

To whom it may concern,

I am writing as a citizen of Guelph to add my voice to the current discussion around providing Daytime Community/Shelter Services to people experiencing homelessness.

I am both pleased and grateful that the City is making an effort to provide essential services to people during daytime hours that existing services are unable to cover. As a former social worker I can attest that these services are much needed – while they will not solve the problem of homelessness they will hopefully mitigate some of the risk and suffering until a proper solution can be implemented.

My one concern is with the aspect of accessibility. I strongly believe that any daytime services need to be located in an area that is accessible to those they are seeking to serve. This would clearly be Downtown Guelph. Restricting the areas to be considered for service provision means limiting options before they are even explored. Furthermore, providing the services in an area that is unaccessible for the people requiring it (such as out of the downtown) would be nullifying the benefits of the services outright. It would self-contradictory.

My other concern is with the perception that the presence of Social Services and the people that access them are somehow at odds with the ability of other citizens of Guelph to conduct business successfully, specifically in the Downtown. I am at a loss to understand some of the statements I have heard regarding this supposed problem – how does the proximity of a not-for-profit service adversely affect the functioning of a for-profit business? And even if it could be demonstrated that it did then why would the solution be to prioritize the business over the service?

Based on statements I have heard and read my best guess is that the presence of people who require social support somehow interferes with stores and restaurants selling their wares to customers. Unless the people needing support are physically preventing staff and customers from conducting business (which would surely be a police issue?) then I can only guess that customers are being dissuaded from attending local businesses because of the presence of people who need help.

This is rank discrimination. Being uncomfortable around people who dress differently, behave differently, use different substances than you (caffeine and alcohol use is clearly welcomed in the Downtown) is prejudice, full stop. The right to conduct business does not supersede the right to be safe, fed, sheltered and cared for. Positioning them as somehow in opposition to each other is divisive. To business owners who find the presence of people in need affecting their business I would say 'get better at doing business'. If they are losing customers because their customers are uncomfortable with the proximity of people in need I would say 'find less prejudiced customers'. Implicitly restricting access to an area based on one's ability to buy or sell things with or for money is one step removed from explicitly restricting access to an area based on the amount in a person's bank account. This is not the Downtown I want for Guelph.

Again, my heartfelt thanks to the Council for all the work put in towards making Daytime Services a reality. Beyond my stated concerns I am extremely optimistic about the good this will do for our community.

Daniel Ksenych