

Dear council,

I am writing to ask you to vote in favour of all three motions on December 11th's council meeting.

The opioid epidemic and drug poisoning will not go away if you shame, neglect, abandon and traumatize our neighbours. That could easily have been any of us on the streets with a turn of events. Remember that.

I support the first motion (agenda item 4.1) because it would make our city safer for people who use drugs and those who don't. This motion is especially important now, in light of the provincial government pushing through Bill 223 with very little consultation from stakeholders like municipalities. We have seen the provincial government rescind bills before, in the face of public pressure, and so this motion holds so much importance now. The government of Ontario must feel pressure from municipalities to maintain, and expand, CTS sites and hours to ensure that we have no more deaths in our community due to overdose and/or unsafe supply. Without access to a convenient CTS site near other services downtown, and without expanded hours, drug users can't ensure safe supply and countless outreach, health, and support organizations have spoken out that closure of these sites will result in more deaths. Additionally, without these sites, people will use wherever they can, increasing instances of people having to witness drug use in public. We know that people in Guelph are concerned about this, and that more, not less CTS sites and hours, is the solution.

Closing CTS sites will put the onus of response from highly trained medical and non medical professionals to (often) ill equipped community members. EMS services will be even more overburdened than they are currently, and this will result in more crowded hospitals, longer waits for ambulance and ER response, and it will result in more people dying. The loss of CTS, coupled with the City's Bylaw, will mean more people who use drugs will be doing so away from hard won supports and services, and now often in isolation as they fear drug seizure and criminalization. This cause and effect isolation means people are spread out, so support is very difficult to give, and people are hiding, going into secluded spaces to avoid criminalization. This will also increase death by overdose, medical harm, as well as community trauma because people will be responding to dead bodies. This is why supporting this motion is so important and why I encourage you to vote in favour of this motion.

I support the second motion (agenda item 4.2) because it ensures that the council upholds the basic human rights of all its citizens. The provincial government's encouragement for mayors to use the Notwithstanding Clause to push through anti-encampment by-laws is a slippery slope towards erosion of human rights by the government. The Notwithstanding Clause is supposed to be used only in the most desperate and unique situations. This is why it is rarely used. There is no critical reason, for the safety, health or wellbeing of our City, to use the Notwithstanding Clause. As politicians it is your duty to uphold and protect the basic human rights of all your constituents. Additionally, there is no process by which to enforce the Notwithstanding Clause – with services for housing and addiction already well beyond capacity, as well as courts and prisons being overwhelmed. Without adequate services or solutions, the Notwithstanding Clause is simply a sentence for further harm. By voting in favour of this motion, you are sending a strong message that you respect democracy and the human rights of all Guelphites.

I support the third motion (agenda item 4.3) because it ensures that municipalities are pressuring the provincial government to ensure cities like Guelph have the resources necessary

to address the housing and addiction crises currently affecting cities across Ontario. Cities, like Guelph, need additional support from the province in order to build housing that is accessible and affordable for people living on a fixed income, and provide services that appropriately address addiction and mental health., including full spectrum supports that include harm reduction options.

Your vote in favour of all these motions will give a voice to the city's most vulnerable, sending a strong message to the province that the City of Guelph is committed to working to proactive, workable, dignified and humane solutions to homelessness and addiction.

I look forward to your positive reply

Maeve Brennagh-Mackie

Additional commentary:

I firmly believe that no one should confidently vote on these matters unless they have met folks on the street as friends, have really listened to their stories. If you feel scared to approach people, it's okay. Join an organization like your Downtown Guelph Friends or attend one of their meals. They could use the help anyways. I promise you, you would learn these are precious humans with critical perspectives and relationships and so much love and wisdom to offer.

I have been meeting people who live on the street since I was 16 years old in Guelph and I am a soft spoken petite woman and I have NEVER had any incidence of harassment or violence against me.

Please treat them with kindness and agency in this process, as I would hope you treat your neighbours.

Maeve