

From: Nova Vita - Rhonda
Sent: Thursday, April 25, 2024 2:30 PM
To: CPSC <cpsc@london.ca>; rhonda
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fw: Downtown Parking

City clerk,

For the past 24 years I have been a proud business owner in downtown London (Richmond and Piccadilly). I have been an engaged and active member of the downtown community, contributing and volunteering countless hours to charities and outreach. However, it is with a deep sadness and desperation that I am writing this letter.

Over the past 3 years I have personally felt the impact of the crisis in our downtown core, there is not a week that goes by without incident. It has led to both my staff and clients feeling unsafe as they are often subjected to unwanted and harmful interactions from individuals who are unwell. We have clients who express that they no longer feel comfortable coming downtown. We have lost clients to this and staff leave whose parents don't want them working downtown.

When the city decided to help businesses out during the pandemic with the Core App that allowed for 2 hours free-parking in the downtown area, I was delighted at the positive impact it had. As a business owner, I felt that the city understood the impact that the pandemic was having and was doing what they could to help us to bring back the vibrancy of our downtown core. However, as time has passed, many of the challenges that downtown business are facing are not improving and we are now facing the elimination of the few initiatives that the city was providing to help us.

I have been astounded at the number of clients who are frustrated and upset that the core app no longer provides 2 hours free parking. Many have remarked that they are feeling so frustrated with their experiences in the core, that it is leading them to make different choices in where they chose to eat, shop, get their hair done etc. Many of the comments have been one more reason not to come downtown. While the city may feel that eliminating the 2 hours free parking will help with revenue, the reality is that the longer term impact of decreasing clientele, combined with other numerous challenges in the core, will lead to even more businesses moving from the core, thus reducing how many thriving, tax paying businesses you have downtown. Looking only at the loss of revenue from the 2 hours free parking, is not an appropriate measure of the impact of this strategy. The reality is that the decision to provide 2 hours free parking, contributed in numerous other positive ways to making Londoners feel welcomed in the core, encouraged to be patrons of business downtown, and to spend their money and their time building a thriving and prosperous core to our city. Considering moving my business my reaction from my commercial real estate agent is, move to west 5 or a nicer area.

Like so many other business owners in the core, the financial strain and the emotional stress of the deterioration of the culture in our downtown has become unsustainable. Our community is suffering. Londoners and businesses deserve to feel safe and thrive.

How can we feel proud to be downtown when we hear regularly from our clients how negative their experiences are in the core? I find myself needing to constantly defend the city and convince visitors and citizens that we have something of value to offer. When reports come out that we have the second largest per capita homeless rate second to Vancouver. Our crime rate is up 45 percent, we

have gone from 600 homeless to well over 2000 and our police service is seeing unprecedented call volumes. I do not recognize this city from the one that I have been an engaged and enthusiastic member of for my entire life. We need a clear strategy to address these challenges. I would love for there to be creative consideration for ways to manage this change and the budget constraints, while still supporting local downtown businesses. I think the key is to focus on the outcome that we are looking for and then collaborate to find ways that meet everyone's needs. We need to continue to actively work to support our downtown businesses and ensure that the voices and needs of those small businesses are being valued and involved in strategies.

I would happily meet with whomever is working on strategies to revitalize our core to contribute to building a safe and flourishing city centre for all. WE need to change the conversation and vibe of our core.

With regards,

Rhonda Bernardi