

To: Mayor and Councillors/ London, Ontario

From: Vicki Van Linden

Re: Reptilia Zoo bylaw exemption request, and Business licensing for Class 7 animals

February 8, 2023

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

I urge you to vote against the creation of a new business license for Class 7 animals, species that are currently (and wisely) prohibited in London.

I also urge you to vote against granting an exemption of our current bylaw that prohibits Class 7 animals from being kept within our municipality.

I urge you to vote against both of these motions at the council meeting of February 14, 2023. Let's settle this once and for all. No Public Participation Meeting. No dragging this on and on when our city, and our council, have matters of critical importance to deal with.

There is surely no need for a Public Participation Meeting since there has already been extensive community involvement, and numerous opportunities for the community to have their say on this matter. Now you have been called on yet again to devote so much of your valuable time to this because a single business owner has refused to respect the stated will of the community, and that of past councils.

As a citizen of London, I am deeply offended by the amount of council time that has gone into trying to accommodate the maneuverings of one business owner. The owner of Reptilia chose to build a facility in our community that has a long-standing ban on the keeping of Class 7 animals. If he now feels that this business decision was unwise, that is his alone to deal with. Our council, and our city and its residents do not owe it to any business owner to bend our community values and already agreed-upon bylaws to suit his intentions. We citizens, our city, have been treated disrespectfully by a business owner who has refused to accept the decisions of past councils that were worked out together with London citizens.

London has a critical housing crisis that affects so many people experiencing distress. You are all aware of how desperate this situation has become, and the dire state of misery that too many homeless Londoners are enduring. This, and other matters of

importance need your time and attention. Yet too many hours of staff and council time have been spent on Reptilia.

Just a few days ago I spoke with a man who is homeless as he was trying to buy food for himself and his dog at a fast-food restaurant. This man was treated badly by the staff. I was deeply disturbed by his treatment. I asked him to wait for me outside and that I would purchase some food for him and his dog. When I later spoke to him outside, he was distressed, but reasonable in his demeanour. He said that he had the money to buy the food, and just wanted to eat, and that this kind of thing happens to him all the time. I asked if I could give him a blanket. He said that he has blankets, **but what he needs is a place to live.**

What he needs is a place to live.

This is what you, our community leaders need to be working on. I know that you understand this, and see the misery that Londoners are enduring on the streets, but we urgently need far more of your attention. We need staff as well to be full-on in their efforts. We don't even have enough day-resting spaces for homeless citizens to use. And we don't have enough shelter beds for the night either.

We also don't have enough reasonably priced rental units for those Londoners who do have jobs and incomes, but at lower-paying jobs. We don't have enough rental homes for seniors living on government pensions. We don't have enough rental homes for younger people starting out in life. And, we surely do not have enough rental units for those who are unable to work due to poor health or some other limiting condition.

This, and so many other issues that will affect our citizens for decades are before you, needing your urgent attention.

I urge you to settle all matters to do with Reptilia on February 14th, by voting against creation of a new business license, and to hold firm on our animal control bylaw, a bylaw that was already well-researched and worked out together as a community.

Please, don't make London a backward community where roadside zoos can once again flourish – to our shame – while other communities like Toronto and St. Catharines have wisely said 'no.'

A roadside zoo is still a roadside zoo, even if it's located inside a mall.

Wild animals imprisoned inside a mall! What a ridiculous concept, one that denies the animals imprisoned there any aspect of a natural life. How this absurd idea has gotten so far is difficult to understand.

Let February 14th be the day that this is finally settled, and turn the fullness of your

attention to matters of critical importance to the city and the citizens you were elected to represent. Surely, we have wasted enough staff and council time, and money on this. Let's cut our losses and put this bad idea to rest.

Respectfully yours,

Vicki Van Linden