

I appreciate this public meeting focusing on the question of the Springbank Dam, and I want to take the opportunity to encourage a broader perspective on what the Thames River might mean to the people of London and the wider Thames River watershed.

Fixing the dam is only a small piece of the project called "Back to the River." If you speak with the First Nations communities that live just downstream from London, they will talk about *our* river. What would happen if all of us who share this watershed understood the Thames River to be not *the* river, but *our* river? Back to *our* River. What comes downstream to us matters, and what goes downstream from us matters as well. We are all interconnected as the people of the Thames River watershed.

Whether there is any benefit to the water quality in allowing the river to run freely through the dam all year instead of for just seven months depends on who is arguing the point. However, until we address the problem of 666 spills upstream in the watershed as documented in the most recent four year period on the UTRCA website, there is faint hope that the water in the Thames River is truly cleaner as a result of a small broken dam.

Others say that the river smells bad when the dam is in operation, but the distinctive odour of burning sewage actually originates at the Greenway Treatment Facility where the wind picks it up from the smokestack and carries it away in the direction of the unfortunate residents on Riverside Drive. Common sense tells us that no one would be interested in canoeing, kayaking or rowing on an evil smelling river.

As an educator, I want the Thames River to be available for all of our children in this city in the same way it was available for me and my children. Having watched enough tourists set out in canoes from the Portage Store on Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park, I know that paddling skills and canoe safety do not come naturally, but I also know that, once learned, they can give a lifetime of pleasure. This is how I want the Thames to become *our* river for the children who live in this city, regardless of income.

I also want to talk about the differently abled in this city, because I am one of them. When I broke my knee very badly almost ten years ago now, I did not recover the full range of motion. As a result, getting in and out of my canoe has become trickier, but you would never know this from watching me on the water. We need to ensure that the Thames is fully accessible as *our* river for differently abled Londoners who want to be included on the water, too.

I am therefore arguing that we need to allow the community of canoeists, kayakers, and rowers who have been patiently waiting to return to the river. I am also arguing that we need to ensure the river is safe and accessible for our children and the differently abled. Most importantly, however, I am arguing that we need to revisit "Back to the River," undertake a new

environmental assessment that encompasses all parts of the project, and look again at our river with fresh eyes before we move on.