



City of London Council
300 Dufferin Ave, 2nd Floor
London Ontario
N6A 4L9

March 27, 2024

Dear Mayor Morgan and City of London Councillors,

RE: Core Area Parking - Two-hour Free Parking

On behalf of our membership, Downtown London fully supports the continuation of free two-hour core area parking. Since 2021, the free two-hour parking program has provided a needed incentive for Londoners and visitors to shop, dine and visit, as well as a cost effective way for the City to support downtown renewal, the retention of businesses and increased economic activity in the core area.

COVID recovery for downtown businesses has happened at a much slower pace than other businesses across the city, with many downtown businesses still facing challenges. That said, the two-hour free parking has offered some assistance and relief to members through COVID recovery and navigating continual business interruptions due to major construction projects in the core area.

These challenges are not yet over for our downtown businesses and many interruptions are expected to continue as BRT and major downtown construction projects continue within the downtown and at its gateways both this year and into next (Wellington, York, Clarence Streets, Clark's Bridge and Victoria Bridge), as well as ongoing BRT construction deficiency work, and Central Ave bike lane construction. Therefore ending the two-hour free core area parking discount is premature and will have dire consequences both in the short and long term for downtown. It will also stop any progress we have made in recent years, resulting in lower numbers of visitors and patrons coming downtown, leading to more business closures and commercial vacancies.

Additionally, downtown, LDBA members and their properties continue to be impacted by negative street activity and health and homelessness. City Council endorsed a one-time investment of \$1.16 million in late 2023 to help downtown and our BIA address these specific impacts. That said, this has provided needed bridging support to help cover the significant costs for building repairs and deteriorating store-fronts and facades due to the escalating incidents of vandalism and property damage, as well as covering expenses for preventative measures and equipment to improve the safety and security of members' premises. A portion of these funds have also been allocated to double the BIA's cleaning and maintenance teams to remove the ever-increasing amount of litter, biowaste, needles, graffiti, etc on public sidewalks and spaces and on private property, while enhancing downtown's public realm to attract more feet to the street. We again thank the City Council for their endorsement of this funding but it was never intended to be used for parking relief

for our members. Rather, this funding has been allocated and is already starting to address the ongoing negative impacts of health and homelessness on our business community and downtown while hubs, housing supports and other strategies and initiatives are developed and fully implemented to support London's most vulnerable.

Through surveys and interviews that Downtown London carries throughout the year with our membership, major construction, detours and the costs and inconvenience of paying for downtown parking are frequently cited by their customers as major deterrents to coming downtown. Ongoing incentives like short-term free parking would ensure there is one less obstacle for patrons and visitors to come downtown.

Many other cities like Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph offer short-term hour free parking in their downtowns and have done so for many years. For these municipalities they have utilized the free short-term parking as one of several easy to implement and cost neutral strategies to assist in the renewal and revitalization of their downtowns.

According to the City Staff Report from June 13, 2023, the two-hour free "CORE" Honk App discount was considered a successful program. In 2022, the cost incurred by the City was \$50,000 based on over 200,000 users of the "CORE" discount code. In comparison Downtown property tax revenues were \$37.7 Million in 2022 and \$38.5 Million in 2023. In addition the City benefits from approximately \$2 Million each year of the BIA levy paid by LDBA members, which helps cover costs for enhanced cleaning, maintenance and beautification of municipally owned properties. That said, any revenue losses related to two-hour free parking more than pays for itself, and helps prevent business closures, commercial vacancies and decreased downtown tax assessment value for the City.

We strongly urge City Council to remove barriers to doing business downtown and utilize proven strategies like short term free parking to support increased economic activity, downtown renewal and the retention of businesses in our core area. As London continues to have one of the country's largest downtown commercial vacancy rates, this is not the time to remove the "CORE" Honk App discount program.

Sincerely,



Barbara Maly
Executive Director
Downtown London