

From: Varshil Pathak

Sent: Saturday, August 26, 2023 1:38 PM

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Cc: City of London, Mayor <mayor@london.ca>; CPSC <cpsc@london.ca>; Council Agenda <councilagenda@london.ca>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fireworks By-law PW11: I do NOT support the proposed ban!

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

Namaste!

Thank you for considering the point of view of the Hindu community at the PPM on Aug 15th. We found it to be a very safe and respectful environment. We felt respected and recognized that the CPSC considered our opinions and voted for Option A.

We realize that the decision by Council is not final until the 29th of August. As you prepare to vote, please consider the importance of family-based fireworks during Diwali which is an important ritual of the festival. Our children don't always understand the religious nuances of our traditions until their adulthood, but they easily understand the celebratory aspects such as fireworks, color, music, and dancing. Diwali, for over 2000 years, is the most popular of all Hindu festivals, and is also celebrated by Sikhs and Jains. Banning backyard fireworks will leave a deep scar in these communities and would remove the very essence of Diwali altogether! All our festivals have religion, spirituality, symbolism, and tradition fused into one. Therefore, it is not possible to take one component out and still maintain the essence.

Backyard fireworks are not only enjoyed by the London community during Diwali. We also enjoy them just as much during Canada Day and Victoria Day! We are sensitive to the issue of noise pollution that affects those with PTSD and those with sensitive pets. Our community leaders are already working with the Fire Department and the Police to ensure that we are taking even more steps to educate the community to ensure a safe and respectful experience. Organizations like Hindu Legacy and CNFA have submitted objective reports showing that backyard fireworks do not adversely affect AQI or other critical measures.

The Hindu community's core values are self sufficiency and respect for our environment. We are proud Canadians and Londoners and have fully inculcated our country's core values of diversity and acceptance of others. Hindus are rarely seen in the forefront and prefer to assimilate into society and take care of their affairs. However, backyard fireworks is an issue that affects us deeply and is very personal to our community. There are more than 10,000 Hindus in London and it is a rapidly growing minority.

We know that the current administration is very supportive of multiculturalism. The city needs to respect our rights to make responsible choices (i.e., safe use of fireworks) and not act punitively. They need to review the available data objectively and not make policy changes based on subjective claims.

We are positive that the esteemed Council will take the right decision, keeping the Charter of Rights in mind, to practice our religion in a free and peaceful manner. We urge you to make the right choice and vote for Option A as the bylaw to help us preserve a very important religious tradition in London and continue to support the religious rights of the Hindu Community.

Thank you and Namaste!

p.s. Please share this letter as part of the Council agenda for the Aug 29 meeting.

-- Varshil Pathak