

GUELPH NEEDS MORE EQUAL ACCESS TO PUBLIC SPACES

Municipal elections are a time for citizens to influence the future of the City. City plans, policies and services are not neutral. They impact different residents differently. Being aware of different impacts is an important part of developing policies that account for these differences. This factsheet¹ is about public space, and about how we can make public spaces in Guelph more accessible for all if we think more about the diverse experiences of Guelphites when we plan and create public spaces.

Why Do We Need an Inclusive Approach to Public Spaces?

Public spaces are things like buildings, parks and other outdoor spaces, and public transit. Municipal decisions about these things should consider the needs of diverse residents.

- *Buildings*: How accessible buildings are affects who can work in them, who can visit them, and how safe people are in and around them. For example, limited access to public washrooms is an issue for many residents experiencing a range of health conditions.² Safety from discrimination – especially for people who are transgender – is another concern.³
- *Outdoor spaces*: We all benefit from having access to outdoor space for recreation. Those of us who cannot afford the cost of memberships, entrance fees, or recreational equipment particularly benefit from free quality parkland, trails, and playgrounds. These are places to gather with others, to be active, and to connect with nature.
- *Transportation*: Roads and sidewalks serve people who travel in diverse ways: on foot, by bike, or in strollers, vehicles, or wheelchairs. For instance, some of us rely heavily on public transit to get to work, school, childcare, and appointments; run errands; connect with friends and family; *and* get home safely after dark. This means that where and how often buses run, for example, impacts people differently.

GUELPH MUNICIPAL ELECTION

October 22, 2018

<https://vote.guelph.ca>

How Are We Approaching Public Spaces in Guelph?

Guelph's *Official Plan*⁴ makes commitments to creating inclusive public spaces:

- *Buildings*: "Provide an appropriate supply and distribution of community facilities to meet the social, health and education needs of existing and future residents in a manner that maximizes accessibility".
- *Outdoor spaces*: "Ensure an accessible, connected open space, park and trail system and sustainable network of recreational facilities necessary to promote a physically active and healthy community that meets resident needs for active and passive recreation activities".
- *Transportation*: "Develop a safe, efficient and sustainable transportation system that provides for all modes of travel including cycling and walking to support sustainable land use...".

These are good commitments, but we can do better at ensuring equitable and inclusive access to buildings, outdoor spaces, and transportation across Guelph. For example:

- *Buildings*: A recent report about immigrants' experiences in our region, which drew on survey results from nearly 200 immigrants, reported that 34 percent of immigrants do not have access to space for cultural events.⁵ Access to public washrooms is an ongoing concern.⁶
- *Outdoor spaces*: Our City's *Vital Signs* report found that families with incomes below \$40,000/year are four times more likely than others to say that cost is a barrier to participating in leisure, culture, and recreation.⁷
- *Transportation*: Also in the recent report about immigrants' experiences in our region, many residents "expressed challenges in accessing health services, including difficulty with transportation" and 47 percent of survey respondents "identified transportation as a barrier to employment".⁸

How Could We Do it Better in Guelph?

We can listen to diverse members of our community when making decisions about the design of buildings, outdoor spaces, and transportation systems. For example:

- *Buildings:* Our *Official Plan* will be reviewed in 2019. In the review, we can encourage inclusive planning. For example, we can ask for adequate spaces suitable for a range of cultural events. We can also ask for clear and explicit commitments to designing public spaces that take into consideration the needs of all people. Resources such as *Creating Authentic Spaces: A Gender Identity and Gender Expression Toolkit*⁹ can help in this regard.
- *Outdoor spaces:* This year our *Recreation, Parks and Culture Strategic Master Plan* is up for review as is the *Parkland Dedication Bylaw*. The review process should include working closely with neighbourhood groups to make sure parks and other outdoor spaces serve lower-income neighbourhoods appropriately.
- *Transportation:* Our *Transportation Master Plan and Transit Growth Strategy* are also up for review this year. This gives us a chance to push for public transit schedules and routes that make it easier for individuals to travel across the city efficiently.

What Can I Do to Promote More Inclusive Public Spaces?

Ask your ward candidate:

- What value do you see in public buildings, outdoor spaces, and transportation?
- How can we make public spaces more equitable and inclusive in this city?
- Where in our ward can you work to improve inclusive access to public spaces?

¹ This is one of three factsheets, produced through a collaboration between the Canadian Federation of University Women - Guelph Chapter and L. Levac at the University of Guelph. They were written and revised by L. McMurtry, B. Ryan, T. McKeeman and L. Levac. We are grateful to all the people who provided us with information, and who are working to make Guelph a safe and fair city for all. We humbly acknowledge our work in the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

² Brubaker, R. and McCreary, C. (2007) US Public Health Mandates and the Restroom Problem in America: A Call to Action. Presentation to the *World Toilet Summit* in Delhi, India. (p. 3). Available at: <https://phlush.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/americanrestroomcalltoactionpaper.pdf>

³ Boyce, P. Transgender-Inclusive Sanitation: Insights from South Asia. *Waterlines*, 37:2. (p. 102). Available at: <https://www.developmentbookshelf.com/doi/abs/10.3362/1756-3488.18-00004>

⁴ City of Guelph. (2018). *Official Plan: March 2018 Consolidation* (p. 10). Available at: <https://guelph.ca/wp-content/uploads/Official-Plan-Consolidation-March-2018.pdf>

⁵ Patel, D, & Henderson, E. (2016). *2016 Guelph-Wellington Immigrant Survey Report*. (p. 22). Available at: <http://www.guelphwellingtonlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/GWLIP-Immigration-Report-final-APPROVED.pdf>

⁶ Suttleworth, Joanne (2015). *Downtown Guelph Still Without Late-Night Washrooms*. Available at: <https://www.guelphmercury.com/news-story/5810869-downtown-guelph-still-without-late-night-washrooms/>

⁷ Guelph & Wellington County. (2018). *Vital Signs*. (p. 21). Available at: <https://www.guelphcf.ca/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=oxM6x3HX8Hw%3d&tabid=100>

⁸ Patel, D, & Henderson, E. (2016). *2016 Guelph-Wellington Immigrant Survey Report*. (p. 28). Available at: <http://www.guelphwellingtonlip.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/GWLIP-Immigration-Report-final-APPROVED.pdf>

⁹ Hixson-Vulpe, J. (n.d.). *Creating Authentic Spaces*. Available at: <http://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/trans-inclusion-matters/creating-authentic-spaces>