



By and large, downtown Guelph is still a great place to work, live, and visit—and hundreds of people do so every day.

We have all seen the visible increase in the number of people downtown who are struggling with homelessness, mental health struggles, addiction, and other challenges.

We can say that we want our downtown to be safe and accessible. However, it is our actions in a time of need that truly demonstrate our willingness to follow through with that ideology.

Last week, one of my company's employees was leaving our downtown office when she was followed and subsequently assaulted and chased by a man exhibiting very threatening behaviour.

What seemed to be a lucky break happened when a staff member leaving work at a nearby store saw the assault and thankfully intervened, buying her some time and space. Terrified, she ran to the front door of the store, seeking safety inside. Unfortunately, the store owner, who was closing up for the evening, was inside watching the situation unfold, closed the door on her and held it shut, while his staff member helped distract the assailant.

Now, there are many people to be commended in this situation: the store employee who intervened, putting himself in harm's way to help protect a visibly shaken victim. The Guelph Police, who ultimately apprehended the assailant in short order, the people in their vehicles drawing attention to the situation by honking their horns and yelling from their cars. As well as Victim Services Wellington, who has checked in on our staff member many times to see how she is managing after her scary ordeal.

However, I am extremely disheartened that a downtown Guelph business owner would neglect to offer their store as shelter for a woman being assaulted in front of their very eyes.

Our downtown is changing. We need more people who will step up and help one another in a time of need. This not only refers to situations like the one our employee faced. It also means offering support toward services that help our downtown people who are facing struggle and despair.

As a long-time owner, operator, and employer in the downtown core, I feel we have a responsibility to do our part to keep each other safe, to protect our staff, our customers and one another. We need to all be prepared and alert, as well as vigilant in our actions.

My hope in sharing this incident is to see the people of downtown Guelph—the people that work, live, shop or do business in the downtown core to consider their actions. That we look out for one another and do the right thing when and if we are called upon. The world needs more compassion, and more everyday heroes – people ready to help one another as good neighbours and simply because it is the right thing to do.

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