

Dear Mayor Brown and City Council,

I am writing this letter in response to the Community and Protective Services Committee's request to compress the timeline for the development of the Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (CDIS). I commend Council on its commitment to completing and implementing the strategy as a pressing priority and recognize that this comes from a desire for London be a genuinely inclusive community for all.

However, while I appreciate the urgency to complete this work, the Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Oppression Committee at our meeting this past Thursday, discussed and agreed on some concerns we have about completing this on such a short timeline and how this could impact doing this work in partnership with the community.

Feedback from the community has indicated that in order for the CDIS to be successful, it must be embedded in community and led in full partnership with community members. Therefore we outline the following concerns in regards to the impact a shortened timeline will have on community members and how this relates to the success of the CDI strategy:

1. Community engagement and development of relationships

In order to engage the community effectively on this matter, relationships and trust need to be built and nurtured. There is a valid history of mistrust among marginalized groups in any city and it takes times and genuine effort to engage authentically in community. We fear that community members may perceive a quick timeline as a signal that community involvement is not a priority and that the community will not be effectively engaged.

For this strategy to succeed, it must be truly owned by community. That will take time.

2. Onus of volunteers

When considering compressing the timeline, it is important to be mindful that a significant amount of this work is expected to be led by community champions. Therefore, asking volunteers to contribute significantly more of their personal time, within a shorter time frame can be a deterrent to participation. In order for the Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to be successful, it is important to have broad representation from diverse groups. Heavy workload, within a short period of time will be a barrier to participation.

Given that this work will be done in partnership with community, we are also concerned that volunteers will be held responsible for potential strategy failures as a result of being rushed by Council's urgency to complete this work.

We commend City Council on its commitment to the Community Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. This work is too important not to get right. It's not a matter of how quickly we can complete this work, but how effectively. Thank you for your consideration.

My best,
Shawna Lewkowitz