

**June 11 2024**  
**Ingrid Ohls**

**Attention Members of The Corporation of the County of Wellington Joint Social Services and Land Ambulance Committee,**

Good afternoon and thank you for your time today. My name is Ingrid Ohls, I am a member of the Guelph Tiny Home coalition. I have been unhoused myself, and I also work as a frontline worker. I am most importantly a concerned community member. As a coalition we are individuals who have come together to form a competent and caring initiative to help folks stabilize and survive the upcoming winter. I have the lived experience to speak on what it is like and know many amazing folks who are without a home and speak with them frequently.

When you are without a home, the world is a very cold and lonely place. Every day is another day spent in survival mode, with no phone, limited access to a device which means making it to an appointment, let alone seeking assistance for health care services or mental health or substance use is almost impossible to do. The trauma that is caused by the cold, the dark, the unsafe predicaments as a woman I had put myself in still, at times, haunt me to this day. The only feelings I remember feeling were guilt, shame, hopelessness and fear. It is just a constant state of survival mode, every day is a battle that you try to make it through.

The precariousness and unsafe circumstances I faced is nothing in comparison to what our unhoused community members face now. We are dealing with a toxic drug supply, minimal places for folks to go, a housing crisis, cost increases in every area of our lives, and mental health issues. We have support services working tirelessly to attend to all encampments and care for all of our folks and the need and demand is growing everyday.

To solve the issues our community is facing, there can't be a system or solution that is one size fits all. This is such a nuanced issue, we need to think outside the box to help people to stabilize, take some deep breaths and start their healing journey. I have seen people who have a roof over their head be able to focus on something other than surviving and the change is always overwhelmingly positive. The Tiny Home Community Model can be part of the Housing Continuum and serve folks who may not be ready for the Permanent Supportive Model quite yet. Supportive Housing in our community is exciting and is going to help many people and I am so excited to see more places open in the future, peoples live will be changed by this. Yet we need to remember that winter is around the corner and the housing opening up is not enough.

With the Tiny Home Model there can be support services working together, building relationships and gaining trust with folks who are apprehensive of such services. The trauma cause by some experiences in the health care and social service realms growing up, or as an adult make a lot of individuals very cautious in even speaking with these workers. The Tiny Home Community can create a safe place for people to feel at ease with Support Services over time, slowly building trusting relationships with them to help them ready themselves to find more permanent housing options. This timeframe is unique to everyone, and we need to acknowledge that some folks may need more time to get out of pure survival mode and start to seek support and resources to care for other concerns they may have. A compassionate, caring and understanding environment, where one can feel accountability, with a small space to call their own is the perfect starting point in their journey.

People who have pets cannot bring their animals into the shelter and couples are separated. Since there is only one emergency shelter in Guelph, folks who have had issues with individuals that are at the shelter have no place to sleep when avoiding those people. You carry everything on your back, and you must leave in the morning in hopes that you will make it in time to get a bed again the next night. Service restrictions happen and in any service are necessary to keep clients and staff safe, but when a restriction is in place there is no other option for the individual, leaving them on the cold streets. With a Tiny Home Community, we can house some of the individuals who come to the shelter, and we can try to relieve the growing number of people they are assisting. An entire community working together to focus on the best care and support for our unhoused neighbours is possible. There is a space for the Tiny Home Community in our Housing Continuum where all services and organizations can work together to provide the best care possible.

My understanding is that the last PIT count was completed in 2021 and the numbers of unhoused individuals has grown dramatically since this time. We need to remember that since then, 90 Carden has closed, and many tenants and folks that stayed with tenants are now unhoused. Even with the count done in 2021 there are individuals who would refuse to answer questions for many different reasons (unease with questions asked, apprehension, and people not trusting services.) The numbers were low to begin with, and they have and will continue to grow dramatically and as a community we need to do all we can to get individuals out of the cold.

Yes, there are more housing options coming online, and that is such exciting and wonderful news for our community, but it is far from enough. The bottom line is there will be many people in the cold this year. That should be enough of a reason for such a privileged community to do something but people in tents in the cold is not the only issue. There will be 911 calls, there will be frostbite, burns, illness and death. There will be emergency room visits for these ailments. The Guelph Tiny Home can give the

opportunity to help folks stabilize, take a deep breath, start to heal while easing a system with such significant demands.

This problem is not going away, and people are suffering. We are a capable, competent group of people who are willing to put in the work and do what is necessary to help folks. As a community in a whole, we can all work together to show each community member they are cared for, and they matter. As a community working together, we can be the change that vulnerable people need and deserve.

Thank You,

Ingrid Ohls