

Fellow Londoners, Council Members, Mayor Morgan and the London Police Services:

I am writing this letter as a last ditch effort to offer some alternative lenses through which to look at the proposed police budget over the next four years. I am not sure whether this information will even make be read, but what else can I do? Due to misinformation from council members regarding the impact of such letter-writing, and disinformation about the ability of council to propose amendments to the proposed police budget, I believed up until this point writing was futile. This also prompts me to include that I am deeply concerned about the trajectory of public participation, community engagement and Reconciliation in the city of London in regard to this iteration of the budget. I am Anishinaabe, and grew up just outside of London, in Elgin County. I have lived in London for the past 16 years, most of that time spent living in SoHo and Old East Village, two neighbourhoods that are impacted by the socio-economic conditions inflicted upon us all by failed policy at every government level. I am writing as a concerned Londoner and note my identity because it does impact how I think, how I relate to this place, and how police have impacted my life.

I am perplexed by the full endorsement of the budget by the Police Board, which contains two council members and the mayor – and I am concerned by Mayor Morgan’s “unequivocal endorsement.” Particularly alarming was the endorsement of the board and those members of council, prompted a post by the London Police Association which said these members “have forged a bold political path rejecting efforts from radical ‘Defund the Police’ zealots.” How is this a bold path when historically, this is the case? The city council has given LPS much of what they’ve asked for over the years. This inflammatory statement implied the board and council, are directly choosing to ignore the voices of Black and Indigenous Londoners who have voiced their critique of LPS itself, and the institution of policing as it exists in Canada, which is deeply concerning to me. The Executive director of the London Police Association was quoted in [CTV News](#) in support of the statement saying “There were words used against police such as genocide and murderers,” said Rick Robson. “And if that language is okay, I would be very well placed to say that that is a radical, zealot point of view. And I stand behind that.”

I want to talk about how problematic it is, that the executive director of the police association does not understand the history of policing in Canada, and its direct relationship to the genocide of Indigenous Peoples, and the role of under-policing in the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People, to which a government report released in June 2019, that the failure of police to investigate MMIP (also commonly referred to as MMIWG2S+) as genocide ([MMIWG Report](#)). Additionally, to categorically say police are not murderers is untrue – what else do you call someone who is responsible for the death of someone else? Yes, not all police officers are murderers – but some are. The circumstances that may justify a death aside – someone that takes another person’s life or stands by and does nothing while they die – is a murderer. But that does not even matter because even when police are convicted of negligence, such as LPS officer Nicholas Doering in the death of Debra-Lee Chrisjohn, they remain on payroll as they appeal the verdict, and continue to drain valuable resources when they have been found guilty of wrongdoing. This is just one example.

MMIWG2S Call to Justice 9.1 reads as follows “We call upon all police services and justice system actors to acknowledge that the historical and current relationship between Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people and the justice system has been largely defined by colonialism, racism, bias, discrimination, and fundamental cultural and societal differences. We further call upon all police services and justice system actors to acknowledge that, going forward, this relationship must be based on respect

and understanding, and must be led by, and in partnerships with, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.” While the scope of the inquiry was MMIWG2S, there is much to be said about the way governments conveniently ignore things that do not “apply” – in this case the Calls to Justice for all Canadians also reads: “15.2 Decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. Learn about and celebrate Indigenous Peoples’ history, cultures, pride, and diversity, acknowledging the land you live on and its importance to local Indigenous communities, both historically and today.”

London’s Land Acknowledgment reads as follows: “This Land Acknowledgement is a first step towards reconciliation. Awareness means nothing without action. It is important that everyone takes the necessary steps towards decolonizing practices. We encourage everyone to be informed about the traditional lands, Treaties, history, and cultures of the Indigenous people local to their region.” I am curious to what extent this is merely lip service, considering that funding a police budget – no questions asked, no amendments is quite contrary to decolonizing practices, and considering that Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in incarceration and justice statistics in Canada, and disproportionately make up the homeless population in London, as an Anishinaabe person living here I am quite stunned by the contradictory intention of the land acknowledgment, and the actions this council has taken towards Reconciliation. I am looking for action and the only action I see is committing to funding the very institution that has failed Indigenous people countless, in the entirety of their existence.

In 2023, [the Yellowhead Institute surveyed the progress on the TRC Calls to Action](#) and found the federal and provincial governments failed to implement any in the entire year. Over and over I hear council members state their “hands are tied” when it comes to almost everything. And I am just wondering to what degree can I continue to participate in city initiatives towards making the city safer, or working towards “Reconciliation,” knowing that the municipality washes its hands of responsibility in Reconciliation and incorporating marginalized voices in their processes?

I would like to share some additional context as to why the institution known as policing, is complicit in the genocide of Indigenous Peoples, and how this is relevant in a Reconciliation context. London Police were established pre-Confederation, in 1855. At the time, Mount Elgin Industrial School, an Indian Residential School was operating just outside of London, in Muncey. When the Indian Act was introduced in 1867, police were the main enforcers of the pass system, and already were sending kids back to Residential Schools like Mount Elgin – this would have been undoubtedly conducted by members of the LPS at that time. We actually do not have a lot of data and analysis of the LPS’ relationship to Indigenous people, and recently they have opened up conversations of an “Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan,” which is promising, and the work needs to be done – but recruitment and training is just one piece of the puzzle. There is nothing in the current police budget that aligns with any resources or capacity building to attend to the TRC Calls to Action, and the MMIWG Inquiry Calls to Justice.

