

Mayor and City Council
City of Guelph
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Dear Mayor Guthrie and Council

If a person suffers from serious heart disease, they could die. Cities too can lose their hearts and fall into decay and eventually die. In the past decades, many small cities have suffered a similar fate. In Guelph, we must be always aware of decisions that may kill our city's heart.

Over the next two years as Guelph reaches its 200th birthday, we must be on the alert to assure that its heart remains healthy and attractive to both citizens and visitors.

Plans are underway to revitalize the downtown with the repair and renovation of Wyndham Street and St. George's Square, two key areas that could bring new life to the heart of downtown Guelph. In a recent speech to a Ward Five Town Hall, Mayor Guthrie enthusiastically exhorted citizens to support downtown merchants, to attend downtown events and to visit downtown attractions.

However, two items in a recent draft of his strong Mayor's budget will undermine much of the attraction of downtown Guelph to residents and to visitors alike. The line item was as follows:

Reduction in Market Square and Civic Events programming, including the removal of Movies in the Park, the City's Doors Open and Culture Days programming and the Artist in Residence program, approximate amount \$200,000.

Since that draft, Mayor Guthrie assured me that he had reconsidered that reduction and that the funding for those items had been restored – BUT – not guaranteed.

I also understand that he had made a reduction of \$300,000 in the money allocated to the Bicentennial celebrations. I am a member of the Bicentennial working group and know for sure that reduction would seriously threaten plans for the 2027 year of Guelph's significant birthday.

These two reductions would seriously jeopardize any hoped-for revival of Guelph's heart – not only its economy, its heritage downtown and its cultural health, but also its citizen engagement and community group's involvement in our city.

- For example, over its 22 years, Doors Open Guelph has attracted more than 100,000 visitors to our city's homes, schools, businesses and public buildings. Each year, more than 100 volunteers help with planning for and hosting those visitors. Over those years, 40% of those DOG visitors have been from out of town.
- The Guelph Civic Museum and other downtown events have provided **free** cultural and heritage programming to parents and children in Guelph, programming that would be unaffordable to many if that funding were removed.
- The Bicentennial will involve many community groups from all different areas of interest: sports teams, music groups big and small, businesses, arts groups like the Guelph Little Theatre and Guelph Storytellers.

Removing the funding from these events will take the heart out of Guelph and remove extensive opportunities for access to free events for many Guelph citizens and their children, as well as destroying many of the attractions and activities that attract visitors to our city.

My ask in this letter as you deliberate on these proposed budget cuts?

Reject these budget cut proposals in the Strong Mayor budget and restore the money to the budget that could help restore the health of our city, its citizens and its visitors.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Ratcliffe