

Hello Budget Committee and Londoners,

The past 2 weeks have been quite turbulent for me in terms of attempting to get through all of the multi-year budget proposals and properly understand their implications. I've been spending several hours outside of my workday combing through the Mayor's proposed budget and then nearly 20 hours going through the recorded budget committee meetings including today's livestream.

Frankly, as a renter, the thought of an 8.7% property tax increase is terrifying. The thought of 30% in property tax across the next 5 years is harrowing. I see how we got here and I know it took several tough decisions, but it's the sort of thing you can barely prepare for. As landlords across the city and the province continue to surcharge given the loosening of restrictions, things like this continue to give them reasons to justify increasing rent for people like me, my colleagues, and anyone else in the city. Reading that more than 86% of apartment condos in London are owned by investors makes me sulk. With no vacant home tax or anything of the sort, renters are essentially bankrolling investors to keep on scalping apartments, driving up rental prices, further changing the real estate values making switching from renting to owning a property even more costly.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/london-ontario-investment-property-1.6739784>

Over the 20 hours worth of budget committee meetings, I learned more about the different proposals that had come forward for the budget and tried to understand how we got to where we are. I found some of the discussions quite irritating and thought the priorities of several councillors seemed to be quite inconsiderate to what a lot of Londoners are going through. Equally, I found some councillors to be hypocritical, stating that the priority should be on not hurting the taxpayer and helping Londoners, whilst also not voting in favour of amendments necessary to supporting the community. However, the most common pattern I found was that no portion of the budget had consistent support aside from the LPS budget requests. As far as the council was concerned, the LPS needed every one of their requests met to a T, with barely any questions asked. The reasoning for this was surprising, given that it seemed to only apply to this one group and nowhere else. When it comes to supporting the LBL which finds itself underfunded and needing more, "they shouldn't make such large requests and should do what they can with what they have." When it comes to supporting the LTC, we've given them enough, even though they say and have evidence that they're at capacity a lot of the time and riders are left behind, even though London is way behind in supporting transit compared to other municipalities "we've given them money, they shouldn't keep asking for more and should manage with what they have." But barely any criticism was made of the LPS budget. We got, "They've done their review and stated that this is what they need to keep going, and we need to give them exactly that." The LPL and LTS budget proposals were both cautiously optimistic, they didn't express a strong desire to revamp their facilities, let alone build two additional ones, just to make the service better with the facilities they have, and continue providing an essential service to the community. I respect that their cautious optimism was met with realism, but the realism was quite harsh and frankly inconsiderate.

The deputy mayor expressed "frustration" that the LTC said ridership would decrease with its increased fare, but ridership increased. If I'm understanding him correctly, he thought that upon seeing the \$0.40 increase, London Transit riders would make the decision immediately

to purchase a \$30,000 vehicle within the first month of experiencing that new fare. Seemingly expecting an instant effect to take place as though purchasing a vehicle is not another strenuous investment that takes months of planning and weighing out the cost-benefit. One could argue that knowing the fare increase was coming would give people time to plan to get a car, but that would forgo the fact that the LTC announced the fare increase in December when Londoners were dealing with all the hustle and bustle that comes with working at the end of the year. As someone who frequently commutes through Transit around London I've been doing all I can to budget, and weigh out the pros and cons of car ownership, whilst dealing with the rapid increase in grocery prices, and a high rental price that is likely to increase again. I'm frankly glad to be staying away from owning a vehicle for as long as I can, but as costs continue to increase, getting a vehicle is beginning to look like a worthy investment, especially without improved route servicing. I was glad that after two amendments we could see the LTC budget increased substantially. But that was not easy. Despite the impassioned pleas from the LTCs board and several of the councilors, the budget increase could only happen due to a singular swayed vote. That's terrifying.

Despite several councilors seeming to connect with the LPL, it was consistently described as an unworthy service. As its operation has become more expensive and they've had some difficulty going at things the way they have been, an increased budget would bring relief to that and help them. I was happy to see the budget amendment for an increased 2024 budget, but sad to see it couldn't get the continuous budget increase requested for the following years. Libraries mean a lot to me, but I've found that they are most impactful for children. Closing a singular library branch in a community takes its service away from children. Children who won't be able to write letters to plead for the closest community learning space for them to stay open. Continuing to insist that the library cut costs in other libraries and focus that money elsewhere, is blatantly denying the usefulness of library spaces. Libraries are not meant to be for-profit centres. If any of them are receiving less foot traffic than expected it is likely a result of underfunding to the library requiring reduced hours, or requiring that services and programming at less populated branches be cut. It seemed several times that the council was taking issue with how few services there were at some branches, yet ignoring how that could be fixed with more funding.

Without daring to be as audacious as the LPS, both the LPL and the LTC brought forth reasonable cases that were torn apart and gutted. Which isn't to say they didn't get anything. They did get funding, noted several times to be more funding than they have received prior, which I'm very grateful for and looking forward to seeing the results of, but they faced such strong challenges to request more. Challenges not at all present to the LPS. They made this request that will cost a 5.0% increase in property tax because they know what they need. It seems that there is such a large blind faith in the LPS, amounting to in funding \$672 million, over the next four years. Despite listening to the meeting, I am still quite baffled at how so much of this constitutes a need. Especially given how few questions were asked regarding it. A second armoured vehicle? The first one doesn't track much usage. In 2006, 2009, and 2011, the LAV was only used once. It wasn't used at all in 2007, 2008, and 2010, and twice in 2017. In 2013 and 2014, the LAVs were deployed eight times, and in 2012 and 2018, six times. In fact, the bulk of its usage has been in training or just for display. But we're just okay with paying the nearly \$500,000 price tag to get a new one? To hire around 100 officers, its own hike in price that I won't argue here, they're proposing building a new training centre (amidst headquarters improvements) costing \$80 million in this tax increase. A new remotely

piloted aircraft system, of which they received 8 more in 2021, costing nearly half a million again.

The big asks of the police budget are not investigated further because councillors and the Mayor trust whatever the police do. But how exactly do any of the above increases do that? They are the most costly ventures and simply add more of what the LPS already has. How does that make individuals safer?

Safety is a thing of the present. The police are a response. Crime doesn't stop when there are more police. It is responded to at a better pace. As the cost of living increases, crime will increase. As the cost of living increases, homelessness will increase. We will never have enough officers to "stop" crime, because crime comes before the response. Increasing the property tax by 8.7% while refusing to fund community resources, nonprofit supports, and transit, will take people out of their homes. It will make people desperate for money. It will lead to more theft, it will lead to more violence. Sure we'll have more people available to respond to the crime, but by focusing on the response and increasing the cost of living through doing so, this budget continues to contribute to the problem.

It's hard for me to expect much change from this, as I've seen how amendments go in the committee. Regardless of how strongly I feel about this, I know several of you have made up your minds on what's more important. 100 letters like this wouldn't convince you to approach this differently. This is sad because that is what the representation of councillors should amount to. I conclude my letter with concern. For the city, and for those who are struggling much more than I, who will have to bear this increased property tax as well.

Thank you for listening,

Emmanuel Akanbi  
Ward 13 Resident

References:

1. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/london-ontario-investment-property-1.6739784>
2. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/london-police-get-a-bird-s-eye-view-of-crime-scenes-thanks-to-drones-1.6871087>
3. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/london-ontario-police-light-armoured-vehicles-1.5081305>