

General Concerns, Public Order, Safety and Human Rights Issues with Encampments

Unsanctioned encampments have caused serious public order and health and safety issues in Guelph for years, especially among working class and other marginalized people. Most incidents involving the public and encampment residents are not reported in media or on Police blotter releases. You have to either be involved, have a loved one who is, or read it on social media. [I've experienced both.] It's affected people's ability to use parks and trails and resulted in broken windshields, attacks, harassment & violence. People know it's those who live in encampment because they observe it themselves or they're told by police.

Unfortunately the police won't do anything, they refer you to by-law, who then refer you to the police. Only after or during violent incidents will you get a response and it doesn't result in a permanent safe solution.

How is this cycle going to change with a sanctioned encampment under the same zero barrier harm reduction and related city policies? Also, all of these initiatives are voluntary, including the consumption sites that will be available at any sanctioned site, and permanent housing solution under "Housing First" referenced in the county report, which is drug strategy, not housing.

Per the Guelph Wellington Drug Strategy Housing First Report, 2011 pg 2

Housing First is a model of housing support that focuses on establishing permanent housing for chronically homeless individuals, particularly those with mental illness and/or substance use issues

Also, the "Community Table" the police use to consult with the public on these issues is 'internal' closed door, and only available to those under the harm reduction umbrella.

Tiny Home Coalition Project

This Tiny Home proposal is not complete, not funded, not a publicly developed project, and not recommended by the County as viable.

It's troubling and frankly annoying to read [Guelph Today article, 8 July] Mr Marcolongo's blithe disregard for the detailed planning and financial viability information the County report

identified as a necessary part of any request for proposal (RFP) they would require for similar projects.

“Sometimes you have to proceed because leadership is required on homelessness...”

I’m sorry but that’s not leadership. It’s also no excuse not to provide the County with relevant info, nor is refusing to provide volunteer and donor list and fundraising (financial) plan details you already have until you get a site from the city and they agree to all your demands.

The emergency bullying of "it's almost winter" in order to push an ill financed, ill conceived project through with the usual suspects who've ignored the public and created deteriorated conditions around their sites (the Mission) is just not acceptable anymore.

The County report also notes a gross underestimation of costs. This is born out by not only Kitchener encampment costs cited, but also those in other jurisdictions, especially BC. Remediation there was in the millions, under the same zero barrier operations, even with eventual city involvement in waste/cleaning services provisions.

I agree with the County & City reports, with the exception that I don't feel the city or county should continue to work with them if the project is so inchoate that it's not a going concern, and there is no consideration of the public and any public involvement in development, including addressing public health, order & safety concerns at other encampments under the same zero barrier Housing First policy, which are totally ignored here.

Specific Agenda Items:

Item 2.1.1 Strategic Real Estate Partnerships on Underutilized City Assets

This process should include the public. City assets belong to the community, not only members of the Homelessness Task Force, Toward Common Ground, and related citizens, churches and NGOs, etc. who want to use them for their own projects. We are also the ones directly and indirectly (through having our higher level funding allotments being used for this) paying for and bearing the brunt of how these projects realistically affect the community.

All Citizens have a right as a group to be able to decide our priorities, who we want to partner with, what kinds of arrangements, and exactly what type of housing will be built under this directive.

The priorities of the general public should also be considered by any developers for alternate land use, including other housing types. We have a 3200 person waitlist for *social* housing, up to a decade for some, we are urgently in need of affordable housing/care units for seniors, the disabled, etc. Why is exploring underutilized city assets (and any resulting development

partnerships), only on an agenda related to zero barrier housing under Housing First (i.e. primarily for drug users)?

All of these uses, including preserving and expanding green-space, should be on the table for any review of city-owned land and/or assets. The mayor should not be allowed to use his unilateral power to exclude other competing uses the public wants to see developed, especially among other under-served human rights status groups.

