

# DIRKA U. PROUT

London, ON

February 26, 2024

Mayor Josh Morgan and other members of council

Via email to [councilagenda@london.ca](mailto:councilagenda@london.ca)

**Re: 2024 – 2027 Multi-Year Budget  
Budget Committee Meeting of February 27, 2024**

Dear Council,

As we are near the end of the 2024-2027 Multi-Year budget process, we must not lose sight of the demands that growth put on our infrastructure. We need new housing that meets the needs of new Canadians and other newcomers from other parts Ontario or Canada. This new housing must be supported by infrastructure and services that help maintain the quality of life that our city aspires to. Preparing for present and future growth requires not only new infrastructure, but also closing the infrastructure gap as we go. Although police services are part of the services that may need to expand with our growing population. We should deeply examine if continual expansion of the largest line item in our budget is fully serving the public interest.

I was happy to see that the nine wastewater Business Cases (#WWT-1 to 9) and #P-56 which provides support to the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) were adopted into the Mayor's budget. Many lower income neighbourhoods miss out on much needed initiatives proposed for the Neighbourhood Decision Making Program. It is great that the #P-27 which enables its expansion was put forward. It was also good that paratransit will also receive more funding in the Mayor's budget given no explicit business cases were included in the draft budget.

Knowing we have infrastructure gaps in Core Services Areas of Water and Transportation/Mobility, and in the Cultural and Recreational Services departments, it was shortsighted to have not also included Business Case #P-55, *Additional Funding to Address Infrastructure Gap*. The 2023 Corporate Asset Management (CAM) Plan recommended that when new/expanded infrastructure is being brought online, funds should be invested annually so that the infrastructure gap does not increase.<sup>i</sup>

For example, London's 2023 CAM Plan noted that in the Core Service area of Transportation and Mobility, 22% of infrastructure in this category is in very poor to poor condition, with 30% in fair condition. Comparing to the 2019 Canadian Infrastructure card<sup>ii</sup>, we are behind, as nationally 16% of roads and 12% of structures (including bridges) are in very poor to poor condition. Nationally, 23% of roads and 26% of (including bridges) are in fair condition.<sup>iii</sup>

London has committed to adding 47,000 new housing units by 2031. Recent research commissioned by the FCM indicates that each new home in Canada will require about \$107,000 in municipal infrastructure.<sup>iv</sup> This figure is a base cost as it does not include costs to operate and maintain these new assets, to adapt them for climate change or build to low-carbon standards. Costs to provide community services such as policing, hospitals and schools to these new homes are also not included. Nor are the costs to close the infrastructure gap. This is why it is important now to invest as we grow to close the infrastructure gap. Even with routine maintenance, assets in fair condition can deteriorate to poor/very poor resulting in higher than anticipated costs to rehabilitate or replace.

Another area we are falling behind our municipal peers nationally is in the areas of culture and recreation. In 2023, approximately 18% of London's arts and culture facilities are in very poor or poor condition compared to about 9% for the 2019 national rate. All seven of London's wading pools were

reported in poor condition in our 2023 CAM Plan. When we examine ice arenas and pools, a significant amount of our inventory is in fair to very poor condition putting us above the 2019 national average.

Cultural and recreational facilities add to community and individual health and wellbeing, foster inclusion, found the basis for quality of life and help build resilient communities. It should not take more than 20 years for the London Arts Council to get an increase in funding. We are under investing in London's cultural and recreational infrastructure. That is a reality!

In contrast we are being held hostage by the perception of rising crime by the London Police Services and the London Police Association.<sup>v</sup> A recent University of Toronto study of police funding and crime rates in 20 Canadian cities has indicated that increasing police budgets do not consistently reduce crime.<sup>vi</sup> Considering that more than half of the currently proposed 8.7% budget increase is going to the police, are we getting good value for money? Have we thoroughly examined how many of the calls the police are currently dispatched to are a best fit for their skills?

London is in the midst of both a homelessness and opioid crisis, which can drastically increase costs to health care system, the justice system and emergency services (fire, police and EMS). As we make progress on tackling these twin crises, policing costs will fall with time. Has this fact been taken into account? Further it appears that public has not been given sufficient justification for spending another half a million dollars on a second LAV. It is not clear why a new training facility is required. Are we duplicating some of the efforts of the Ontario Police College?

To be effective with the hard earned tax dollars of our fellow citizens, we should be addressing the roots of crime. The police budget should be reduced and redirected to such efforts. This would require a comprehensive strategy, similar to the whole of community response developed for homelessness. The Canadian Municipal Network for Crime Prevention can be consulted for guidance.<sup>vii</sup> If London had followed the 2008 advice of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to spend \$1 on crime prevention for every \$1 spent on increasing policing perhaps we would not be so "under-resourced".

Policing is a reactive approach to crime. To be cost effective, we should be proactive and address the economic factors (poverty, lack of housing etc.) and social factors (e.g. inequality, lack of adequate social, cultural and recreational services). Investments in transit, library services, arts & culture and recreation for example will do much to reduce health care, social services and police/justice costs.

I ask that Council revisit the decision to not carry forward Business Case #P-55 which was developed to close the infrastructure gap and improve the resiliency of our municipal assets. Secondly we should carefully evaluate what parts of the police budget are necessary. We should also redirect a portion of the police budget toward targeted crime prevention initiatives and purposeful investments in relatively underfunded community services/assets like recreation, transit and library services that more meaningfully address the roots of crime and give citizens a stronger sense of belonging.

Sincerely,

*Dirka U. Prout*

**P.S.** We should not wait until an asset management plan is prepared for the 16 London Public Library branches to provide funding for roof repairs at seven of 16 branches and lighting/energy retrofits. Leaky rooves lead to more extensive and costly repairs if not promptly attended to. A healthy library building contributes to a healthy community.

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<sup>i</sup> See Recommendation No. 7 of Table 23.1 *2019 CAM Plan Recommendations and Progress Reporting* of the 2023 CAM Plan.

<sup>ii</sup> FCM 2019. Canadian Infrastructure Report Card 2019, Monitoring the State of Canada’s Core Infrastructure.

<sup>iii</sup> Under transportation structures, the City of London includes bridges, footbridges, culverts, pedestrian tunnels, retaining walls and noise walls. In contrast, the 2019 Canada Infrastructure Report Card does not include retaining walls or noise walls.

<sup>iv</sup> FCM 2023. New research: Canada’s housing challenge is also an infrastructure challenge. November 23, 2023.

<https://fcm.ca/en/news-media/news-release/new-research-canadas-housing-challenge-also-infrastructure-challenge>

<sup>v</sup> In 2022, the crime rate in London hit a more than 20 year low. Details can be found in this Free Press article:

<https://fpress.com/news/local-news/analysis-london-police-demand-big-bucks-but-wheres-the-debate>

<sup>vi</sup> CBC 2023. Police budget increases may not reduce crime rates in Canadian cities, research indicates. January 18, 2023.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/police-budget-crime-rates-canada-1.7086532>

<sup>vii</sup> The Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention (CMNCP) is a community of practice to build capacity and mobilize Canadian municipalities to prevent and reduce crime and foster community safety and well-being. It can be accessed at <https://safercities.ca/>