

Corporation of the County of Wellington
Social Services Committee

July 20, 2022

Dear Members of the Social Services Committee,

Re: Special Meeting, July 21

Partner organizations of the WGDS work together to reduce the harms related to substance use in our community, and we take action to address substance-related issues. Collectively, our partner organizations have been facing unprecedented challenges in supporting their clients, many of whom are experiencing:

- Decreased availability of affordable shelter options, and soaring rental costs
- Stagnant social assistance funding which does not meet market conditions
- Ongoing concerns related to Covid-19 about the safety of congregate settings
- Increased toxicity of substances purchased on the unregulated market leading to ever-present risks of drug poisoning
- Working within a service framework that was not designed to meet widespread urgent need.

By working together through a Strategic Advisory Group on Downtown Issues, the City and County can provide much needed backbone support and co-ordination to redesign services to meet current client needs. This new body can provide resources such as:

1. Personnel to support the project-based work service providers need to redesign services to meet current needs.
2. Oversight and evaluation of service re-design by integrating quality improvement, PDSA-type processes to ensure service redesign is successful in meeting identified needs, targets and outcomes.
3. Ensuring the consumer voice is built into the redesign process at all stages of the work.

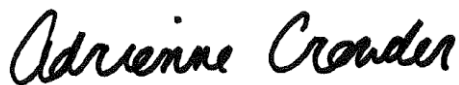
The County has every reason to believe that it can be a leader in setting up successful new services. Over the last two years it has been intimately involved in creating three new Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) projects. This has been a truly remarkable achievement.

The same skills and processes that were crucial to the success of these PSH projects now need to be redeployed to meet the needs of other sectors of our community who are experiencing ongoing hardship. The successful precedents that we can now draw from to generate successful outcomes include:

- Private/public partnerships
- Organizational champions leading specific projects
- Involvement of all levels of government (elected officials and staff) to access political and funding support
- Projects targeted to meet specific health and social needs which have widespread community support
- Dedicated personnel to support project development.

The Drug Strategy appreciates the responsiveness of the County Social Service Committee in calling a Special Meeting to address the current urgent needs in our community and offers its support in generating initiatives to respond to them.

Sincerely,



Adrienne Crowder
Manager, WGDS

July 20, 2022.

To the members of the Special Social Services Committee,

We are writing to you from the perspective of community based organizations who, through many integrated programs, provide primary care and mental health and addictions support to people experiencing homelessness and people struggling to maintain housing in the downtown core. We have longstanding partnerships with the City of Guelph, County of Wellington and many service providers that have led to enhanced programs and services that meet known gaps in the system. One of these programs is Permanent Supportive Housing. Through partnership, collaboration, and support we have worked with the City, County, multiple levels of government, and service organizations to bring this dream to a reality.

We also know that Permanent Supportive Housing is not the answer to homelessness for everyone. We must now turn our attention to complex issues that are happening in our downtown core and continue to work together to develop a system-level plan and meaningful response. No one funder or organization can address these issues alone. It is in this spirit of continued partnership and collaboration that we bring the following gaps in our system to your attention:

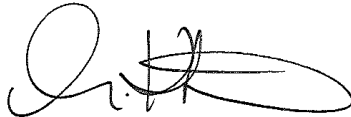
Gap #1: Emergency Shelter Options: We require more than one emergency shelter option in our community. Community members deserve choice and options based on their varied needs, preferences, and circumstances. We would like to highlight one option in particular: structured encampments, which is an evidence-based option on a robust housing continuum that our community should consider (i.e. [A Better Tent City](#)).

Gap #2: Day-time Spaces: We need additional options for day-time spaces in the downtown core, and an infusion of funding to ensure that the services and supports people require are available to them. These services include housing-focused workers dedicated to this population as well as outreach and social work.

Gap #3: Voice of Lived Experience: We MUST centre the voice of people with lived experience in this work. This means including people with lived experience at all tables, especially where and when decisions are made. Their voice will support the development of plans that start from a place of harm reduction and understanding people's needs, rather than seeing people as a problem to be solved.

