

Mayor Fontana and members of London City Council:

Below this email you will find one from Mr. Orest Katolyk, the City's Manager of Licensing and Municipal Law Enforcement Services. In it, he asks how I am going to clean the graffiti off my downtown buildings "in accordance with our by-laws". I recognize he is just doing his job but his email crystallizes an ongoing problem for all downtown property owners and, given the extent of my holdings, for me in particular.

I pay millions of dollars in taxes for almost 500,000 square feet of office space that I can't rent because people have lost confidence in the downtown and there isn't enough parking available anyway.

And what thanks do I get for that? Criminals (and that's what they are, make no mistake) plaster graffiti on my buildings, they seldom get caught, and I am left holding the bag when it comes time to pay the bill for the clean-up. And if I don't, the City will fine me as though I had created the problem myself.

I understand the need to maintain property standards and FHC spends as much as anyone in the city in keeping our buildings in good condition. But something is seriously wrong when third parties can deface my buildings and create a situation where their actions put me violation of the existing bylaws and, if I don't pay to fix their damage myself, I am the bad guy.

I think this situation has gone on long enough. Downtown business owners pay millions in property taxes and assessments for Mainstreet London, yet we are also expected to pay fines for things that are totally beyond our control in the downtown.

Through this email I ask that Council members formally consider this situation, and I strongly urge you to change the bylaw so that law-abiding property owners are no longer victimized by every punk who comes along with a spray bomb, and the fines the City levies that do nothing but add insult to injury.

If someone defaces public property, we hope the law will catch them and they will be held accountable, but even if that does not happen the damage is repaired. Why? Because we believe it is in the best interests of the community as a whole to do so. We all share the cost because the damage is done to all of us.

I know there is not an exact parallel when the property is privately-owned, but it seems to me the principle should be the same, especially when we are not talking about paying for the damages with tax dollars. I would suggest instead that some of the millions channeled from property owners to Mainstreet London every year be used for graffiti cleanup. It already functions as a kind of 'community collective' to spread the cost of many downtown projects across the spectrum of downtown property owners, and it seems to me it would be the ideal way to look after the downtown graffiti problems as well.

It may be easier and more familiar to simply bill the property owners for the cost of crimes they didn't commit, but that does not make it right. In fact, I believe very strongly it is entirely unfair and inequitable and on those grounds alone Council should change the relative bylaws.

I can't speak for other property owners but to me this has become a matter of principle. I resent the actions of scofflaws and criminals being allowed to make a lawbreaker out of me, and I am tired of being billed for the results of someone else's misdeeds.

Sincerely yours,

Shmuel Farhi
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