

[REDACTED]
London, ON

August 22, 2023

London City Council

Re: Vote on Fireworks By-law

Mayor Morgan and Councillors;

I write to you today to call on you to vote for Option B on fireworks. The health of the people, animals, and the city itself depend on you casting a responsible vote.

Enforcement of the current regulations are non-existent. These need to be increased and better enforced. Currently, when a display is going on, you can't get a live person on the phone. Having one team on to enforce the regulations and fine people would start to show the public that they must abide by the regulations. Wearing seatbelts wasn't always mandatory and some of the same arguments were used to stop that regulation. Those arguments weren't valid then and aren't valid now.

The cost to the environment has been well documented, and I know this material has been presented to you, so I will not belabor it here. However, if London is truly committed to being an environmentally progressive city, reducing the number of fireworks is a piece of that puzzle. In fact, it may be easier if an outright ban is necessary in the future to begin that curtailment now. The fires, such as the \$1 million barn fire that occurred ironically the night before the public consultation on the matter, caused by fireworks also contribute to that environmental footprint. Owning a horse, which I have for over 40 years, means that I have been attuned to such stories, and I can assure you that that barn fire is not an isolated incident.

Let me reiterate to you the cost to the animals trapped in London and surrounding areas, who are forced to endure what amounts to torture for the pleasure of a few. Many animals are affected by fireworks who are not affected by other loud noises. It is often the distinctive whine before the bang that literally causes them pain due to their more sensitive hearing. Having no way to protect themselves and there being no way to explain or warn the animal increases this terror. My own dog, Othello, was never afraid of thunderstorms, but fireworks were a night of terror and agony for him. My horse, Samba, who is interestingly very sensitive to incoming storms, is not upset by thunder or lightening once the storm breaks. He lives virtually next door to a firing range and never bats an eye at the often continually loud bangs. However, during fireworks he is terrified, flinging himself around his stall and desperately trying to get away. I am not surprised at the evidence, also presented to Council, of wild animals being killed by fleeing out into roads and being separated from mothers/offspring.

I am not naïve enough to believe that every person cares as deeply for all living things as I do. For instance, anyone who is ok with an animal being terrorized for a few hours a few days a year, clearly doesn't really care about that animal. Would they say the same for their children, who they claim love their pets? I need only look to the number of animals swelling the animal shelters now that the Pandemic is over and all the covid-pets are being abandoned to realize that many people do not care to the level of even responsible ownership of the animals they can buy.

Because I do care about people as well as animals, I do care about the community that came out to speak in support of Diwali. However, Diwali is a celebration of LIGHT not noise. There was never any

restriction on sparklers, but by their own admission, their current family backyard displays are illegal. They are asking to continue a right that they already had (sparklers) and one they never had (backyard displays). The option for permits for Diwali in Option B satisfies any religious freedom claim by providing a compromise that doesn't impinge on the freedoms of those harmed by fireworks.

I would also like to point out something that Councillors at the Public Participation Meeting were likely unaware of as it occurred in the gallery where I was seated. It was clear that the Fireworks company owners had rallied the Option A group to attend the meeting. They greeted them and thanked them for coming. I know many of these owners of fireworks companies say that this is their sole income. How do they live off of the limited amount of time they are allowed to sell fireworks? This can't amount to more than a few weeks a year.

Finally, I would like to address the cost of fireworks to my own mental and physical health. After I spoke at the public participation meeting, several people essentially brushed aside my comments or stated that my comments weren't valid. I was frankly shocked at the non-professional comments by so-called mental health professionals. I am happy for the people who spoke with PTSD who said that fireworks don't affect them, but I also wonder if the gentleman who is also a licensed pyrotechnician realizes that at least part of his PTSD would be calmed by the fact that he is in complete control of what is happening. In addition, his comments only reinforce the need to have permitted displays. He's exactly the guy that I want putting on these displays in a safe manner.

The Option B side has a very strong following. Unfortunately, their anxiety and PTSD can make it difficult for them to attend public meetings. Unfortunately, many of them had to work at the time of the meeting as they don't sell fireworks for a living.

For myself, I have an anxiety disorder complicated by a hearing disorder. Loud noises in and of themselves do not startle me. A door banging unexpectedly for instance is not a cause of concern and does not trigger an attack. Noise that happens that I cannot control does set off an anxiety attack. I try to remove myself from the source of the noise. This means that I am rarely in the country for Canada Day. If I go to a fireworks display – and I've been to Guy Fawkes in the UK, Bastille Day at the Eiffel Tower, and a wonderful fire, laser, music, and fireworks display at Versailles – I go knowing what will happen and there is no anxiety. However, when noise invades my home in the middle of the night, where can I go? If I am about to go to sleep because I need to get up and work in the morning, what do I do? My anxiety is most like a panic attack. I find it difficult to breath. I feel uncontrollably angry. The only way that I can relieve these feelings is often through self-harm. I have the scars to prove it.

I urge the Council to vote responsibly for all the people of London. Option B does not impinge on the rights of any other Londoners. Please vote for Option B. The health of your city depends upon it.

Sincerely,
Lisa Macklem