

August 22, 2024

Dear councilors, representatives, and staff,

I am writing to voice my opposition to the proposed Public Space Use By-law. Such a by-law will not help people experiencing homelessness in the city of Guelph, will not solve problems associated with our homeless neighbours not having anywhere else to go, and will place an unnecessary burden and risk on our city.

A by-law such as this risks legal action. With the city's tight budget, how can we afford to take on such risk, which would no doubt be costly? In addition, I worry about the city's public image should a case be brought against it, especially if it had to do with violations of human rights.

On the subject of money, it is well known from studies across Canada and the United States that forcing homeless people to constantly relocate is a poor financial strategy. It is incredibly expensive to have police constantly monitoring, dismantling, and displacing encampments, not to mention the downstream effects of poorer health of those regularly displaced (and thus the burden on our already overburdened healthcare system!). Studies have repeatedly shown that policies that aid in providing housing to homeless folks are much more financially viable than policies that restrict the existence of encampments.

I am also concerned by the fast-tracked timeline of this proposal, outlined in the Staff Report from February 14th of this year. It does not sound like the normal processes were followed – does the city not have rules about this? What happened to democratic processes? This makes me very nervous that any by-law could suddenly be rushed through without proper consultation and research.

On a personal note, I have lived in Guelph for 12 years, almost all of it just outside downtown. I walk my dog every day in Royal City park, and we regularly go to other parks and green spaces around the city. I shop regularly downtown. I have never felt unsafe or threatened by a homeless person anywhere in the city, nor have I ever witnessed any drug use. Having worked in larger cities in both Canada and the U.S., Guelph has always felt safer.

I love Guelph, and I'm disheartened and disappointed that a by-law like this is being proposed. Our homeless neighbours need evidence-based solutions, not expensive and risky "bandaids" that will do nothing to solve the actual problems.

Sincerely,

Katherine Drotos



Ward 5