

July 2, 2024

To the members of the Strategic Opportunities Review Working Group,

We were dismayed this week to learn that two Councillors are seeking to have the City Council cancel three years' worth of budgeted investment in community infrastructure, nonprofit innovation, and participatory budgeting for citizens. We see that Deputy Mayor Shawn Lewis and Ward 8 Councillor Steve Lehman are proposing to cancel funding for the City of London Capital and Innovation Grants and the Neighbourhood Decision Making program from 2025–2027.

On behalf of Urban Roots London, I hope to demonstrate the great value of the City of London Capital Grant and implore you to continue making this program and the others available to London organizations.

In 2022 we were granted \$34,600 through the Capital Grant stream. Urban Roots benefited from the Capital Grant to install hydro directly to our main farm site to enhance our irrigation system and to bring electrical to our new two high tunnels, cold storage shed and pack/wash house shed. In addition, Capital Grant funds were also used to design and build our cold storage shed and pack/wash house shed. The Capital Grant funds were a part of significant infrastructure projects in 2023. We received capital funds from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to build the two high tunnels as well as from United Way to build the two sheds and a utility shed that houses the hydro meters. Without the City of London's Capital Grant, we would not have been able to leverage other funding sources sufficient to be able to install Hydro directly on the farm which means our high tunnels and sheds would have been less utilized during the cold months. Before this infrastructure project, we were working out of a shipping container where we could only have 1 or 2 staff inside processing produce and building orders for our community pop-up markets, farmgate markets, donations, and wholesale orders. As the demand for accessible and affordable food increases in London, Urban Roots needed to increase our capacity to meet that demand. Now we can have 4 or more staff processing produce and building orders in the pack/wash house shed. With these investments, we have doubled the amount of produce we can carry in our cold storage shed. This has greatly improved our capacity to help meet the pressing demands of food insecurity in London.

This is not just a “one-off” support but rather a project that will continue to increase the possibility of greater food security in London for years to come. In 2023 we distributed over 20,000 pounds of produce throughout London. Our community pop-up markets increased food security for over 3,500 individuals and 1,700 families across the City of London and our affordable farmgate market had over 1,000 visitors from London and the surrounding area.

We think a program like this should be available to any community organization that can steward community infrastructure, community innovation, and community engagement for ongoing public benefit, and we encourage you to defeat this emergent motion soundly.

Respectfully,

Anna Badillo, Executive Director of Urban Roots London

Jeremy Horrell, President of Urban Roots London