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Option C for Backyard Fireworks?

Dear

Over the past 42 years that I have been a London resident, I have seen an increasing use of and disruption from the consumer use of fireworks.

This increased use contravenes the existing by-law restrictions wrt both duration and frequency, as city residents set off fireworks outside of Victoria Day and Canada Day, and beyond the 11pm cutoff time.

Further expansion of this bylaw to include Diwali celebrations (which is 5 days in duration) would more than triple the present permitted number of days of consumer fireworks.

I grew up with backyard fireworks so I know how magical they can be... But I also grew up with no car seats, bike helmets or seatbelts.

Our awareness of safety for both ourselves and our surroundings has improved over those intervening decades.

Simply said, once you know better, do better.

Fortunately, many of those safety improvements are now enshrined in both law and public conscience.

Wrt the safety issue of fireworks, I will not attempt to provide much scientific evidence beyond what was submitted to the recent PPM of the CPSC on August 15, 2023.

However please find below a short video by Gwen O'Sullivan, professor of environmental sciences at Mount Royal University in Calgary regarding the long-term effects on health and the environment of repeated use of fireworks.

Point 1:

<https://youtu.be/3oPSSfAcRQw?si=aR5hprzx8mBZHO-z>

Bottom line: What goes up most come down... Which means that the toxic chemicals released by fireworks pollute the air and then settle into the soil.

Our own Colin Butler of CBC London News recently published an article on August 15, 2023 detailing the negative air quality effects of fireworks, akin to that produced by wildfire smoke:

Point 2:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/fireworks-ban-london-ontario-1.6934354>

Wrt the case presented by the Hindu faith community that denial of backyard fireworks during Diwali is a contravention of Section 2(a) Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

Point 3:

A challenge to Section 2a of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms still requires a Section 1 review.

The current prohibition on consumer fireworks is based on public safety.

As a result, the above challenge would fail Section 1 scrutiny due to both public safety priority and the harm caused by fireworks.

Point 4:

As melodramatic as this sounds, our world is on fire... largely due to climate change and other human interferences with our environment, e.g. natural firebreaks such as wetlands being reclaimed for development.

Five years ago, London stepped up to the plate and signed a climate emergency declaration.

Backyard fireworks add to the climate crisis burden, via the direct fire devastation they can cause, as well as the release of toxic chemicals into the air, water and soil.

When outdoor fires are banned or discouraged in our city because of the real and growing incidents of fires affecting both rural and urban areas, how can we concurrently support the use of other incendiaries like fireworks?

Case in point:

A fireworks-related barn fire east of St. Thomas on August 14th caused 1 million dollars in damage.

Not only was there significant financial devastation, but every fire puts first responders at risk, not to mention the public, their homes and businesses and any flora and fauna in the vicinity.

Increasing climate change increases fire risk.

As a result of London's commitment to act on climate change, a CEST assessment is requested to further inform Council's decision on the use of backyard fireworks.

Point 5:

Diwali is an integral part of the Hindu community.

It includes the use of fireworks, once they were created centuries ago.

Prior to that, oil lamps called Diya's were the traditional way this Festival of Lights was celebrated.

In order to provide the respect that all faiths and cultures in this city are due, how do we balance these practices and community well-being?

Can a public display of fireworks be permitted for one day during Diwali, vs consumer displays for several days?

This could be considered **Option C**.

My understanding is that Diwali celebrations must occur in a home setting and not a community based one but I'm hoping there may be room for compromise.

Please note that other longstanding cultural/faith practices have had to be modified to fit modern times, for legal, safety and/or humane reasons.

Point 6:

Council has a responsibility to address the fallout from fireworks: Potential fire damage, health issues, environmental impacts and trauma to both humans and other animals (domestic and wild).

My mother's home burned to the ground when she was 18.

Her entire family was at home when fire broke out and they thankfully made it out alive, some of them by jumping out of windows.

They lost everything.

The fire wasn't caused by fireworks, but I still saw the aftermath of the trauma and loss it caused.

Why increase these risks of fire to your constituents?

With recent and ongoing devastation caused by forest fires both nationally and internationally, why would we want to increase those risks and ensuing harms?

There are more responsible and evidence-based ways to ensure public safety.

Final Point:

These issues require further Council consideration to ensure the safety and well-being of the community and environment as well as respecting the traditions of Diwali.

Option B echoes the recent decision by Woodstock, Ontario to ban the sale and use of fireworks due to similar concerns.

This may serve as a precedent for Council to investigate how we can strike a balance between cultural practices and community well-being.

In conclusion, I urge London City Council to more thoroughly evaluate a ban on backyard fireworks, with an eye towards a possible compromise by adding a public display option for Diwali.

A approach that balances cultural needs with environmental and public health concerns would be a testament to the city's commitment to diversity and inclusivity.

I hope that Council will engage in meaningful dialogue to find a solution that respects the rights of the community while ensuring the overall welfare of the city.

Thank you for your time and consideration in weighing this issue for all stakeholders.