

Re: Special City Council - Budget Wednesday, October 29, 2025

October 24, 2025

To Mayor Guthrie and Members of Council,

My name is Andrea Bidgood, and I'm honored to serve as Guelph's first Bicycle Mayor, proudly connected through the international BYCS network.



I'm writing as a Guelph resident and Community Advocate for Safe, Inclusive Mobility. I believe in fiscal responsibility — but not when it's achieved by taking the most from those already doing the most with the least.

These cuts won't fall evenly. They will hit hardest for residents who rely on affordable, safe, and accessible ways to get to work, medical appointments, and groceries — our essentials.

When winter routes disappear or programs are deferred, it's not just a policy shift, it's a signal about whose safety and access matter. You're asking people who have already adapted, compromised, and stretched to their limits to stretch even further. We're not asking for luxuries; we're asking for the basics and the ability to move through our city safely.

The proposed reductions: ending winter snow removal for on-street bike lanes (\$650k), cutting Active Transportation programming (\$254k), and deferring the Pedestrian Master Plan (\$250k); may appear to save dollars in the short term, but they undermine safety, equity, accessibility, and Guelph's climate and road-safety commitments.

Public Sentiment & Accountability

The public conversation around this budget has been far from unanimous. While many residents appreciate a 3.17% tax increase target, others are asking *what was sacrificed* to get there.

On the City's official Facebook post announcing the Draft Budget, commenters questioned why essential services like transit and cycling were being cut while higher-cost departments saw fewer reductions.

Many are asking why affordability is being highlighted only in tax percentages, and not in how those same dollars could actually ease the burden of living here.

Transportation is a household's third-highest cost after housing and food, and for too many residents, including myself, it's the difference between stability and struggle.

When buses run reliably and bike routes are safe year-round, people save hundreds on gas and maintenance, seniors keep their freedom, and workers without cars can reach opportunity without risking their safety.

That is what affordability looks like; investing those dollars so people can move, work, and live without going broke or getting hurt.

The City's own Companion Report acknowledges that the "budget is tighter than ever" and contingency reserves remain "well below targets" — between 15–20% of approved goals. That scarcity is now being downloaded onto residents who can least absorb it.

Public support exists for prudent budgeting, but not for choices that make daily life harder for those without cars or savings to fall back on.

If the goal is to make life more affordable, this budget should be removing barriers — not building them.

Council's Dilemma & Leadership Opportunity

The budget meeting will test whether Guelph's Vision Zero and climate commitments are more than words. Councillor Phil Allt has already raised concern about how service reduction and deferral of cycling and active transportation programs contradict the City's Strategic Plan.

Under the Strong Mayor system, the Mayor can veto amendments that push beyond the 3.17% tax target, unless two-thirds of Council vote to override.

That makes this moment about political courage. Council must decide whether to defend short-term optics or long-term outcomes.

Leadership isn't found in the easiest cuts, we can show it in our willingness to protect what matters: people's safety, access, and trust in public institutions.

Why These Reductions Hurt More Than They Help

Safety & Legal Compliance

Public safety and legal compliance are not optional line items — they are statutory obligations and moral duties. These proposed service reductions directly undermine both.

Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS): Municipal Act Obligations

If a municipality keeps a road, bike lane, or pathway open to the public, it is required under Ontario's Minimum Maintenance Standards to maintain it to a defined standard of safety.

That includes snow and ice clearance thresholds, response times, and record-keeping requirements.

Declaring a “significant weather event” does not suspend these obligations, it merely pauses the clock. Once the declaration ends, the clock restarts.

If the City intends to remove maintenance from an open corridor, it must formally close that corridor and clearly sign and communicate the closure. Without that, the City remains liable for any resulting collisions or injuries.

Failing to meet these standards has real financial and legal consequences. Ontario case law has repeatedly found municipalities liable where reasonable maintenance was not performed, even during resource constraints.

In short: if the City leaves lanes unmaintained but still open, it inherits full responsibility for every resulting harm. These “savings” could be eclipsed by insurance claims.

Accessibility Law: AODA and Human Rights Compliance

Under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), municipalities are required to maintain accessible elements of public spaces and manage temporary disruptions through public notice and alternative access routes.

Ending winter maintenance on key cycling corridors — many of which serve as accessible routes for mobility-device users and pedestrians — sanctioned or not — creates prolonged barriers.

It directly conflicts with the principles outlined in Guelph’s Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and Equity & Anti-Racism Action Plan, both of which commit the City to proactively reduce systemic barriers to movement and participation.

