

February 11 2023

Lin Grist

Guelph, ON N1H

Email:

Phone:

Dear Mayor Guthrie & Guelph City Councillors:

**Re: Public Space Use Bylaw 2024 -76**

First to thank the City Clerk's office for extending the deadline for correspondence with respect to the above-mentioned bylaw. It has given those of us who have concerns about the bylaw to do more research and to provide educated feedback to the mayor and council on this matter.

To those councillors who do not have time to read all the correspondence on this matter prior to the meeting on Wednesday February 14<sup>th</sup> at 10 am. **I would urge you NOT to support this bylaw as it is written. Part 1 of the proposed bylaw only further marginalizes the most vulnerable members of our community - the homeless, including those with mental health issues and those with addiction issues.**

Unfortunately, parts 2 and 3 of the proposed bylaw, which I am sure are well meaning, do absolutely nothing to improve the situation of the homeless in our community.

**Item 2 "respectfully requests" the County of Wellington to provide access to permanent shelter for the homeless community in Guelph.** Currently the provision of affordable housing is contracted out to the County of Wellington: they have provided ZERO new rent geared to income housing units in Guelph in the past 5 years.

**Item 3 suggests that Guelph continue to advocate with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Provincial government to address the need for greater municipal funding to deal with housing instability issues.** There is nothing that speaks to provision of permanent housing for the homeless.

Sincerely

E. Lin Grist

### **Background Information on bylaw 2024-76**

City staff indicated that the bylaw 2024-76 has been developed because, as they put it:

Recent trends indicate that there were times over the first three quarters of 2023 in which one of the County's contracted temporary shelter provider (SteppingStone) did have some nights at full occupancy where they had to turn individuals away. Some of these individuals were temporarily accommodated through emergency hotel sheltering. However, Steppingstone received additional funds to open two more shelters before winter; this has resulted in being able to accommodate everyone who needs or wants overnight accommodation, including adding additional cots as required to ensure people do not have to sleep outside in the cold. As a result, they have enough beds available to accommodate everyone who requests one.

When someone who works with the homeless and is *not* dependent on the City of Guelph for any operational funding, a much more complex picture of the current situation was provided.

Here are some of those comments.

- Transient individuals (as many move from one municipality to another) are told that a shelter will not take you in unless you have lived here for the last 6 months
- individuals are kicked out of shelters due to altercations with others where staff at the shelter will not allow them back, and sadly these decisions are not investigated as the people that start the altercation often have mental health issues and the other individual ends up laying charges against them, but still is not allowed back in the shelter.
- Some homeless people refuse to enter a shelter as it is not a safe place for them as they leave rehab and don't want to be around those that are consuming illicit drugs.
- Others do not want to sleep in shelters because of fear of theft of the very few items they own (mainly clothing)
- Some homeless women refuse to go to shelters as they are afraid of either being assaulted or raped.
- So, unfortunately, we have many homeless folks who would rather sleep in the elements than enter shelter for the reasons outlined above.

The plight of the homeless in Guelph, and in cities across the province and nation is complex and there are no quick fixes. There are no accurate figures available to the public on the number of homeless In Guelph – in 2021 it was 220 – and since rents have skyrocketed since then, the number is likely higher. Bylaw 2024-76 does not address any of the major elements involved in homelessness: addiction and mental issues -it will simply take down tents and force the most marginalized to go elsewhere.

On a practice level if passed this bylaw will require

Officers to evict vulnerable people from their tents and removing the tents – those same bylaw enforcement officers have no obligation to help them find alternative locations

There will likely be legal challenges to this bylaw – and valuable city resources (our taxes) will be spent on legal fees that could have more productively been used to begin to work on providing permanent safe accommodation for this vulnerable community.