

Hello there,

My name is Maeve. I am a student who divides her time between Guelph and Montreal and has experience working with various community organizations in Guelph, which has given me a broad view of the community and its various perspectives and areas of need. I have been involved for several years with Your Downtown Guelph Friends, who are at the frontlines of the housing crisis in Guelph and who directly serve the growing number of those who experience homelessness and food insecurity and are often criminalized for these reasons.

I am writing to you as I am very concerned as to the item of discussion 2.1 Public Space Use Bylaw regarding encampments in the downtown and elsewhere in the city, that is to be considered in the upcoming council meeting on February 14th.

To criminalize and displace marginalized and unhoused people from the downtown core will result in A) people losing access to essential services such as harm reduction supplies at the Guelph CHC and Downtown Guelph Friends, warming centres such as the Guelph Public Library, and food and resources at community centres such as the Royal City Mission and HOPE House, and B) people being unable to set up tents downtown, where many folks would prefer to stay due to these essential services and friends/community, leading to sleeping in the open cold temperatures which is very dangerous and potentially deadly.

Instead of this proposed bylaw, we need the immediate expansion of shelter capacities in downtown Guelph as well as the use of downtown spaces for expanded permanent housing. Bylaws will not prevent encampments, or provide safety for these individuals who have nowhere else to go. Instead, put money into affordable housing and into reducing our ridiculously high rental costs, and place controls on the landlords that profit off of people's housing instability. What you are targeting is cruel and useless in this "Public Space Use Bylaw". Who do you consider to be the public, council members and mayor Guthrie? Is it only people who have as much money as you?

Your revised recommendations in the meeting agenda include pursuing more housing options and funding options for permanent housing. I should hope these housing options would be located near essential services, would give people the choice and dignity they deserve (such as the right to refuse unsafe conditions that occur in many shelter settings), and that unhoused community members would be consulted with in this process to better understand their needs and situations rather than deciding what is best for them. I would add that these avenues can be easily pursued without having to pass the Public Space Use Bylaw, 2024-76.

I urge the Mayor and the Councillors to seek to serve all those who call Guelph home. Crises of homelessness, addiction, and mental health, are not going away. You cannot push these humans away from your sight simply because you see them as unseemingly within your vision of the city. These are people with complex stories, relationships, and so much compassion, humour and determination despite hardships.

I hope you will consider my voice on February 14th. Listen to your community, as it is your duty.

Thank you,
Maeve Brennagh-Mackie