

Dear Councillors and Mayor,

I am writing you because I am extremely disappointed and disturbed by the recently proposed Public Space Use By-law. This by-law essentially criminalizes encampments, giving people living in them no place to go, no place to store their belongings and will make their lives much more precarious.

I fully support encampments in all public spaces until better, more systemic based solutions are made to reduce houselessness. I deeply oppose the criminalization of any encampments.

I also believe we can facilitate creative, short-term options, similar to A Better Tent City in Waterloo, or creating a designated, resourced, downtown space for encampments (like a level of the Wilson St Parkade, for example) as a temporary solution.

For many people, the shelter system is not safe, a lack of shelter beds is only a piece of the problem. You cannot solve the problem of encampments by making them against by-laws. This does nothing to address the root cause and directly sends a message to the houseless population in Guelph that you do not care about them.

I understand that the City does not control funding for social housing, but there are many things that you can do to increase housing supply and increase affordable housing. You continue to allow short-term rental properties and continue to allow the financialization of the real estate market in Guelph.

These things drive up rental prices and push more people into precarious situations.

Additionally, there is no by-law on new developments needing to have enough affordable units (for people on social assistance or living below the poverty line) to address the problem.

There are MANY things council can be doing to address this issue and they are not. It is appalling.

It is disgusting to me that you care more about Guelph's "image" than the people who live here. The people living in encampments are members of the Guelph community and you represent them too. They deserve to have your respect and feel dignified in our city just as much as any other constituents. It is your duty to ensure that they, too, have a positive experience of Guelph -- not one that is more criminalized and more unsafe than ever.

I strongly urge you to reject the Public Space Use by-law and allow encampments in public spaces until all people living in them have safe and permanent housing solutions.

I also urge you to use all tools at your disposal to address the housing crisis. The excuse that there's "nothing you can do" is untrue and lacks the creative vision and understanding of urgency needed for this crisis. Instead of attacking an already marginalized community with by-laws, use the tools you have to increase housing options in the City.

Thank you,

Amanda Reaney