

June 24, 2024

To: Members of the Strategic Opportunities Review Working Group

I urge you to defeat the motion to cut community funding as outlined in the letter to SORWG's agenda for June 26, 2024

Full disclosure: *I have applied to both the Neighbourhood Decision Making grants and to the Innovation grant program.*

Like many Londoners, I am concerned about the large increase in property taxes this year, and for the next 3 years. I too, look around and sometimes wonder why the city seems to be wasting money on certain programs, services, or activities.

I am sure we all have our own examples of what we consider waste. Councillor Lewis has commented in the past that some people say the protected bike lanes on Wavell are a waste of money. Other people love them. Everyone has their own priorities. Which is why it is so wonderful that the city has a Strategic Plan. I often find a Strategic Plan to be a great resource for identifying priorities.

#### Looking at the Strategic Plan:

Yes, we value financial stewardship. But we also value Inclusivity and Respect; Compassion; Teamwork and Collaboration; Commitment and Drive and Learning.

According to Cambridge Dictionary: *someone's stewardship of something is the way in which they control or take care of something.*

To me, this definition seems to emphasize that the City's values should be inherent in the financial decisions made.

I have heard members of Council in the past reference the good work of the Smart Prosperity Institute. In their March 24, 2023 writing titled: "[Industrial Policymakers need to put Communities First](#)", author John McNally points out

"governments rarely spend enough time engaging with community members to understand the problems they are experiencing." "...creating a sense that governments do not care about the challenges faced by their constituents."

It is my understanding that this was why these Community and Neighbourhood Decision Making (NDM) grants were established in the first place. The City's website indicates that:

"Neighbourhood Decision Making allows residents to be involved in making their neighbourhood a better place to live, while connecting with their neighbours and engaging in their municipal government."

From the letter circulated with this meeting's agenda, I understand that "More importantly" [than the cost savings], "it is time we pause these programs to re-evaluate the value and effectiveness of spending public dollars in this manner."

*This makes me think that this is really a motion about the legitimacy of these programs, not about cost savings opportunities, which to me would be outside the purview of this working group.*

The letter singles out proposals for street parties and park benches. I will point out that Covid highlighted the fact that stronger neighbourhoods provide more resiliency in difficult times and getting more people out (and sitting in) nature, has a positive benefit to their mental health, saving health care dollars and lost productivity.

The Councillors' letter makes me think that if park benches are truly needed, we should perhaps not eliminate this budget, but move the budget to Parks and Recreation (*which some would argue is already underfunded*). It is my understanding that when the NDM grants were established, a portion of the budget for community enhancements were allocated to this project – so if the NDM grants are discontinued, *should the budget not revert back to these staff-directed budgets?*

#### Frivolous Projects

This letter suggests that there are frivolous projects proposed in the NDM grants. This is the beauty of the NDM program. Residents are accountable to how the money is spent. In searching past projects from 2017-2023, I could not find examples of any street parties approved in NDM grant program, unless you count the one Woodfield porch concert series. There were instead, by my count, 21 enhancements to playgrounds, often at elementary schools and 41 projects that were enhancements to green spaces. Schools no longer fund playgrounds, I believe it is up to the Home and School Associations to raise funds for play equipment, which can be difficult for some communities.

#### Outdated Framework

The NDM grants HAVE ALREADY been reviewed and revised this year. Why use more staff time to do it again? That does not seem to me to be efficient use of staff resources. *If you want to make some changes to the NDM grants, perhaps it might be useful to look at the 9 projects awarded for outdoor neighbourhood ice rinks. As we have already experienced, climate change will be bringing warmer and more unstable winters – making outdoor rinks a waste of city funds and staff resources. But I digress.*

#### Community Grants shouldn't benefit for-profit organizations.

The letter seems to indicate a concern for providing capital funds for private and not-for-profit organizations. Again, let's go back to that Strategic Plan. Some of the Areas of

Focus include Accessibility, Inclusion, Culture, Wellbeing and Safety, and Climate Action. I did not recognize any “for profit” organizations that received funding. Many of the services that Londoners rely on are delivered by not-for-profits. From my experience serving on the board of a children’s camp, I understand that when new regulations like Accessibility Standards come into force, it can add a financial burden to organizations. Organizations like the Boys and Girls club, Reforest London, the John Howard Society, the Arts Project each contribute to our community in meaningful ways. The City has many programs that support businesses, like through the Business Improvement Associations, that have larger budgets-are we suspending those programs too? Not-for-profits also create jobs and generate GDP.

### Innovation Grants support Council’s anti-racism and oppression work

A quote from the Multi-Year budget:

“Municipal council has affirmed its commitment to eliminating systemic racism and oppression in our community. As individuals who serve the public, facing this troubling reality is both daunting and uncomfortable-and, for many, deeply personal. While this work demands urgency, the actions needed to deconstruct systems of racism and oppression will require sustained commitment and courageous action to drive transformative change.

