

Ottawa

Valour Bldg, Rm 1220
151 Sparks St.
Ottawa ON, K1A 0A6
Tel: 613-995-2901
Email: irene.mathysen@parl.gc.ca



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

London

1700-D Dundas St.
London ON
N5W 3C9
Tel: 519-685-4745

Irene Mathysen

Member of Parliament for London-Fanshawe
Critic for Veterans Affairs

**** OPEN LETTER ****

January 26, 2016

Dear Mayor Brown and Members of Council,

I am writing to you today to clearly express my position on the issue of the Springbank Dam coming before the Strategic Priorities and Planning Committee.

As I am sure you know, in the previous Parliament of Canada, I introduced a Private Members Bill in an effort to restore protections to the Thames River which were stripped away in prior Conservative Omnibus legislation. I received emails and petitions of support for this effort from many Londoners.

I have repeatedly participated in the annual "Thames River Clean-up", often focusing my volunteer hours around the Meadowlily Woods Environmentally Significant Area, to ensure the river flowing through the woods was as healthy as possible.

I have also supported asks for federal funding by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, in order to support student jobs in environmental fields, and to assist with species at risk rehabilitation efforts.

The health of our river has always been important to me and as an MP I have been supportive of efforts to improve our river quality at every opportunity. Having reviewed the body of information available on the health of the river, it is clear that the Thames river is in better health today than when the Springbank Dam was in operation. This is not opinion; it is empirically supported scientific evidence. There is no doubt that the investments made in the Greenway Water Treatment Facility have helped further improve the health of the river; but, that alone cannot be attributed to the recovery. Having the dam open and allowing the water to flow naturally was a significant factor in the improvement of the river's health.

Now that the legal matters around the dam have been resolved, Council must now decide how to best proceed. The decision, in my view, is an easy one and it should be to decommission the dam.

Council is in an enviable position where the environmental, the fiscal, and the intergovernmental relations factors all line up to support decommissioning the dam. I have already briefly addressed the environmental issue. The fiscal issue is just as important.

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Repairing the dam and returning it to full operation will be a costly endeavour, no doubt easily exceeding the settlement the City received in the recent resolution to the lawsuit. If the dam were required to mitigate flooding issues, the investment might potentially be offset in emergency management operational savings in the years to come. However, as we know, the dam serves no purpose in regard to flood mitigation; so, there is no such long term return on investment to be realized.

Nor will fixing the dam provide a significant long term return on investment through increased recreational use. While some recreational opportunities may arise, other recreational opportunities will be lost. I have heard, as you have no doubt heard as well, that for hunters and anglers, the renewed health of the river has increased its recreational value in that area of interest. The Springbank Dam only ever served to create some recreational opportunities, but did so only at the expense of other recreational opportunities. When considered along with the environmental health, the recreational value of Springbank Dam is clearly a holdover from a bygone era when environmental concerns were consistently trumped by human convenience. Today we know better and our actions should reflect that better understanding of the value of a healthy environment.

In short, repairing the Springbank Dam represents an unnecessary additional cost to the property tax burden for Londoners. At a time when genuine infrastructure and rapid transit needs are already creating a tax increase, it would be questionable to add to that increase with a costly repair bill for the dam.

Finally, the City of London must consider the intergovernmental relations component of its decision on the Springbank Dam. The Chippewa of the Thames has been clear in its position in favour of decommissioning the dam and the City of London should be working respectfully with our First Nations neighbours. Again, to ignore the objections of the Chippewa of the Thames would hearken back to an era when First Nations voices were not only ignored, but actively suppressed. As a nation, Canada has recognized we must move forward and have a respectful nation to nation dialogue with our First Nations communities. This is an opportunity to be a leader in so doing.

Further to that, by respecting our First Nations neighbours on this issue, the City will find itself with a staunch ally should the federal government seek to recoup any of the funds it provided towards the repairs of the dam. You can also count on me to stand with you against any such attempt. The City spent the money in good faith on the purpose for which it was intended. That the project in which the investment was made was ultimately a failure should not be cause for a new government to come knocking years later seeking a refund.

It is also important to remember that the Chippewa of the Thames is not the only community down river of the Springbank Dam. The Oneida, the Munsee-Delaware, and Delaware First Nations, as well as small communities such as Thamesville, and the City of

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Chatham will be negatively impacted by a decision to repair the Springbank Dam and return it to operational status.

For eight years the Springbank Dam has been inoperative and London has done fine without it. This is not the time to “push it down the road” with more studies and delays. Now is the time to show leadership for our community and the entire region by putting this issue to bed and moving immediately to starting the process to decommission the Springbank Dam.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Irene Mathysen".

Irene Mathysen, MP
London-Fanshawe
IM/sl

cc: Chief Leslee White-eye, Chippewa of the Thames
Mayor Randy Hope, City of Chatham
Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
Thames River Anglers Association
London MPs & MPPs