

February 9, 2024

Mayor and City Councillors,

RE: Community Engagement re: Proposed Public Space Bylaw

I'm writing to encourage you as our community leaders to take the time to come up with a evidence-based approach to mediating the conflicts our city is currently experiencing with the use of public space for tent encampments. The proposed bylaw, developed in a rush and without significant community engagement, will create red tape that will require resources to communicate, implement and enforce – resources that could be directed to supporting more creative approaches to conflict resolution that are also in line with [Guelph's Community Plan](#).

Our Community Plan and our Community Foundation strive to hold us accountable as community citizens to [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, -- a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are an urgent call for action by all countries & their citizens - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

As Guelph's [Community Foundation's 2023 Vital Signs report](#) emphasizes, "We all do better – when we all do better." This includes Guelph citizens currently living in tent encampments in our public spaces. This Vital Signs report also emphasizes facts I'm sure you already appreciate:

- *"A sudden increase in pressure from a life event—like losing a job, a relationship breakdown or a health crisis—can push people into homelessness: sleeping on friends' couches and floors, living in crowded or unsafe places, sleeping in cars or even being out on the street. **Source: County of Wellington Housing Services (2022)**"*
- *"Everyone in our community should have a decent and affordable home. But challenges and inequities like rising home costs, low vacancy rates and poverty mean that not everyone does."*

As you may know from personal experience, as I do, when we experience significant, life-altering loss, we experience a dramatic shift in our entire capacity: physiologically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually. Our recovery is nurtured by caring relationships with significant people in our lives and stability in accessing our basic needs. Our capacity to deal with bureaucracy and its rules and regulations is very depleted.

As you well know the conflict this bylaw attempts to address is not unique to Guelph since municipalities throughout Canada are dealing with crisis levels of poverty, food insecurity, unhousing and lack of access to health supports. National Forums such as the [National Alliance](#)

[to End Homelessness 2023 conference](#) included opportunities to learn from the bylaw response to unsheltered homelessness in Montreal, Penticton and Sudbury. Penticton presented on how their Community Safety Officer program is focused on how trust and relationships are paramount in sustainable approaches to community safety. Have City of Guelph staff had the opportunity to explore and learn from other cities' approaches?

Your leadership skills in calling for and participating in the Housing and Health Symposium at the end of January are to be commended. You will have had an opportunity to hear from people with lived experience of homelessness and those who work daily to deal with our community's homelessness crisis. I wonder if city staff were able to be informed by this symposium as they worked to develop this bylaw in the short time allotted by Council?

I urge you to avoid feeling rushed to resolve the encampment conflicts and, instead, take time to review the May report back from this symposium. I hope that this time will allow you to develop a conflict resolution & bylaw approach that is centred on the human dignity of all parties who use our community public spaces.

Respectfully yours,
K. Vanessa Hyland

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