Any potential related public safety issues and removal of public space for any development usage, including but not limited to the Tiny Homes Project, is also not something that should be decided or debated only by city staff, County bureaucrats, politicians and/or activist/religious service providers in a secretive, exclusionary closed door system.*

*Housing recommendations originated from three closed groups: the mayor's Homelessness and community safety ETF, the Downtown (safety) Working Group (secreted within the ETF) and Toward Common Ground. The ETF provided county direction and also made them the system manager for social services, effectively creating a Regional Government without Guelphites having any democratic representation or seat at any table. The Housing Symposium that resulted was entirely closed to the public and media for the majority of the sessions. Their report is still not public.

[It should also be noted that these projects are concentrated in Wards 1 and 2 and/or in marginalized areas in Wards 3 & 4. This puts an unfair burden on already neglected people, e.g. immigrants, working poor, disabled, etc. Many of them receive services from entities who are part of these larger closed door groups, and they are afraid to speak out about their negative experiences around harm reduction [drug] policies, and safety issues around encampments & social housing for fear of retaliation, esp. re: County housing management. (I've spoken to many over the years.) Consideration of potential impacts on these people should be considered as part of any development process, including encampment/Tiny Home locations.]

It's a legitimate concern based on past experience that the public will have absolutely zero say in any part of how *city* land and buildings are developed and repurposed for housing. Public input is especially important for parkland, for reasons outlined in the submitted reports of July's Committee of the Whole meeting.

As Councillors have noted, re: parkland appropriation, during the July Committee of the Whole meeting, this is not even a complete inventory of City assets, and there's no consensus on what counts as "underutilized". Everyday Public use, i.e. "non programmed spaces", is also varied and diverse throughout the city, and isn't even considered-as the public have been shut out of this process. For example, the land picked in similar way for another secretly developed

homeless housing project, container homes at Beaumont Crescent, had as the “non programmed use” a children’s play-space (many of these kids were also neurodivergent).

Decisions should be made with the most, best information possible in an inclusive process. I support recommendation 1. to defer exploring city lands for temporary or permanent housing until a complete inventory is done. However, I include the caveat that real & meaningful public consultation should take place immediately on all aspects of this directive, including land usage, and specific location sites already identified.

3 Authority to move into Closed Meeting

3.3 Potential Municipally Owned Sites for Temporary Structured Encampment

Invoking the Municipal Act re: closed door meetings for securing a location and directing negotiation terms is NOT the same as transparency on which sites are being considered, having that list be public, and involving related stakeholders *outside* the closed door homeless groups bubble.

Part of the reason cited in the city’s attached report rationale for going into a closed meeting was the fact there was no public consultation: then why not have it before yet another behind the scenes, private session? And why wasn’t it done when this was first considered? There was more than enough time. City staff have made no effort to arrange public consultations for any related harm reduction/housing project-Strong Mayor Powers or Not. It’s ridiculous to refuse to involve the public, then cite that as a reason to further exclude them, and withhold information that will have major impact on those in affected areas.

In addition, the Tiny Homes Coalition’s demand that they won’t provide a project budget and fundraising plan (which they claim to have already developed) until they get a site location is outrageous bullying and totally disrespectful to the public who are ultimately footing the bill for this. It should not be the driving force behind a closed door council meeting.

Given that the proposal is not deemed viable anyway, there is no reason to rush a decision on locations.

At the very least, council should vote on the Coalition proposal first, and then if it’s not under immediate consideration at this time, the closed meeting portion should be canceled, and any previously considered sites, including land, buildings and other assets, be revealed to the public. An information meeting, or special council meeting where they can delegate and/or ask questions of city & County staff as well as Councillors regarding the sites and any related issues should be scheduled ASAP.

As we move forward, I feel it's time to consider options unrelated to Housing First drug policy/housing outside the current harm reduction framework that is not working and excludes the public. Long term public, evidence based treatment facilities, with detox, forensic wings, and transitional services and actual affordable housing for all would be a good start.

jj salmon
Ward 2