

February 25, 2016

c/o London City Hall
Suite 214 – 300 Dufferin Avenue
London, Ontario N6G 1Z2

Dear Mr. Mayor and London City Councillors;

On behalf of the London Rowing Club I would like to add our voice to the discussion on the future of the Springbank Dam. Without the dam and the high water it provides recreational opportunities on the Thames River have been extremely limited for the majority of citizens for the last 9 years. For the century before the 2007 replacement of the dam Londoners had the opportunity to enjoy the river and the accessible opportunities it afforded to canoe, kayak, dragon boat, enjoy river cruises and row. As a city, we have come to a crossroads about the future of a stretch of the Thames that runs through the city's core. The question seems to be: Do we want a vibrant urban river or do we want current state, a river that can best be described as a large ditch.

For historical background, since the 1960's the London Rowing Club has called the Thames River its home. Prior to the wars there were multiple rowing clubs that rowed on the Thames and made the river their home. The rivers accessibility and proximity to the population of the city helped to grow the current London Rowing Club and 100's of Youth and Adults alike rowed and raced on the Thames. A number of Olympians and National team members got their start on that Thames and represented the club and the city at numerous international events with great success. Since 2007 the club has struggled to maintain membership and the quality of programs we were able to have on the Thames. While Fanshawe Lake is the home of the Canadian National Team it is not easily accessible to all residents of the city and the London Rowing Club does not have the same sort of facilities at Fanshawe as we have on the Thames.

The rowing club used to annually host the Head of the Thames Rowing Regatta every September until the dam was rebuilt. This regatta brought upwards of 2,000 competitors and their supporters to our city from all over the world. Local businesses, restaurants, and hotels benefited from this annual event. The club still almost 10 years after the last regatta gets emails and questions from rowers and clubs from all over North America wondering when the dam will be fixed and when they can come back to London to Race on the Thames. They are all amazed that the city still has not taken the action to restore the river to a usable state.

A river is a great asset to any city. There are numerous examples of cities that have revitalized themselves through redevelopment of their rivers. In Pittsburgh Pennsylvania for

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example, where 3 rivers meet in a fork like our Thames, they have revitalized that area and then stretches of all 3 rivers to allow citizens the ability to enjoy the heart of the city. In Hartford Connecticut, the riverfront recapture project has not only beautified and restored the waterfront, but also brought recreation to the river where it did not previously have a presence. There are many other examples where cities worldwide have used their waterfronts to create vibrant community recreational opportunities on their rivers.

Much has been made in the media about water quality; with or without the dam the issues of water quality will still exist. Any decision made without the benefit of an Environmental Assessment will not provide for an informed decision about an asset that plays a significant part of a much larger downtown London revitalization project. The community wants a healthy river, no one would argue that. However, without 2016 research on impacts on and by the dam on the quality of the water that flows in the Thames, a truly educated decision cannot be made. I hope you are supportive of an Environmental Assessment. And should that be favourable to fixing the dam, you will support that as well, so we can all get back to enjoying the Thames as the recreational asset it can be for London and the surrounding areas.

Stephen Ross
President and Head Coach
London Rowing Club

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