

Hello -

I'm sharing my concerns today as a lover of downtown Guelph and someone who has worked in the downtown core for 17+ years.

I have supported small businesses downtown for decades. These are the places that make our city special and unique and create memorable experiences in our beautiful community.

I have reviewed the proposed Public Space Use bylaw. While I 100% believe something needs to be done to ensure public spaces in our city are safe for all residents (especially children) I question whether this new bylaw does enough to define what is considered a protected public space. I also don't currently see any enforcement of the laws and bylaws which exist, and question whether this would even be enforced to create change.

Since the pandemic, the safety of the downtown has declined dramatically. In all my years working downtown, I never questioned my safety until we started to see encampments across the downtown core and volumes of individuals congregating in downtown thoroughfares.

I have 3 young children who love to go to The Works restaurant and who comment on feeling unsafe walking from our car to dinner. The last time we went as a family, my daughter, who is 10 years old, stepped in a puddle and later realized it was likely urine. This was without discussion, she came to this conclusion by observing her surroundings. Not to mention the dangers that could exist for our children who may come across needles or other drug paraphernalia.

I want my children to grow up in a vibrant city where they can experience their downtown and all the diversity and culture that is available to them without fearing for their safety. They should be able to safely enjoy parks and sports fields.

It is our city's responsibility to create the conditions for these safe public spaces. The solution is not shelter space as many individuals are option out of using shelters for a variety of reasons. It is not an easy problem to solve but I hope that this bylaw coupled with enforcement and clarity of the terms could be a step in the right direction.

Regards,
Natalie Free