and waters that sustain us, about the things that make life worth living like music and art and sport and community. And right now there is a proposed Public Space Use By-law that goes against the core values of this city I love so much.

I am greatly disturbed by this by-law that essentially criminalizes encampments, giving the people living in them no place to go, no place to store their limited belongings, and making their lives more precarious than they already are.

I am opposed to all criminalization of encampments and fully support encampments in all public spaces *until such time that permanent and safe solutions can be found for every person living in encampments.*

I also support creative, short-term options like A Better Tent City in Waterloo, or creating a designated, resourced, downtown space for encampments (like a level of the Wilson St Parkade, for example) as a temporary solution.

It's not just a lack of shelter beds that is the problem. For many, the shelter system is not safe and people avoid them because of this. You can not solve the problem of encampments by making them against by-laws. This does nothing to address the root cause.

I understand that the City does not control funding for social housing, but there are many things that you - as Mayor and as councillors - can do to increase housing supply and increase affordable housing. You could...

- create a vacancy tax
- decrease the number of short-term rental properties allowed in our city
- desist allowing the financialization of the real estate market in Guelph.

All of these things could slow down and drive down the rental prices, which would lead to fewer people experiencing precarious living situations that require encampments in the first place. You could also create a by-law that requires new developments to have enough affordable units (for people on social assistance or living below the poverty line) to address the problem.

You have the power to make positive change in our city. Your hands are not tied. You actually have more power to make creative, community-focused, caring changes in Guelph than many people in our city possess. It is not your job as Mayor and councillors to only take care of the powerful and wealthy members of our community. In fact, your job is to make decisions that care for the vulnerable members of our community and to balance the needs of all of us who call Guelph home.

If you are concerned about our city's image more than you have concern for its citizens, you are doing this wrong. The people living in encampments are members of the Guelph community and you represent them, too. It is your duty to ensure that they, too, have a positive experience of Guelph -- not one that is more criminalized and unsafe than ever.

I urge you to reject the Public Space Use by-law and allow encampments in public spaces until all people living in them have safe and permanent housing solutions. I also urge you to use all tools at your disposal to address the housing crisis. The excuse that there's "nothing you can do" is untrue and lacks the creative vision and urgency needed for this crisis.

Instead of attacking an already marginalized community with by-laws, use the tools you have to increase housing options in the City. Speak to the people in our community who are experts in dealing with these issues to inform how we make positive change so that no one in Guelph needs to set up a tent in the dead of winter in the core of our downtown. Listen to the people who are unhoused and can't afford housing. Listen to the people who care for these folks. They will guide you in solving this problem.

And always remember that the people are not the problem. The unjust systems are the problem. Please do your job to make those systems more just and caring.

Thank you,

Rachel Barreca

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**When words leave off, music begins. -Heinrich Heine-**

*I live and prosper on lands traditionally connected to the Attawandaron, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. It is governed by the Between the Lakes Treaty No. 3 (1792) between the Mississauga nation and the Crown, now the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. For even longer this land has been governed by the Dish With One Spoon wampum belt covenant between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. Today, it is home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. I am grateful to the Indigenous nations who have continually welcomed settler folks like me into these treaties that bind us all to share and protect the land in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect.*