



THE ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

BRANCH 43

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To The Oshawa City Council:

I am the President of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 43

Memorial Park has a special significance to our membership, many of who are veterans or related to veterans or fallen soldiers. Every year, we participate in the Remembrance Day Parade and Ceremony at Memorial Park. Our members also often commemorate the Invasion of Normandy on June 6, or attend individually at the cenotaph to pay their respects or remember their family members or individuals who they served with.

A number of individuals have been attending Memorial park every day to provide free food to anyone who attends. This entails many vehicles being parked on Metcalfe Street while they eat. While they may mean well, the volunteers involved do not seem to understand or care that making Memorial Park into a place for homeless people to get "freebies" is interfering with its purpose as a war memorial. A number of our members have expressed concerns about safety and hygiene in attending the park. It is not uncommon to detect the distinct scent of urine in the area east of the cenotaph or near the band shell and many of us have seen people use the area to relieve themselves. As a result, the character of the park has changed from a war memorial to a homeless encampment.

Recently, a number of news articles were published stating the City of Oshawa was going to prosecute the individuals who are using the park without authorization for this purpose, but then the City of Oshawa announced that it is going to delay this prosecution pending an application for a permit. Our understanding is that the individuals involved were already warned on multiple occasions that they had to apply for a permit, and they did not, so it is concerning that the City of Oshawa has given yet another extension to them when there appears to be no intention to comply with the permitting process.

As the President of Branch 43, I would like to take this opportunity to voice our opposition to issuing a permit to anyone who wants to hand out free food in Memorial Park. I believe that these individuals could find a better location, or join with another non-profit group that has a private property to operate out of, and they would be able to help just as many people. I want to be clear that our members are not opposed to helping people, but we do not believe that it is appropriate for the city to convert Memorial Park from a War Memorial into a daily soup kitchen. If permit is granted, we believe it should allow for perhaps one event a month, but that it is improper to give any group (even the legion) a right to occupy the park on a daily basis as the park should be there for use of everyone and not just one specific group to take over. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Vanessa Leblanc President of Oshawa Legion Branch 43