

CITY WARNS MASONIC TEMPLE OVER NUISANCE ACTIVITY — MEMBERS FIRE BACK

OSHAWA — A warning from the City of Oshawa to the Oshawa Temple Building Ltd. has ignited a larger debate over who should ultimately bear responsibility when homelessness, trespassing, drug use, vandalism and disorder spill onto private property.

The controversy involves the Masonic Temple property at 91 Centre Street South, used by hundreds of members of local Masonic organizations.

According to correspondence provided to The Central, City of Oshawa Senior Municipal Law Enforcement Officer George Shaw contacted the Temple on Friday, September 18, after observing what he described as nuisance activity on the property. Shaw wrote that he was observing individuals “loitering and consuming what appears to be narcotics.” He said Municipal Law Enforcement would ask the individuals to leave and would escalate the situation to Durham Regional Police if they failed to comply. But his email also contained a warning that immediately raised concerns among Temple officials.

According to the City correspondence, Oshawa By-Law is “not a private security service” and the property owner should begin taking preventative security measures.

The Temple was advised it may wish to contact police or hire private security. Then came the line that Temple representatives say changed the entire tone of the exchange: “An ongoing failure to prevent Nuisance activity occurring on 91 Centre St S may result in an order to comply under the City of Oshawa Nuisance By-law 65-2009.” That has Temple officials asking: COMPLY WITH WHAT?

The Temple says it is not creating the nuisance. It says it is trying to stop it. Temple officials say that for years they have reported trespassing, vandalism, graffiti, open drug use and people defecating on the property.

A No Trespassing notice has been filed with Durham Regional Police, according to Temple officials, and a No Trespassing signage is posted around the building.

The organization says its members regularly call police for assistance.

Robert Livingstone, Secretary of Oshawa Temple Building Ltd., responded sharply to the City's email.

Livingstone told the Municipal Law Enforcement Officer: “If your email is intended as a joke, it's not going over well. If you're serious, it's going over worse, many more times over.” Livingstone said he personally contacts Durham Regional Police three to four times a week and that other people associated with the Temple also regularly call.

He continued: “There is a NO TRESPASSING order on file with DRPS and signage posted around the property.” Livingstone described the City's warning as both offensive and insulting in light of what he characterized as years of continuing problems faced by Temple members and visitors. He wrote that the warning demonstrated, in his view, a lack of understanding has been dealing with.

600 MEMBERS — AND NOW RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROBLEM?

Temple representatives say

approximately 600 members use the building. Their frustration is straightforward. They say they are victims of recurring trespassing and disorder, yet now find themselves facing the possibility of municipal enforcement if nuisance activity continues on their property.

Their interpretation of the situation is blunt: Call police. Live with the problem. Hire private security. Or potentially face a City order. The City's email did offer another option.

Shaw advised the Temple that the property may qualify for Oshawa's Graffiti and Vandalism Remediation Fund to assist with preventative security measures. The City established the fund to help eligible commercial and industrial property owners repair vandalism and implement preventative measures.

But Temple officials say that does not answer the bigger question: Why should a property owner that repeatedly reports trespassing and illegal behaviour potentially be held responsible for failing to prevent the conduct of people it has already told to stay off the property?

The City's Nuisance By-law 65-2009 provides important context. The by-law defines a “public place” broadly enough to include private property exposed to public view. It prohibits people from causing, creating or permitting nuisances and specifically addresses conduct including loitering, littering, damaging or vandalizing private property and activity that interferes with the comfortable enjoyment of property.

Most significantly for this dispute, Section 4.1 says that when an officer believes the by-law has been violated, an order can be directed not only to the person who allegedly caused the nuisance but also to “the owner or occupier of the land on which the contravention occurred.” The by-law requires such an order to identify the alleged contravention and provide a compliance deadline.

Failure to comply can result in administrative penalties, and the consolidated by-law lists escalating penalties for repeated contraventions.

That may explain the legal mechanism behind the City's warning. But it does not resolve the policy argument being raised by Temple officials: How much can a private property owner reasonably be expected to do when the unwanted individuals are already trespassing and the property owner repeatedly contacts authorities for help?

The disagreement goes far beyond garbage collection or property maintenance.

Temple officials say they believe responsibility for a broader social crisis is increasingly being shifted onto private citizens, community organizations and businesses. Their concern is that property owners are being asked to secure their buildings, repeatedly clean damage and waste, call police, consider security guards and potentially face enforcement when the activity continues.

Meanwhile, those property owners have no power to arrest someone, compel treating, provide housing or operate social-service programs. That raises the central question: WHO OWNS THE PROBLEM? Homelessness serv-

ices in Durham are primarily administered through the Region of Durham, which operates a coordinated system involving outreach, shelters, housing services and its By-Name List of people known to be experiencing homelessness.

Durham's own Community Safety and Well-Being Plan reported 1,803 people on the Region's By-Name List in August 2025, up from 786 one year earlier. The same report says 4,377 people accessed the shelter system during 2024, although those figures measure different populations and should not simply be added together.

A separate Durham presentation cited a 2024 Point-in-Time Count identifying 1,345 individuals actively experiencing homelessness across the Region.

Those official numbers demonstrate the scale of the regional challenge. The actual numbers could be as high as 2,900 people.

But they also reinforce why businesses, clubs, churches and private organizations argue that they cannot solve it individually.

The Mason Hall feels that civic respect has deteriorated both from citizens and city Hall. The Central contacted the Mayors office but no reply by time we went to press.

