



Monday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Dear Mayor Guthrie and Members of Council,

We are writing to you on behalf of Community Voices, a group of over 30 community members with lived expertise of poverty convened by the Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination. We amplify our lived realities with poverty and advocate on the issues we are experiencing.

We were quite upset to see the proposed Public Space Use Bylaw as a consideration at the upcoming Special Council meeting on February 14th. With the rising rates of living expenses in the city, homelessness could soon be a reality for so many people. We at Community Voices believe it is better to focus on root cause solutions, including affordable permanent housing, than on criminalization and displacement of unhoused folks.

It's heart breaking to think we are at a point in time where the privileged gaze surpasses the importance of a human life. It is cold outside! There are various reasons why people could feel much more safe in encampments, such as they are closer to the supports they need. We have Community Voices members who have been unhoused and did not feel safe going to a shelter. We understand that there are concerns around safety downtown and we believe this is a legitimate concern and a very complex issue, but moving forward with this bylaw is not the solution. It is important that you think about the safety of people who are unhoused. We worry that this bylaw will make unhoused people more unsafe, and increase stigma and discrimination.

Guelph has the capability to continue working together as a community to create solutions instead of causing further harm to our already struggling neighbours. Until we can provide everyone with a comfortable place to call home this is our unfortunate reality and we don't think people should be hidden or displaced. We are concerned that the proposed bylaw does not align with a Housing First or housing as a human right approach. We are concerned that this will make it harder for people to access support, that it will amplify dangerous stereotypes, and take focus away from solutions.

We are calling on you Mayor Guthrie and City Council members to oppose this bylaw and instead focus attention and resourcing on solutions, such as permanent housing and health supports. Any responses to these issues must ensure the dignity and human rights of all community members and include meaningful engagement with lived experts.

We encourage you to build more open and accepting relationships with folks who are suffering.

Thank you,

Maggie Phelan, Community Voices Co-Chair

Dana Nuttley, Community Voices Co-Chair