

Mayor Guthrie and Members of Council:

I wish to express my opposition to the proposed Public Space By-law which is coming before Council on Wednesday, February 14th.

I am astounded that the Mayor would entertain risking \$1,000,000 in legal expenses to defend a by-law restricting encampments when similar by-laws have been ruled unconstitutional in neighbouring jurisdictions.

Moreover, staff identifies that \$69,000 could be required for "enforcement"

The provisions of the By-law are tantamount to sweeping the issue, and the individuals involved, under the rug. The psychological stress they will cause to individuals with already fragile mental health cannot be underestimated.

Council needs to participate in actually solving this problem. One tool that is within your jurisdiction is a Vacancy Tax. Less than 1 km from St. George's Square, there are 6 houses sitting completely vacant, and these are only the ones I personally know about.

Perhaps part of the \$21.4 million of the "Housing Accelerator Fund" can be used towards establishing a vacancy tax? The best way to "accelerate" housing is to bring housing that is already built back into the rental or sale market.

It's shocking to me that not one dime of the \$21.4 million that Guelph is receiving from the Federal government will actually be spent on building housing. Has no one asked why we are spending money to speed up residential project review and approvals when there are already 6,000 units of housing which have been approved by the City, but yet to be initiated by developers?

Mayor Guthrie has claimed that we do not have a vacancy problem in Guelph. If Guelph citizens are sleeping in tents in parks and other civic spaces, there shouldn't be one single house or apartment sitting vacant without good reason.

To underline my point, I am providing photographs of #15, #17, #19, #21 and #23 Fountain street. For context, in the edge of the wide shot, you can see the edge of the Police Station building. All five of these houses are currently vacant. These same houses were documented in an inventory prepared by Mayoral candidate Danny Drew during the most recent municipal election, so they have all been vacant for at least two years.

A few hundred meters further, there is a detached house on Glasgow St. N which has been vacant for more than 15 years.

Assuming 3 bedrooms in each of these houses, they could accommodate 18 people currently living rough.

If "supply" is truly the issue, then incentivize supply via a vacancy tax. Funds generated can be used for public housing initiatives.

Bandaid approaches which harass people in poverty are not the solution, permanent housing is.

Sincerely,  
Susan Watson







