



**URBAN LEAGUE  
LONDON**

Argyle  
Bishop Hellmuth  
Blackfriars-Petersville  
Byron  
Meadowlily Woods  
Glanworth  
Hamilton Road  
Kipps Lane  
Lambeth  
North-East London  
Northridge-Grenfell  
Oakridge-Hazelden  
Oakridge-Riverside  
Old East Village  
Old Masonville  
Old South  
Old Wonderland  
Orchard Park-Sherwood  
Forest  
Riverforks  
SoHo  
St. George-Grosvenor  
Stoneybrook Heights-  
Uplands  
Thorndale  
Woodfield

A.C.O. (London)  
London Fuse  
Nature London  
ReForest London  
T.R.E.A.

February 17, 2015

Mayor and Members  
Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee  
City of London

Re: 2015 Budget and Draft Strategic Plan

The Urban League of London is volunteer umbrella organization for neighbourhood and community organizations in London. We are not here to ask for money. But we do have comments on the budget and the draft Strategic Plan.

Greg Thompson, President of the League



#### RENT OR OWN?

From previous budgets, we have been given to understand that we are paying around \$3 M to rent office space in and around the downtown. Is this the best use of money, year after year? Could it make more sense to have all staff in one place for a lower annual cost of principal and interest payments that would be paid off in the not too distant future instead of paying rent year after year, after year, after year? Has the cost benefit analysis been done?

#### SUBSIDIZED DEVELOPMENT

This relates to when taxpayers pay the development charges for new development. We support the idea of Community Improvement Plans for greater transparency in how much tax money goes to subsidize industrial, institutional and residential development each year. The cost in this year's budget is \$3.5 M - about 0.7% of the tax bill. The residential component is \$1.62 M, up from \$900K last year. We are alarmed to see that it could be much, much higher in years to come. You recently received a staff report on the possibility that over 2000 units taking advantage of this subsidy for a tax levy cost of over \$40 million. I believe the report was received without any questions.

Before the next budget, Council must develop clear, meaningful measures and be prepared to consider ending the program for downtown given it has been in place over 15 yrs. The problem was, previous councils did not have clear objectives and now you don't have the ability to determine if it is time to take away the punch bowl. Having said that, the program seems to be generating activity in Old East and has the potential in SoHo. However, we point out apartments are being built all over the city, and not all are subsidized.

#### POLICE BUDGET – TIME FOR AN OUTSIDE REVIEW?

We suggest you ask the Police Services Board to contract with Simon Fraser University criminologist Curt Griffiths, who runs SFU's Police Studies Program. He has done operational reviews and staff deployment studies for both Winnipeg and Vancouver Police Departments. It could be worth the cost.

#### NATURAL HERITAGE – TIME FOR A FOCUS

London's Natural Heritage System belongs to all of us who are here now, and we should be good stewards for future generations. We are concerned that Natural Heritage is not currently seen as a strategic priority in the draft Strategic Plan. We ask that it be included. And in budgeting we call on you to be more assertive in meeting the expectations of communities who engaged in the Conservation Master Plan processes that have been undertaken and are underway in these Environmentally Significant Areas: Westminster Ponds, Sifton Bog, the Coves, the Medway Valley and Meadowlily Woods. These plans have significant goals that are far beyond the paltry \$200K a year in capital you give staff to implement measures to protect and enjoy these Environmentally Significant Areas. We call on you to set a target in your Strategic Plan that 90% of the recommendations of a Conservation Master Plan are implemented within 5 years. Right now, it has taken twice that long to reach that target at Westminster Ponds and Sifton Bog. With multiyear budgeting, you should be able to set a target and ensure that funds are budgeted to reach that goal.

#### MULTI YEAR BUDGETING

And speaking of multi-year budgeting, we want to better understand how this will work and the impacts. How much certainty vs flexibility will there be? Are decisions to be fixed in stone? If not, what will the next budget cycle look like? How will contingencies be planned for?



#### NEIGHBOURHOOD FOCUS

We commend you for noting in your draft Strategic Plan that it is a priority to have a well laid out approach to deal with surplus school sites. However, we are concerned there is little in the Strategic Plan related to neighbourhoods. We encourage you to direct staff to consult with established neighbourhood associations and their members when you look at strengthening neighbourhoods. When the Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy was launched, staff deliberately avoid established associations.