

# **Edwardsville Residents Speak For, Against Overnight Warming Location, Mayor Gives Update**

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter  
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EDWARDSVILLE - Edwardsville residents at Tuesday's City Council meeting shared a range of perspectives for and against the Overnight Warming Location (OWL) operating out of the First Baptist Church at 534 St. Louis Street in Edwardsville, following an announcement from Mayor Art Risavy.

Risavy announced at the meeting that he has asked his staff to [suspend a citation](#) that was issued against the church for operating as a warming location without a special use permit. He said the city never planned to shut the center down and no fines were ever imposed or collected.

"I've been working with urgency to try to resolve our issues with the Overnight Warming Location at First Baptist Church," Mayor Risavy said. "It was never our intent to prevent it from operating, particularly at a time of such dangerous weather conditions - and please know, there were no fines ever imposed or collected."

Risavy's account of events varies greatly from claims made last week by the Overnight Warming Location [on their Facebook page](#) that they had been served a cease and desist letter by the city to stop operating in the church, or else they would face daily fines of \$750. Mayor Risavy also said the permit requirement was solely for the safety of those in the warming center, a claim later questioned during public comments.

"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,” he said. “Tonight, I am announcing that I have directed staff to suspend the citation and cancel the municipal court appearance that has been scheduled for this week. Our hope is to continue a conversation with First Baptist Church so we can be part of a solution for those that are unhoused or in dire circumstances.”

Neighborhood resident Dylan Anderson, one of the most vocal opponents of the OWL’s permit-less operation in previous City Council meetings, spoke again on Tuesday and accused them of mounting a social and traditional media campaign against city residents.

“It’s not responsible to incite an online mob and send them viciously towards people who disagree with them ... it’s not responsible to run directly to the media and throw your entire city under the bus to get your way,” he said. “I’m not even necessarily opposed to this church trying to help, but what I am opposed to is an outside organization coming into our town and bullying residents into getting their way.

“They say God calls on them. God calls on them to love their neighbors, and what they’ve done is a weird way of expressing that.”

Michelle Babb, secretary for the Glen-Ed Ministerial Alliance, claimed First Baptist has already had the required permit for decades. She said she doesn’t condone any calls for violence against or doxxing any elected leaders, but also doesn’t believe the safety of the unhoused is the city or public’s primary concern in this case.

“You should know that First Baptist already has a special use permit and has had once since 1969 to operate as a church,” Babb said. “Operating as a church includes opening your doors and welcoming people in without checking their ID, without metal detectors or body searches. Operating as a church involves serving meals, preparing food, serving our neighbors. Operating as a church sometimes involves sleeping overnight in the church.

“I suspect that the motivation in requiring an additional special use permit of First Baptist is not based on concern about a difference in the activity, the use, that’s proposed on the property - it is based on a concern about the type of people that are going to be participating in that activity.”

Another resident expressed her disappointment at the city’s decision to drop the citation against the OWL, stating she doesn’t believe organizations should get to “bully the city” into getting what they want. She also claimed that an OWL representative gave an hour’s notice before failing to show up to a city-organized forum on Dec. 6, 2023, which was

meant to find solutions between the OWL and neighborhood residents. Instead, OWL representatives reportedly offered residents a list of answers to “Frequently Asked Questions.”

Finally, a fourth resident spoke in support of the OWL and the city’s decision to drop the citation, commending the city’s “religious community” for coming together to provide a life-saving service and claiming that another resident lost both of their feet last year from the extreme cold. In closing, they said they were glad to see the city and OWL “trying to move toward a more productive conversation.”

For full public comments and more discussion about the Edwardsville OWL, see the full Edwardsville City Council meeting at at the top of this story or on the [City of Edwardsville Facebook page](#).