While we have much to celebrate in terms of progress in our community, we must also acknowledge that the needs of many community members are not being met in the current system and they deserve better. Homelessness is a system failure, and we are all part of the system, which means that we have the influence and ability to redesign the system **WITH** the people it is intended to serve. **Doing nothing is not an option.** We have shown that together, we can build the system with success in our community, and we are committed to continuing to work together with the City of Guelph, County of Wellington and all service providers to make positive change happen quickly in our community.

In partnership,



Melissa Kwiatkowski, MPH MHA
Interim Chief Executive Officer
Guelph Community Health Centre



Kristin Kerr, MSW, RSW
Executive Director
Stonehenge Therapeutic Community

City of Guelph motions passed at their July 4 Council meeting:

Urgent Issues Related to Homelessness, Mental Health and Addictions

1. That City Council respectfully requests quarterly updates from the County on the provision of social services with a focus on homelessness, addiction and mental health issues, including performance reporting and key performance indicators.
2. That City Council endorse the Ontario's Big City Mayors call for "an emergency meeting with the Province to address the chronic homelessness, mental health, safety, and addictions crisis" in our communities.
3. That City Council advocate to the Province in support of immediately raising Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program social assistance rates above the poverty line.
4. That City Council urgently requests Wellington County Council to call an emergency meeting to hear from and respond to community social service providers with respect to urgent needs related to homelessness, mental health and addiction issues.
5. That City Council respectfully requests that Wellington County work alongside the City of Guelph and other stakeholders to identify any gaps in the existing shelter system with the goal of 24 hour shelter coverage in the City of Guelph and report back by August 2022 with a plan to achieve 24 hour coverage.
6. That City Council endorse a new sub-committee, Strategic Advisory Group on Downtown Issues, of the Mayor's Taskforce on Homelessness and Community Safety and under the direction of the CAO, that a member of City staff sit on the advisory group for general awareness.
7. That Council use, one-time unused funds, up to \$50,000, from the Mayor and Council training, travel, and conference budget, to be used as recommended by the Strategic Advisory Group on Downtown Issues.



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

AD-22-06

To: Chair and Members of the Social Services Committee
From: Eddie Alton, Social Services Administrator
Date: Thursday, July 21, 2022
Subject: Homelessness Issues in Guelph

Background:

As you are aware, the City of Guelph like many other urban municipalities is facing an increase in incidents of inappropriate interactions between individuals in the downtown core and residents, visitors, and businesses. At a meeting chaired by the Mayor on June 10, 2022, attended by the County, the downtown businesses expressed concerns around the well-being of these individuals as well as the negative impacts it was having on their businesses. Numerous community partners were in attendance, sharing information on their mandates and the work that is being done.

It is important to clarify that these vulnerable members of our community who are downtown Guelph are not all experiencing homelessness, in fact, many stay at the shelter or are housed. In a small survey conducted in 2021, the main reasons why people came downtown were: food insecurity, seek out assistance/services, socialize/spend time with friends and volunteer/work. Royal City has indicated that from January to June 2022, they have had appropriately 860 unique individuals access services from them and that anywhere from 120 to 170 unique individuals a day access their services. In May of 2022, there were 131 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with about a third sleeping rough and precariously housed illustrating that a significant portion of the individuals accessing the service at Royal City are not homeless.

On July 4, 2022 the City of Guelph held a Committee of the Whole Meeting, where various motions were presented to Council to help address some of the issues taking place. At that meeting, the City passed the following motions that make reference to the County:

Motion: That the County provide quarterly updates on the provision of social services with a focus on homelessness, addiction and mental health issues, including performance reporting and key performance indicators.

Quarterly reporting on homelessness can be added as a regular report to the County's Social Services Committee and be shared with the City. However, County staff do not provide mental health and addiction services to clients. The County makes referrals to other agencies and community partners whose mandate it is to provide this service. Therefore, the City should reach out to mental health and addictions partners to request this information.

Motion: That County Council call an emergency meeting to hear from and respond to community social services providers with respect to urgent needs related to homelessness, mental health and addiction issues.