For further context and understanding of responsibility - the City of London’s growth, and ability to take up land – by the city itself, developers and private landowners - land that the city taxes, to generate money for things like the police budget – relied heavily on the enforcement of the Indian Act, and the location of Mount Elgin and we live with the impacts today. The city benefitted from the colonial genocidal project initiated by the federal government and remains to this day complicit in the violation of Treaty responsibilities, such as the alteration and pollution of Deshkan Ziibing, or the Thames River, so

people can no longer sustainably consume fish from the river on a regular basis, and the level of homelessness of Indigenous people. Tax money revenue generated on stolen land to fund the institution that over polices Indigenous people is quite the pathway to Reconciliation.

It has been inferred that the consequences of rejecting the budget proposal will find council entangled with the Ontario Civilian Police Commission, who historically favour police forces over city councils. As a constituent, I find this unacceptable. This response directly undermines the democratic participation of citizens, and as municipal representatives I am calling you to action to dismantle the structures that leave you powerless to determine how the city budget will be spent. What I find most troubling about this arrangement, is that the ability of the police to control their budget with no council input, [pre-dates Confederation](#). While people are quick to dismiss “the past as the past” in the context of MMIP and the role of police in enforcing the pass system, and the Indian Act, I am yet again reminded, **how the decisions of politicians seven plus generations ago, impact the people of today**. If we have a pre-Confederation mandate controlling the impact of city council on the police force, but we refuse to acknowledge the historical and contemporary impacts of London Police and the city of London on Indigenous Peoples – what does this say about our pathway to Reconciliation?

I am genuinely wondering if you could speak to how the approval of this police budget aligns with TRC Calls to Action #30 and #31. I refuse to accept the dismissal of responsibility of the municipality, because municipal governments are not listed in those specific Calls – for decades, municipal, provincial and federal governments have played hot potato with accountability and responsibility when it comes to Indigenous rights and affairs. I am writing about Reconciliation and Indigenous people as an Anishinaabekwe – however there are vastly more lenses and considerations to apply in the decisions you are making as council members and I am not seeing a lot of evidence of bringing in decolonial praxis, or an anti-racist approach, let alone a community-oriented focus that prioritizes social services, community building and the evidence-based practices of harm reduction, and housing homeless people that are informing council’s decisions.

As another argument in favour of the police budget - there has been a number on the Crime Index thrown around and our city has been labelled “unsafe” – giving people the idea that the OCPC will rule in favour thanks to this statistic – because London is now 78.1 on the crime index. [In 2022, London was sitting in a historic low for crime](#) and the city still approved a budget to increase the force by 52 officers since then. We still have no data, or accountability to the impact of that spending – and whether that many officers were hired and the impact they had on lowering crime and increasing safety.

Many people argue this budget increase will bring the force up to 1990s levels – but there is no data or evidence to point to this impacting crime levels at all – [as crime since 1998 has steadily declined](#) (StatsCan). Lastly, Canada’s Crime Severity Index rating was 78.1 in 2022, and our city was city at 74 in 2022. If London is now sitting at 78.1 – [that puts it on par with Canada overall](#). The prime minister of Canada is not advocating for more military spending because a crime severity index rate of 78.1 is too high – the country is no longer safe – why is this inane logic even being applied in this instance? To argue gun crime and homicides are rising is to blatantly ignore that police do not prevent these crimes – robust social services and community building do. [There is evidence that even planting just 10% more trees in a neighbourhood reduces crime](#) by as much as 12%, [yet there is no evidence suggests more police, police spending](#), or light armoured vehicles, or tasers, do. Some of the largest police budgets and police forces in the city remain the most dangerous for Indigenous People – Thunder Bay and Winnipeg come to

mind. Recently the Thunder Bay Police Service was independently reviewed for the systemic racism against Indigenous people demonstrated by their police force.

Lastly, I will say that the community-engagement process needs to shift. It is not robust enough and it is inaccessible. A few meetings at 4:30 or 6pm on weekdays are not accessible. Not having childminding, as well, prevents many people from participating. Many people also still rely on word of mouth or social media to know what is happening and when. You need an informed public to participate ethically in democracy – and based on the lie alone that our city is “no longer safe” – this is a failure to provide accurate data, information and evidence to constituents to participate fully in this process. Additionally, I am calling on you to review the budget and see where it aligns with the Calls to Action and Justice. I am also calling on you to review the police budget-making process and advocate at the provincial level to review this process and create greater accountability to cities, city councils, and the communities they serve and represent. Lastly, I am asking you for accountability – where is there accountability to Reconciliation? What accountability is there for renovations when renovations were just completed within the last decade? A new training facility when the Chief has said in a meeting I attended, “every hour spent training is an officer off duty.” Where is there an accountability process for the police to make our city safer – if in four years the crime index rate has increased – what is the accountability there? When the other facets of society’s health, safety and wellbeing continue to crumble and the evidence continues to demonstrate over-funding police does not create safer communities – who will be accountable and how? I am left wondering – who the city will be safer for?

I want to leave you with this quote from another article “[The brutality is in the budget](#)”

“City budgets are expressions of values—they tell us whose lives matter to the people crafting the budget, often in rank order. Because the stakes of a city budget are life and death, we can measure their impacts by observing whose lives are being shortened and put at risk by the enactment of this value system? We can observe, empirically, that the defunding of community supports and services produces increased violence and vulnerability to violence.”

What kind of future are we building? What kind of future ancestor do you want to be?

Chi Meegwech for reading,

Sara Mai Chitty