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## COUNCIL

# St. Catharines removes minimum heat requirement in vital services bylaw for shared hallways

City staff say hallway temperatures difficult to enforce and not the intent of the bylaw

By **Karena Walter** Standard Reporter

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## READ THE CONVERSATION

A newer St. Catharines bylaw that aims to protect tenants from having vital services cut off by landlords has been amended to remove common hallways and focus on residential units only.

City council heard the purpose of the [vital services bylaw](#) adopted in August 2022 was to ensure residents have access to necessary services like heat in their living spaces and not in transient common areas like hallways.

The city's bylaw enforcement division has found it's a challenge to enforce a 20-degree Celsius standard in common areas where entrance or stairwell doors are opening and closing and people are coming and going.

"The recommended amendment will still require that tenants are provided with adequate and suitable heat within their home or living space, which is the overall intent of the vital services bylaw," manager of bylaw enforcement and licencing Paul Chudoba told council Monday.

The change comes after the city's by-law enforcement division received a complaint in November 2022 about inadequate heat in sixth floor hallway of an apartment building. Their investigation found temperature readings varied from 17.5 to 19 degrees, moderately below the threshold of adequate heat.

Not all councillors agreed the city should remove hallways from the bylaw as a result.

St. Patrick's Coun. Caleb Ratzlaff said he can understand why it would be hard to keep the entrance way of a high-rise building warm but not the hallways.

"The door opens in that lobby I could see it being hard to keep that lobby warm. But in a hallway that's 10-storeys high, how is it difficult keeping that hallway warm? I don't understand why that would be a reason to change this bylaw."

City resident Saleh Waziruddin, speaking to council as a tenant, said renters don't just live in their apartments and should be able to take garbage out and go to the laundry room without discomfort.

"You shouldn't need to wear a coat or jacket to go out into the hallway, which is what will happen if we let landlords off the hook to keep the heat adequate for common areas," he said.

“A tenant obviously complained about the hallway being too cold and our response is to change the bylaw rather than enforce it on the landlord.”

He said it wouldn't be hard to plug gaps and add adequate insulation to raise the temperature a few degrees.

City council ended up voting for the change 8-5.

St. Catharines is the only municipality in Niagara to adopt a vital services bylaw, which gives it greater powers of enforcement to ensure landlords who are supposed to be providing adequate heat, water and gas to tenants are doing it.

Chudoba said St. Catharines received 65 complaints for vital services in the city in 2022 – 10 times more than what he estimated the city would get when he presented the new bylaw to council last year.

“It goes to show that there is a need and it does have a demand for our service. But at this point, we're focusing on the primary need, which is the internal rental unit for the tenants.”

Chudoba said in cases where there is no heat, the city would address the matter under the property standards bylaw.



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### How they voted

That council approve an amendment to the vital services bylaw

Yes: Garcia, Harris, Kushner, McPherson, Phillips, Williamson, Dodge, Stevens

No: Miller, Ratzlaff, Townsend, Lindal, Siscoe

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