

Hello Mayor Cam and council members,

I'm writing regarding the proposed Public Space Use By-law. I am deeply opposed to the proposed by-law and appalled by council's actions surrounding it. This by-law is a clear attack on one of our City's most vulnerable and disadvantaged people. I am ashamed that my City is seeking to make the lives of unhoused people even more difficult and criminalized by introducing a by-law that effectively removes the last safe housing options that remains for some people by banning tents, built structures, and encampments.

The lack of humanity and empathy present in this by-law is disturbing. Reading through the by-law only added to my concerns as several clauses overlap, which I can only assume will be used to stack charges on unhoused people for a single actions. Part 3.1 General Restrictions covers any Public Space and lists the activities, yet the by-law still includes separate clauses for General Public Spaces, Parks, Reservable Public Spaces, Sensitive Public Spaces and Designated Areas, all of which are already covered by the definition of public space. This double-dipping can be seen again when the structures that this by-law would make illegal are made more illegal if erected in groups larger than 5, or if groups are too close together, ignoring the fact that unhoused people often live in groups for their own safety.

The staff report to council even says that this bill does not address the underlying issues, that the costs are unknown but could include Charter challenges and additional staffing resources. The City says it supports Human Rights, but this by-law repeatedly puts some people's desire for enjoyment of a space over the needs of the unhoused people currently living in Public Spaces. This by-law claims to be about health, safety and well-being, but does not provide any solutions or resources to actually improved the well-being of unhoused Guelphites. Instead, its implementation would require more resources going towards controlling and punishing unhoused people instead of housing them. The staff report mentions how they used Hamilton as a comparator city, yet instead of taking Hamilton's approach of designating legal spaces for encampments to be Guelph is only creating exclusion zones. Removing spaces for unhoused people to live while providing no legal alternatives.

I also said I was concerned about the actions surrounding this by-law. Actions like naming the Public Space Use By-law, which masks the true intent of this by-law. This is not a general use by-law with relatively equal impacts across residents. It is a targeted, anti-homeless by-law. To me, this appears to be an instance of manufacturing consent, by hiding the true intentions of the by-law behind an unobjectionable name. My, admittedly cynical view, is further supported by this meeting being closed door. Given the fact that there have been no additional staff reports on this by-law since the original council meeting in February, it looks to me like council knew it would look back to pass an anti-homeless law in the middle of winter. Now, we have a closed door meeting in summer, when many residents are out of town and out of the loop on local news, and there is less empathy for unhoused people because of the warmer weather.

This by-law is not going to stop encampments. This by-law is only going to punish people who are already living harder lives than most of us can even imagine. A better City would put its resources in housing solutions. Instead, Guelph is signing up to pay more to hurt its most vulnerable. Shame.

Be better. Vote against the Public Space Use By-law.

Sincerely,

Fawkes