

Please attach a copy of this open letter correspondence to the Council agenda.

June 25, 2012
City Council, City of London
London, Ontario

RE: Greater Flexibility Required in Noise Bylaws (Open Letter)

Dear Members of City Council:

As one of the many thousands of residents that have relocated into London's Downtown core area over the past decade, I believe that many important voices are not being heard in the debate and discussion around changes to our current noise bylaws, including some of the very voices that this Council often speaks about as being priorities for the future of London. These voices include many of those living in our Downtown core, newcomers to Canada, and the younger professionals and leaders that we are collectively working so hard to attract and retain. Within these groups are many that are strongly in favour of increased flexibility to our current noise bylaws, in relation to hours, levels, and particularly adaptability and common sense enforcement.

While a number of outspoken residents of surrounding areas (Woodfield, Old North, Old West London, etc.) have made submissions to Councillors and Committees, and these comments are frequently cited by the media as being representative of Downtown dwellers, I have seen very little attention paid to the actual opinions of the increasing large, and ever faster growing population in the very core of our Downtown. While it is assumed by some that tighter restrictions on noise and festivals are needed to further boost this population, in my personal experience I have found the exact opposite to be the case. Many of the young professionals, students, newcomers to Canada, and empty-nesters now flocking to the Downtown core are doing so specifically because of the greater sense of vitality and other contrasts to a typical suburban life. I have heard from hundreds of individuals who are concerned about a lack of appreciation for their lifestyle choices in this debate, and who frequently cite a perceived negative attitude by the City of London towards after-hour events and outdoor sound as one of the factors that weigh heavily on their decision to remain in London. I have also read opposing letters on this issue and stood in the public session at City Hall listening to an ironically loud minority call students and young people "transients" and "unwelcome" to applause from fellow citizens (who may be frustrated but should know better) and it has saddened me greatly.

I have lived in London my entire life, and in the Downtown core ever since graduating with two professional degrees from Western University. I was among the first to move into the first of the major new high-rise buildings that have led the recent and continuing boom in the Downtown's residential population. My windows and balcony are located almost exactly one block between the bandstand at Victoria Park and the main stage area at Harris Park. Below my (always open) bedroom window is a bar that (until a recent complaint by one of my neighbours) played high-quality music on weekend evenings. Despite keeping a busy schedule that has me up at 5:30 a.m. every morning, and needing all the sleep I can get, I have never once had an issue with noise from the many festivals, baseball games, fireworks, parades, and other events and activities in my bustling neighbourhood. While I appreciate the honest frustration that many from surrounding areas (perhaps in older homes or with greater sensitivity) have expressed on this issue, I want to make it clear that such frustration is far from universal and perhaps even unusual for those that have chosen to live closest to many of the sources of these sounds.

While I personally have no issue with extending the hours and sound levels even further, I believe that the compromise developed by the Community Services Committee last week is a reasonable step in the right direction. Despite the perception of many opposed to keeping the status quo, I recognize that London's noise restrictions are not unusually strict, and keeping the existing limits with an additional grace period of 15 (or even 30) minutes and an allowance in the range of 3 (or even 10) decibels for momentary crescendos seems to make tremendous sense. Simply keeping the status quo (or reducing these limits further) would send a strong negative signal to many of my peers that are debating between London and moving their careers, their companies, and their families to larger urban centres.

Furthermore, I strongly believe that other aspects of London's noise restrictions warrant further review to make them more adaptable to the changing circumstances of our City and especially our Downtown. Specifically, I would recommend a process be developed to apply for special bylaw exemptions and extended permits, to allow occasional later-night events, exhibitions, and commerce like Nuit Blanche, German-style Christmas Markets, and other late-night festive activities enjoyed in so many cities in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere. Our restrictions on amplified music on patios are particularly antiquated, having personally observed a patio being threatened with police action over a violin and acoustic guitar, they seem to be in direct opposition to the vibrant street-life our City is investing millions of dollars into our Downtown to help foster. I don't expect or recommend such further changes to be made on the fly, but I don't think that this issue is close to being settled and hope that Council keeps an open mind towards further research and a community dialogue on further enhancements.

Thank you for your consideration, and to the members of the Community Services Committee for developing a workable compromise on hours and levels that I hope Council seriously considers. I look forward to your decision and to further public dialogue on how to make this and related bylaws more flexible to our adapting needs as a community.

Sincerely,

Joel

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Joel Adams, Downtown Resident
520 Talbot Street
London, Ontario

cc: Cathy Saunders, City Clerk; Judy Bryant, Ward 13 Councillor; Joe Fontana, Mayor.