

Written Delegation to Guelph City Council

Re: Public Space Use By-Law

February 8, 2024

Dear Council,

The proposed “Public Space Use By-law” will undoubtedly have an impact on people who are living in encampments. As frontline agencies working with these individuals and other marginalized community members, it is essential that our organizations work closely with City and County officials to secure a human rights and health-based approach to any enforcement actions.

As health care providers, we commit to the following:

1. **We will continue to coordinate services** so that all of our community members are supported with the health services they need.
2. **We will work with County and City staff** to help people living in encampments find locations for temporary shelters.
3. **We will continue to relentlessly advocate for accessible permanent shelter options** that include expansion of options on the “left hand” side of the housing continuum. These may include a more diverse set of shelter options, structured encampments, tiny homes, and more access to supportive housing options.

To accomplish our work together, we make the following recommendations:

Recommendation #1: Enable access to essential services and utilities to create safe, hygienic and known environments where healthcare can be administered safely.

[We know that continued displacement can negatively impact health.](#) As we move people further from our city’s downtown core, we move them further from the life-saving services they access daily. Unknown, unsafe, unhygienic spaces create barriers for health supports because they limit our ability to find people and effectively coordinate their care.

We request the City consider providing basic needs supports such as water, port-a-potties, and electrical access that are necessary to support hygienic health care delivery such as wound care.

Recommendation #2: The City and County lead the collection of meaningful housing, health and homelessness data that includes both the supply and demand for housing options.

Currently, the inventory and use of shelter beds is used as a primary indicator of need in our community. We need to capture data in a more robust manner to determine why people are not accessing shelter, so that we can collectively build a more diverse set of options to meet their needs, such as for families, couples and Indigenous community members.

Recommendation #3: Monthly data should be shared with health partners to enable informed, proactive partnerships between health and housing providers and agencies.

Data should be used to support collective advocacy and to better enable co-design on behalf of health and social service providers, the City, and the County to build a more diverse set of options on the left-hand side of the continuum in the community.

Our agencies are prepared to continue to coordinate health care services and co-design solutions that meet the needs of individuals, and we require accurate data that incorporates the voice of lived experience to make decisions about design, delivery, and pathways to healthcare.

Recommendation #4: The City of Guelph will direct its By-Law Officers and staff along with its service providers (e.g. Fire, Police, Paramedics, Public Health) to continue to take a human rights and health approach when enforcing any by-law impacting people experiencing homelessness.

We know that a by-law, while well-intended, has the potential to lead to greater displacement and instability, which will lead to health and social decompensation. Additionally, by-laws like this can further contribute to [criminalization and stigma](#) related to poverty, mental health, and substance use.

We believe that by taking a human rights and health approach, developed in consultation with frontline health workers who have established relationships with many community members who will be impacted, will significantly minimize the potential for harm to health outcomes.

Submitted by:

Melissa Kwiatkowski, CEO, Guelph Community Health Centre
Mark Walton, CEO, Guelph General Hospital
Kristin Kerr, CEO, Stonehenge Therapeutic Community
Helen Fishburn, CEO, Canadian Mental Health Association, Waterloo Wellington