It’s a contradiction of the City’s stated values.

When we shut down the only accessible winter corridors for people using scooters, mobility devices, or bikes, we are effectively telling those residents: your access is seasonal, your safety negotiable, and your independence expendable.

Reputational and Financial Risk

Beyond legal exposure, there is a reputational and fiscal cost.

A City that frames itself as “inclusive and climate-forward” cannot afford to be seen breaching accessibility law or creating safety hazards for budget optics.

Every council term includes unplanned incidents — collisions, accessibility complaints, or tribunal cases. When budgets strip away the preventative layer, those incidents become predictable and indefensible.

Cutting maintenance is not a neutral budget adjustment — it is a transfer of risk from the City’s balance sheet onto its residents’ bodies and mobility.

False Economy

What looks like savings on paper can cost more in the long run: more collisions, more insurance claims, and more residents forced back into cars — increasing congestion, emissions, and road wear.

Winter operations already have fixed costs; scaling back only spreads those costs less efficiently.

Program Deferrals = Progress Delays

- **Active Transportation Programming (-\$254 k):**
Funds the “lowest-cost multipliers” — school travel planning, education, and data collection that make infrastructure effective. Cutting it slows progress on mode shift and community safety.
- **Pedestrian Master Plan Deferral (-\$250 k):**
Stalls upgrades most likely to prevent harm — crosswalks, curb ramps, and school-zone safety improvements.

Strategic and Climate Misalignment

Guelph has pledged to reduce emissions 63% by 2030 and achieve net-zero by 2050. Transportation accounts for roughly 31% of community emissions.

Eliminating winter cycling and slowing pedestrian upgrades directly contradict those commitments.

Even the City’s own budget notes that these cuts will “*slow progress on modal shift and environmental objectives.*”

If we are serious about climate action and affordability, investing in public and active transportation is not optional—it's essential.

Economic & Fiscal Responsibility

Strong transit and cycling infrastructure aren't costs; they're investments that deliver long-term returns through productivity, health, and reduced congestion. Every dollar spent on transit can generate several in economic benefit through increased reliability, job access, and lower road maintenance needs.

"Affordability" means helping residents spend *less* on transportation overall, not saving a few tax dollars while forcing people back into cars.

Alternatives & Solutions

Rather than weakening core mobility, Council could:

- Re-examine higher-growth department budgets (e.g., policing or administrative overhead) for fractional trims.
- Expand user-pay models like parking fees or congestion surcharges to fund sustainable mobility.
- Protect the Transportation Reserve Fund from erosion if Automated Speed Enforcement revenue is reduced.
- Prioritize cuts that don't compromise accessibility, safety, or compliance.

Recent Wins Worth Protecting

Guelph's recent progress shows what's possible when the City invests with intention:

- **College Avenue Protected Bike Lanes:** Phase 1 complete; Phase 2 under construction for Q3 2026.
- **Emma/Earl Pedestrian Bridge:** Nearing completion.
- **G2G Trail Connection (\$128k):** Closing the gap between Woodlawn and Silvercreek.
- **Rural-to-Core Bikeway (\$1.4M grant):** Linking Woodlawn Road to Downtown.

- **Youth & Seniors Ride Free:** Making inclusion tangible and real.

Let's not lose momentum now.

These cuts don't reflect Guelph's values or vision.

They make our city less safe, less accessible, and less prepared for the future.

I urge Council to reconsider and protect the essential services that keep Guelph moving—safely, equitably, and sustainably.

Thank you for your time and your continued leadership on building a city where everyone can move freely, safely, and affordably—year-round.

Thank you.

In motion and solidarity,

Andrea Bidgood

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The role of Bicycle Mayor was inaugurated in 2016 by BYCS, an Amsterdam-based social enterprise, to break silos between government and civil society when promoting cycling for transportation and amplify the voices of community leaders in this effort. As interest in the position grew, a network was born in order to encourage collaboration, transnational solidarity, and to share common challenges & solutions on a global scale. As part of the network, Bicycle Mayors receive resources and training as well as opportunities to learn from and collaborate with other Bicycle Mayors. The network itself combines the voices, experiences, and efforts of the Bicycle Mayors to advocate for progress in cycling at a global level including calls-to-action to international organizations. BYCS works internationally with civil society, governments, nonprofits and businesses to initiate and scale breakthrough ideas around cycling. In particular, the organization focuses on strengthening the “human infrastructure” of cycling cities by supporting community initiatives, developing a culture of active transportation and inspiring new citizens to take up the bicycle for daily trips.

For more information, visit www.bycs.org