



**Neighbourhood
Legal Services**
LONDON AND MIDDLESEX

The City of London

By email: budget@london.ca

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City of London 2024-2027 Multi-Year Budget Consultations Submission

Neighbourhood Legal Services London and Middlesex is a poverty law clinic assisting low-income Ontarians who reside in Middlesex County with legal issues in the areas of social assistance, landlord/tenant and employment. As such, we are highly aware of the difficulties that low-income individuals and families who live in London encounter.

We would like to make the following submissions with respect to the City's Multi-Year Budget for the years 2024-2027.

Introduction

As noted above our clinic assists low income individuals. The majority of our clients are Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients. Over the last number of years it has become more and more difficult for those on OW/ODSP to meet their basic needs of shelter and food. Due to skyrocketing rent increases, inflation and minimal social assistance rates for those on ODSP and none for those on OW over the last 4 years, our clinic continues to see more and more individuals/families in financial crisis. It is next to impossible for those on OW/ODSP not in an RGI unit or receiving a rent supplement to find and maintain housing. For example, a single recipient on OW receives a maximum of \$343.00 a month to cover all their shelter costs and a single ODSP recipient receives just \$556.00 a month to cover all of their shelter costs. Our legal clinic fields dozens of calls a day from individuals facing eviction due to mostly rent arrears issues but also due to questionable landlord applications for "own use" or renovations.

We are aware that Londoners are facing a 5.4 per cent property tax hike just to maintain existing services. Business cases accepted by Council will add to the rate hike.

However, the business cases we recommend Council approve are in the areas of poverty and housing (affordable/adequate housing and homelessness). We ask that Council keep in mind that a recent City report noted that a majority of Londoners surveyed noted poverty/homelessness as the largest issue facing the City and that as well a majority can accept higher taxes to at least maintain current City services.

Housing/Homelessness

In the previous 4 year multi-year budget process, City Council made housing and homelessness a top priority.

Despite the efforts of Council and Community partners over the last 4 years the lack of affordable housing and homelessness continue to be significant and difficult issues in our community.

The City and its community partners are currently in the process of implementing innovative housing/homelessness plans that will need to be continuously reviewed and evaluated for their effectiveness.

As Council reviews a number of business plans in the area of housing/homelessness, we would like to recommend several business plans be accepted as they would assist individuals/families to find and maintain affordable housing and avoid homelessness, as well as creating much-needed affordable units. We recommend:

Business Plan #P-16 - Housing Stability Banks (HSB) Expansion

Our clinic assists tenants whose cases have merit to dispute an eviction application by their landlord. Many have issues with rent arrears. The Housing Stability Bank's ability to provide funds to cover up to two months of rent arrears in appropriate situations is a critical tool that allows tenants to make acceptable payment arrangements with landlords and preserve their tenancy. The HSB also provides needed last month rent deposits to help secure housing for low-income Londoners. The need for the HSB has increased in recent years due to a number of factors including the large rent increases experienced by many tenants, very limited social assistance increases, and wage increases not keeping up to inflation. We submit that the increase in funding to the Bank is needed to avoid more homelessness. We further submit that this is a low cost housing tool compared to others.

Business Plan #P-15 – Hoarding / Extreme Clean Program

Our clinic has worked with the Extreme Clean Program on a number of our clients facing eviction for hoarding and some who are unable to clear ordinary clutter due to age or disability to prepare for pest management treatment. They have also referred tenants to our services when they encounter vulnerable people who need our help. Their assistance has saved many tenancies. We believe the program is a low cost program that allows tenants to remain in affordable housing situations and avoid homelessness. As well, these tenants would face large barriers in being rehoused.

Business Plans #P-18 and 20 – Roadmap to 3,000 Units / Enhanced Portable Housing and Portable Housing Support Programs Case Management

Our clinic believes a low cost and efficient way to get individuals and families housed is through portable rental supplements. This is especially true to ensure lower acuity participants who are homeless can be housed. A portable rental supplement assists social assistance recipients to find housing they could not otherwise afford, and prevents eviction in cases where they can no longer afford their existing housing due to rent and utility cost increases. When long waits persist for Rent-Geared-To-Income (RGI) housing this is essential.

We support additional funding to be earmarked for additional rental supplements. In our estimate these supplements only cost on average about \$6,000 per year per unit. Compared to the cost of shelter beds and hospitalization, this is extremely affordable. We support these plans as they will result in more low acuity individuals being housed.

Business Plan #P-17 – Housing Stability Table

Again, for a low cost we see this program as beneficial in saving tenancies resulting in fewer homeless individuals.

We submit that tenancies are being saved specifically in cases where tenants would experience large barriers to being rehoused with this program. The costs would be much higher if these vulnerable tenants lose their existing tenancies.

Wellbeing and Safety

Business Plan #P-25 – Productive Municipal Compliance

Our legal clinic has been a member of a City led landlord and tenant group reviewing a number of landlord/tenant issues, including the residential property standards complaint and enforcement process.

We endorse this business case especially as it pertains to increasing the ability of municipal law enforcement officers to respond to tenant complaints regarding property standards issues. Tenants should have the right to reside in safe and adequate housing with landlords living up to required standards. We submit that the business case outlines that the proactive pilot project of building blitzes on property standard issues has shown the need for more property standard bylaw enforcement in our community.

Transit

LTC Request for Additional Funding

Specialized Transit (formerly paratransit) deficiencies and limitations have been highlighted in recent years. Londoners who require these services have expressed extreme frustration with long waits, poor advance scheduling capability of the system, and limited availability of services. We support the LTC receiving significant additional funding that is specifically earmarked for Specialized Transit services.

Business Plan #P-51 – Transit Service Hours Growth

We support this plan as it involves increased services to industrial areas and an expansion of the service day to being earlier and ending later in an effort to accommodate more shift workers. The additional accessibility of using the LTC will allow more low-income individuals to find and maintain jobs.

Thank you for your anticipated review and consideration of our submission.

Yours truly,



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