

Overnight Warming Location Responds to Edwardsville's Decision to Suspend Citation

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Overnight Warming Location (OWL) has responded to an announcement by Mayor Art Risavy at the Edwardsville City Council meeting on Jan. 16, 2024.

The OWL, located at First Baptist Church in Edwardsville, had been in conflict with the City after Edwardsville [issued a citation against the church](#) requiring a Special Use Permit. The citation would fine the church \$750 for every night it remained open as a warming location.

[During the meeting](#), Risavy announced the city had [suspended the citation](#) and clarified that no fines were ever imposed or collected. The OWL responded on their Facebook page.

“We gratefully welcome the change in posture from the City of Edwardsville,” the OWL said in their post. “And we remain hopeful that a strong partnership is ahead of us, one that respects the legitimacy of First Baptist Church’s 55-year-old Special Use Permit to use its facility to fulfill the church’s mission. We believe the City and its leaders have much to offer and we’re eager to see what can happen when they say yes to helping our neighbors Get Inside, Get Connected, and Get Well. Fully invested leadership could be transformative for our community.”

The OWL’s response comes after the mayor’s announcement that the citation is suspended. Risavy added that the City has been working with OWL organizers to find a solution.

“I want to reassure you that the City Council members and I recognize that there is a need for the services for our most at-risk citizens,” Risavy said. “I have been working with urgency to try to resolve our issues of concern with the Overnight Warming Location at First Baptist Church. It was never our intention to prevent them from operating, particularly at a time with such dangerous weather conditions...The city’s concern was only that the facility was safe for the people staying there and volunteering there, and we are truly sorry that anyone believes any other reasoning might be true.”

The mayor went on to note that the City has “a long history of support for the good works being done here.” He said the City provides annual support for the Glen-Ed Pantry and the Main Street Community Center, and Edwardsville works closely with daytime warming centers to provide services during the winter months.

During the public comments portion of the meeting, residents vocalized both disappointment and support for the City’s stance. You can read more about the meeting at [this article](#) on [RiverBender.com](#).

In their Facebook post, the OWL went on to thank supporters for “coming together in a movement of wisdom and compassion” to advocate for the OWL. They asked people to reach out to City officials and express gratitude for the decision to suspend the citation.

“The Mayor and other City officials heard your voice and responded. That’s not always easy and deserves credit,” the OWL said. “Unity sometimes requires us to tear down walls that never should have been built. But we can’t do that recklessly, nor can we forget that we tear down walls in order to embrace one another. So say thank you. Gratitude will help build trust and welcome them into the movement.”

For more information about the OWL, visit their [Facebook page](#).