

Friday February 9,
2024

Guelph City Council
Guelph, ON,
N1H 3A1

To Whom it May Concern:

It saddens us to hear that the visual appearance of Guelph's public spaces is valued over the safety and well-being of the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals in the community.

The City of Guelph has allocated public spaces that are open to the public, but should this by-law pass, a stigmatizing standard will be set where only certain people from the public are awarded access to community spaces. Guelph cannot claim to be a city that values inclusivity and community when it punishes vulnerable individuals for situations that are beyond their control. The City of Guelph cannot label itself 'vibrant' while it tries to cover up, hide, and exclude members that contribute to the diversity of the community. Private spaces are protected, but public spaces are meant for the public. Displacing unhoused individuals means that the City of Guelph does not recognize these people as members of the public that are equally entitled to these same community spaces.

The negative outcomes of passing the proposed Public Space Use Bylaw would outweigh the 'positive outcomes' with displacing unhoused community members. The negative impacts scale from individual to structural-level disruption. Examples are as follows:

INDIVIDUAL IMPACTS

- Stigma, isolation, exclusion
 - forcing the removal of unhoused people from public spaces conveys the notion that their well-being and autonomy is unworthy, invalid, and inferior to those who are advocating for this bylaw.
 - It is important to note the differences in privilege of those who are pushing for this by-law, and those who will ultimately be criminalized by this by-law.
 - In considering the major disparities in privilege, access to resources, stable housing, income, nutrition, hygiene, etc., the removal of marginalized people for the sake of appeasing those with privilege would violate Charter rights such as fundamental freedoms and equality rights.
- Individualizing a structural problem
 - Passing this by-law would make individuals bear the weight of societal problems such as lack of housing, inadequate supports, insufficient funding, and inaccessible housing options due to the housing crisis.

- Individualizing the problem reinforces stigma and isolation, and it draws attention away from the gaps in society that are beyond individual control. Furthermore, blame is placed on those who are trying to survive (creating shelter for basic needs).
- Individuals are forced to suffer alone
 - The continuous disruption and movement forces people into isolation. This means that they are unable to communicate their needs, access community resources, and have a sense of dignity. Once again, Guelph cannot claim to be inclusive, nor working towards efforts to support marginalized individuals while simultaneously removing them from the community through the use of by-law enforcement.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

- Discourages harm reduction
 - Continuously shuffling people out of community spaces leads people to use substances in unsanitary and unsafe conditions. The failure for the Guelph community to promote harm reduction means that more community members are at risk of dying from drug toxicity poisoning. Furthermore, this will lead to more hospitalizations and resources focused on stabilizing those who use substances to cope with the traumas of being unhoused and unwanted in the city of Guelph.
- Strain on law enforcement and funding
 - Should this by-law be passed, this would mean that hiring security guards and by-law officers would cause a larger strain on community funding. This funding
 - could instead be allocated towards community resources (shelters, warming centres, supportive housing), which would ultimately aid in decreasing the rate of homelessness in Guelph. Furthermore, in allocating funds towards the development of shelter spaces, this would stably house individuals, meaning they would not need to occupy public spaces at the current rate.
- Lack of collaboration and community relationships
 - The passing of the by-law would create a dynamic where there is continuous conflict between law enforcement (by-law) and vulnerable populations. This tension will ultimately escalate, and will cause larger community and political issues
 - Pushing vulnerable people out of public view may cause unhoused people to seek support from neighbouring cities (Kitchener-Waterloo). Trying to 'pawn off' Guelph's community problems to other cities will ultimately harm the relationships and collaboration with said cities.

STRUCTURAL IMPACTS

- Increase in hospital admissions

- In light of the inability for those without stable housing to create temporary shelters, this means health concerns will increase hospital admissions and Emergency Department wait times.
- To continuously force unhoused people to move around ignores disabilities, health barriers, and mental health. As a result, Guelph will see a larger strain
- on the already-existing pressure within hospitals. Moreover, the majority of hospital admission will likely be in regards to wound care, untreatable health complications, and mental health crises. Subsequent funding for healthcare services will mainly consist
- of serving the unhoused population. Allowing people to create temporary shelters means that they can have the ability to create brief stability and tend to health concerns.
- Structural Violence
 - The implementation of this by-law is an act of structural violence in the sense that it will produce discrimination, harm, and potential deaths.

Ultimately, it is advised that careful consideration of the short-term as well as long-term complications as a result of this by-law be considered prior to implementation. While this by-law may be a quick fix to appease the Guelph residents, this is merely a band-aid solution that has potential to jeopardize Guelph's legitimacy in promoting a community of respect, dignity, and equality.

Respectfully,
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