When you look at the list of projects funded by Innovation Grants, you can see evidence of this commitment from Council through funding for Muslim, Indigenous, Black, and newcomer communities. If this work “demands urgency”, then pausing these grants for three years undermines this sense of urgency and importance.

### Why are these the first cuts?

It saddens me to think that the first reaction to cutting expenses is targeted at the only programs that Londoners have where they can engage with program funding. We have recently come out of a municipal election where only 25% of Londoners bothered to vote. Suppressing engagement efforts with the public will not improve this average.

When I look at the functions of the SORWG, I see the mandate to review programs and services, explore revenue generation, and develop an annual workplan for both city programs and services and the City’s boards and commissions. Why are we jumping straight to “pausing” – which in effect is canceling of programs BEFORE the reviews are complete?

- Where is the “thorough consideration of all qualitative and quantitative impacts in the review process” that is required in the stated functions?
- Where is the “clear performance metrics and evaluation criteria”?
- Or the “structured framework for decision-making”?

How is this decision to cut community funding justified without any of this pre-work? 'We all know' that once you cancel a program, it is much harder to get it re-instated.

I urge you to defeat this motion and instead start the process for developing criteria and framework and metrics so that a non-emotional decision can be made on this and other cost saving measures.

Respectfully,

Mary Ann Hodge

Climate Action London

*You have my permission to add this letter to the public record.*

## APPENDIX A – CAPITAL PROJECTS

In 2023, there were 2 capital projects:

- \$61K to create a classroom for the Humana Community Services organization – who focus on addressing child and youth mental health concerns and providing supported community living options for children, youth and adults with specialized needs.
- \$38K to a church to facilitate programs serving low income and newcomer residents

The 2022 capital projects were:

- \$24K -John Howard Society, soundproofing for confidentiality
- \$132K – ReForest London, renovations to buildings at Westminster Ponds
- \$24.5K -Reimagine Institute, renovations for community event space and home of the Thing Library
- \$35K – Urban Roots, processing facility, hydro and water upgrades
- \$40K -YMCA (Central), new gym floor

The 2021 capital projects were:

- \$35K- Boys and Girl's Club, new gym floor
- \$80K – Southwest Aboriginal Health Access Centre, security system for Child Care and Family Centre

The 2020 capital projects were:

- \$90K Aeolian Hall Musical Arts, to purchase building to host El Sistema program
- \$75K Big Brothers/Big Sisters, renovations
- \$40K Forest City Velodrome, accessible washrooms, training space
- \$25K John Howard, roof and parking lot repairs
- \$22K N'Amerind Friendship Centre, roof repairs
- \$90K ReForest London, building renovations, including washrooms
- \$36K The Arts Project, washroom renovations
- \$52K Youth Centre for Change, washroom renovations

## APPENDIX B – Innovation Grants

### 2023 Innovation Funding

- \$8K Canadian hearing Services, First Aid and CPR training using ASL
- \$15K Gan-Gani Nursery School, Art Program for seniors and pre-schoolers
- \$28K London Children's Museum, STEAM activities for low-income families
- \$15K London Community Chaplaincy, Youth leadership and mentoring program
- \$22K, London Environmental Network, Carbon Sequestration Feasibility study
- \$44K, Nokee Kwe, Chamber of Commerce collaboration on hiring practices
- \$81K Muslim Resource Centre, Healing program for women/girls responding to Islamophobia
- \$60K Muslim Wellness Network, Mentorship program for youth
- \$67K Now for Tomorrow, Music and dance program for South Sudanese youth
- \$30K Participation House, Community participation for Young Adults
- \$28K WeBridge, Adult day program for Black seniors

### 2022 Innovation Funding

- \$75K Across Languages, App to connect interpreters to medical professionals
- \$47K Alzheimer Society, Dementia training to community volunteers
- \$68K Centre Communautaire Regional, assist newcomers to integrate into London community
- \$50K Anova, Trauma and violence-informed training for landlords to increase safe and quality housing for women

### 2021 Innovation Funding

- \$87K Aeolian Hall Musical Arts, Black London Network Outreach Program
- \$43K Nigerian Association, Mental health and addiction services
- \$35K Pillar Nonprofit Network, Equity & Inclusion Reflection and Framework toolkits
- \$32K ReForest London, Seed Hub and Community Tree Nursery
- \$35K Thames Region Ecological Association, Thing Library
- \$33 Congress of Black Women, Future Smart Youth Program
- \$85K London Cross-Cultural Learner Centre, Youth Peer Support Project
- \$31K WeBridge, Black Seniors and Youth Educational Workshops

### 2020 Innovation Funding

- \$66K Across Languages, Remote Interpretation Change Agent Project