

TITLE: USC RECOMMENDATIONS RE: THE 2012 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

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REMARKS FOR: JANUARY 17, 2012 – COUNCIL BUDGET CONSULTATION

INTRODUCTION

- My name is Patrick Searle, and I am Vice-President University Affairs at the University Students' Council at Western. I am also a life-long Londoner.
- On behalf of the USC, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity and I hope you find our advice helpful as you deliberate on the budget.
- The USC believes strongly in the principle that students are citizens of London first, and students of Western second. Following on that principle, the USC also believes that it has a responsibility to be a positive force in the broader community.
- The USC has always placed a priority on giving back to London, and being a good partner to City Hall and the neighbourhoods surrounding campus. We give back through our annual fundraising efforts for local and national charities, and students donate countless volunteer hours to local non-profit agencies.
- We are also founding partners in BizInc, an organization dedicated to fostering student entrepreneurship and helping students grow businesses here in London. Job creation is an important factor in retaining students, and we're trying to do our part.
- After hearing the mayor's annual address last week, and after speaking with many of you personally, I am very aware that the City of London values Western students and wants to retain more of us after we graduate. We at the USC want to be a good partner in that endeavour, and the theme of my remarks will be about how you can use the 2012 budget to make London a more attractive city for students to live now, and hopefully retain post-graduation.
- In the five minutes I have with you, I'm going to focus my comments on the 'Adds and Cuts' list that you have prepared, but my broader message is that we at the USC believe you should prioritize and protect two areas in the budget: **Building a Progressive Transportation System**, and **Strengthening Community Engagement**.

1. PROGRESSIVE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

- Many students drive cars, but even more walk, bike, or take the LTC to get around the city and to campus. Pursuing strategies to make London friendly for transit riders, cyclists, and pedestrians is very important to students.
- Looking at the 'adds and cuts' list, we strongly encourage you to fully fund the Transit Growth and Development initiative, which will help the LTC continue taking steps towards implementing Bus Rapid Transit.
- We know full implementation is many years away, but there's no time to waste. For any student who has been literally left behind due to buses that are overcapacity, Bus Rapid Transit can't come too soon.
- Beyond making students' commutes to campus easier, implementing Bus Rapid Transit will send a strong message to students that London is committed to being an urban, healthy, and green city – traits many students will be looking for when they decide where to live after graduation.

- We are very pleased that you set a goal for London to become a 'green and growing city' in your recently approved strategic plan – implementation of rapid transit serves that goal, so we're hopefully you'll make this a priority during budget deliberations. There's no time to waste.

2. STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Students feel connected to Western, but not as connected to the City of London. If London wants to retain students post-graduation it needs to engage them in their neighbourhoods, and make it easy for them to be active citizens.
- At the USC we engage thousands of students in leadership opportunities each year – students want to participate in their campus community, be leaders, volunteer, and engage with issues. Students – with all of their passion, talent, idealism, and perspectives – could also make valuable contributions to the city if they felt more connected and engaged with London.
- That's why I urge you to fund two initiatives on the 'adds and cuts' list: the Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy and Improving Outreach and Communication with Citizens.
- The 'community garden program' and 'clean and green initiatives' within the Strengthening Neighbourhoods strategy could be of great benefit to near campus neighbourhoods.
- These initiatives could be opportunities for students and permanent residents to work together to better their communities and improve Town and Gown relations, but also a chance for students to be active citizens and take pride in their community. For many students, this pride will translate into deeper forms of engagement with the city.
- On the Community Engagement item, hiring a specialist to improve outreach with citizens is an opportunity for London to tap into the energy of students. The 'Living in the City' notices in local newspapers don't inspire long-term residents to engage with the city, let alone students – so we support hiring a community engagement specialist that knows how to engage with our demographic.
- Invest in engagement and you'll start to get more students to public meetings, and applying to sit on Advisory Committees and Task Forces. This engagement will give more students a sense of belonging in London, more knowledge of the city and its job market, more interaction with community leaders who can connect students to jobs – these are key factors in retaining students after graduation.
- We stand ready to assist the city to engage with students, and help get more students involved in opportunities off-campus.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

- I'd like to thank you for your attention and the opportunity to appear. I know you've got a difficult task ahead of you, but I hope you'll make **Building a Progressive Transportation System** and **Strengthening Community Engagement** priorities in your budget deliberations.