

**From:** Chinmaya Mission London <hello@chinmayalondon.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 28, 2024 7:47 AM  
**To:** CML Board London, Council Agenda <councilagenda@london.ca>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Fireworks By-law letter to Council - April 2 Meeting

**March 27, 2024**

**London, Ontario**

**Fireworks By-law PW11: I do not support removing Diwali from the allowed days.**

Honorable Mayor and City Council Members,

Namaste from Chinmaya Mission London.

**Chinmaya Mission London**, is a registered Hindu religious organization, founded in 2011 and a registered charity in Canada. We are part of a worldwide mission with over 350 centres around the world, engaging in imparting Hindu education to children and adults. In London we run classes on Sundays for children and classes for adults throughout the week in addition to organizing special events, retreats, summer and spring camps etc. We have over 150 students at our centre in London, who study Hinduism and its scriptures every weekend. As a Hindu religious organization in London, promoting and teaching Hinduism to preserve its traditions and culture is integral to our existence. This includes the celebration of our ancient festivals. To learn more about us, please visit <https://www.chinmayalondon.org/>

On behalf of Chinmaya Mission London, I am writing to you with concern regarding the recent vote of the CPSC committee against the recommendation from 2023 to allow Diwali and Chinese New Year backyard fireworks in London. We would like to go on formal record that we have grave concerns on the city's vacillating position on a critical religious issue. In August 2023, London City Council voted 10-5 in favor of allowing backyard fireworks for Canada Day, Victoria Day, Diwali, and Chinese Lunar New Year. The whole process leading up to this vote was fair and democratic, backed by objective data. Now, we are very disappointed to learn that the CPSC has voted against the addition of Diwali and Chinese New Year to bylaw PW11.

Diwali is a Hindu festival that dates back 2,000 years. During Diwali, backyard fireworks are essential to complete our Diwali rituals and celebration. Backyard fireworks, along with other rituals, food, family, and friends all make Diwali such a joyous and rich tradition of the Hindu diaspora all over the world. Last year, we made additional efforts to promote awareness of safe practices through social media and at our events. We continue to promote and educate our communities to follow fire department guidelines and practice safe fireworks!

However, today, once again, we are asking that the City Council not kill this age-old tradition and preserve the smiles of a community that is over 10,000 strong in London (and growing). The ban on fireworks will deeply scar the Hindu community and create a feeling of alienation and loss of religious freedom. It will also create a sense of loss of democracy where a few individuals are allowed to use their influence to undermine our ability to positively and joyously celebrate a major religious event.

**We see this as**

- Infringement on the religious rights and freedom of Hindus in London

- Denial of an important ritual from a family centric ancient festival
- Denial of joy, vibrancy from one of the most festive celebrations
- Loss of an opportunity for our future generations to learn our traditions in an authentic manner

As you prepare to vote to update **by law PW11**, please consider the importance of family-based fireworks during Diwali and the impact on the next generation of Hindus as we consider the erosion of a centuries-old tradition. Given the City Council's commitment to being culturally sensitive and inclusive, denying a cultural and religious practice to be continued goes against the very principle that the City has been trying to achieve. We ask that the City respect our right to make responsible choices (i.e., safe use of fireworks) and not act punitively. We ask that you review the available data objectively and not make policy changes based on subjective claims.

Hinduism is one of the only surviving ancient civilizations and it has gone through its fair share of attempts to erase its traditions. It is rooted in the tenets of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" meaning the world is one family. We are a peaceful community contributing significantly to the growth of London in ALL ways. We are confident that the City will take our concerns seriously and honour the City's commitment to uphold values of equity and inclusion; to promote cultural traditions and diversity in London.

**P.S. Please share this letter as part of the council agenda for the April 2nd meeting.**

Sincerely,

**Dr. Sreelatha Varapravan**

President, Chinmaya Mission London

On behalf of the Board of Directors