County staff attended a meeting on June 20, 2022, chaired by the Mayor and including the members of the Supportive Housing Task Force. During the meeting, updates from various community partners were provided on what was being done to address the lack of supportive housing. It is important to note that in late 2022 and 2023, 72 to 100 new units of supportive housing will be created.

Grace Gardens	32 units	Under Construction
Kindle	32 units	Construction will be starting 2022
Wyndham House	8 units	Under Construction
Delhi	28 units	Awaiting the results of the hearing

We continually meet with community partners and some agencies have made presentations to the County on the work being done and the gaps. In addition, the County hosts and attends over seven different weekly, bi-weekly and monthly meetings dealing with needs of individuals at risk or experiencing homelessness. The purpose of these meetings is to build our community collaborative response to homelessness in our community.

Motion: That the County work alongside the City and other stakeholders to identify any gaps in the existing shelter system with the goal of 24-hour shelter coverage in the City and report back by August 2022 with a plan to achieve 24-hour coverage.

There currently are 24-hour shelters options in Guelph with staff on site to provide support to the residents as well as a 12-hour overnight space in the downtown core. As you can appreciate, the individuals in the shelter can come and go as they please as they are members of the community. Throughout the pandemic the County has increased shelter spaces by 35%. The funding to support the 24/7 coverage, the 12-hour overnight space, and one temporary shelter location is provided by other levels of government at this time, but the COVID funding may be discontinued, and this may require local taxpayers funding to support this model going forward. Historically, the vast majority of emergency shelter system users are from the City. The current split on the usage is approximately 91% City with the remainder being County residents.

Here are a few of the gaps we have identified that would need to be addressed:

Gap: Need for more mental health and addictions supports both in the community and the shelter system. Staff and partners have routinely identified clinical support gaps within the community including the shelter system. We are aware that CMHA has prepared a proposal in conjunction with other service providers for expanded funding and has submitted it to the Ministry of Health and if required CMHA could provide more clarification. We propose a shared community approach to this advocacy work with our partners.

Gap: Need for more supportive and transitional housing for individuals. Would have to apply for funding from other levels of government but could require a substantial local contribution. For instance to support a temporary shelter location the contribution could be as much as \$7,500,000 for capital and annual operating costs of approximately \$650,000 for staffing and \$135,000 for food insecurity that could house approximately 48 individuals.

Gap: Need for enhanced multi-disciplinary housing focused downtown outreach support which would require additional funding from other levels of government or local taxpayers. There are other gaps that would need to be identified and addressed depending on the direction taken to address these issues.

The following motion has been shared that could be approved addressing some of the concerns identified above:

Motion to Request that the Province of Ontario Immediately Increase Capital and Operating Investments in Affordable and Supportive Housing to Mitigate Homelessness

Whereas homelessness in Ontario is on the rise; and

Whereas the Province of Ontario has released More Homes More Choice, Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan; and

Whereas the Province of Ontario has released Ontario's Community Housing Renewal Strategy; and

Whereas Ontario's housing action plans do not address the need for supportive housing; and

Whereas Ontario's most vulnerable populations require access to supports to maintain their housing and their health; and

Whereas the absence of permanent housing with adequate onsite supports is a key driver of homelessness and recidivism to homelessness; and

Whereas the Province of Ontario requires municipal Service Managers to collect detailed, up-to-date information from individuals experiencing homelessness through the use of by-name-lists; and

Whereas the Province of Ontario identifies the use of by-name lists as an innovative approach to help connect people with local housing and homelessness supports that better respond to their needs and improve access to supportive housing; and

Whereas municipalities and Service Managers are stretching beyond their funded limits and mandates to provide supportive housing in their communities.

Now Therefore Be It Resolved That The County of Wellington in the Province of Ontario acknowledge the need for immediate action and flow capital and operating funding to municipalities and Service Managers in Ontario to lead the development of critical supportive housing programmes.

Recommendation:

That the Homelessness Issues in Guelph Report AD-22-06 be received for information.

Respectfully submitted,

Eddie Alton

Eddie Alton
Social Services Administrator