This lack of respect for local institutions does not stop with the Masons. Local Royal Canadian Legion Branch 43 on Simcoe has had it's share of problems with the homeless. From people caught on video urinating in the front lobby to people sleeping, shooting drugs right on the front steps without any worry of being arrested.

The Legion has been so under seige that member have been physically attacked and assaulted.

The staff at the Legion are fed up with having to clean every morning human feces, drug related items, condoms and general filth.

A member of the Legion that did not want to be identified said. “Volunteers are afraid to come and participate. We have had occurrences where people have been assaulted, sworn at, called all kind of names. It has become real dangerous. When police call they come hours after the fact as most perpetrators leave the property and nothing is done. We are at our witz end.”

COMMUNITY MEETING FOLLOWS DAYS LATER

The dispute at the Masonic Temple comes amid wider neighbourhood concern about homelessness, public drug use and community safety in south-central Oshawa.

On Sunday, September 20, a community meeting was held at Royal Canadian Legion Branch 43.

The meeting brought residents and community participants together to discuss concerns involving the Simcoe Street and Mill Street area.

Among the issues raised were neighbourhood safety, open drug use, homelessness, the impact of street disorder on residents and businesses, and what role municipal and regional governments should play.

Royal Canadian Legion Branch 43 is located at 471 Simcoe Street South and serves as a community gathering facility in the neighbourhood. Accounts circulated following the meeting said

current councillors and municipal-election candidates were among those attending.

Participants called for cooperation between governments and emphasized that solutions could not simply be postponed until after the municipal election.

Those in attendance include incumbent councillors offering the same empty promises and no real solutions.

In attendance there were a handful of local registered candidates.... Some not really understanding the issue.

Others attempting to grandstand as to capture an opportunity to present platforms.

The discussion reflected the same basic frustration now being expressed by the Temple: Residents want assistance. Businesses want assistance. Community organizations want assistance. And property owners want to know who they are supposed to call when repeated disorder occurs on their doorstep.

Despite the criticism directed at City leadership, Livingstone emphasized that Temple officials are not blaming front-line officers. In correspondence circulated to Masonic members, he described the assistance received from both municipal officers and Durham Regional Police as tremendous.

Their support, he said, has been invaluable. The dispute instead focuses on policy and responsibility.

Temple officials say they were recently informed that Municipal By-Law would no longer be responsible for attending the property to enforce its No Trespassing notice and that trespassing complaints should instead go directly to Durham Regional Police.

DRPS, according to the Temple, continues to provide assistance, but limited resources can mean slower responses. That creates an obvious practical problem.

A person can be ordered off private property. But if that person refuses to leave and police cannot immediately attend, what exactly is a private property owner expected to do?

LIVINGSTONE CRITICIZES CITY LEADERSHIP

Livingstone also criticized senior municipal leadership, including Mayor Dan Carter. He alleged that although councillors and City support staff have communicated concern over the years, the Mayor's office has been unresponsive to the Temple's concerns. That is Livingstone's allegation and characterization. The Central has not independently established the complete record of communications between the Temple and the Mayor's office.

Dan Carter remains Oshawa's Mayor during the current 2022-2026 Council term.

The Mayor and City should be given an opportunity to respond directly to the Temple's allegations and explain their position.

QUESTIONS CITY HALL NEEDS TO ANSWER

The September 18 correspondence has transformed what might otherwise have been another complaint about trespassing into a larger public-policy dispute.

The questions are now unavoidable: What specific additional security measures does the City expect Oshawa Temple Building Ltd. to undertake?

How much security is legally considered enough?

Would repeated calls to DRPS, posted No Trespassing signs and a standing trespass notice demonstrate reasonable efforts by the property owner? Under what precise circumstances would the Temple receive an Order to Comply? Would the alleged nuisance violation be based on the actions of the trespassers or something the property owner itself failed to do?

Can Municipal Law Enforcement issue penalties directly to the individuals creating the nuisance?

If By-Law observes drug use and loitering, what enforcement action is available against those individuals?

If the property owner cannot physically remove them, who is responsible for doing so?

And when does a homelessness, addiction and public-safety problem stop being the responsibility of an individual property owner and become the responsibility of government?

Those are questions that matter far beyond the doors of the Masonic Temple.

They affect every business owner, church, service club, landlord and resident confronting repeated unwanted activity on private property.

For the hundreds of Masonic members who use the Centre Street building, the issue is now deeply personal.

They say they have been calling for help for years. They say they have posted the property. They say they contact police several times a week.

They say they clean up the

aftermath. And now they are being warned that continued nuisance activity could result in an Order to Comply.

The City has a by-law that gives it enforcement authority. The Temple has hundreds of members asking why that authority could ultimately be directed toward the property owner rather than solely toward those creating the nuisance.

That distinction now deserves a clear public explanation. Because the argument at 91 Centre Street South is no longer simply about one property. It is about who carries the responsibility when a community-wide crisis lands on somebody else's doorstep.

Sadly as it stands. Tito-Dante Marienpietri appears to be the front candidate for Mayor. If he wins nothing will change as he has sat on council and accomplished nothing to solve the problem.

Runner up according to polls is a new comer Henry Onwuachu. A candidate with passion and possibly the change that Oshawa needs.

Someone from outside the political circle. Someone that is not part of the good old boys. Someone that is approachable and genuine.

Not like the current council that does not return phone calls. Only become involved during election time. A council that is directly responsible for the disrespect for the Legion and the Mason Hall.

Neither downtown councillors were available for comments. Rick Kerr or Derek Giberson. Derek running for Mayor and Kerr for re-election. As they are both responsible for the homeless issue downtown.



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