

September 17, 2018

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter to voice my support for the installation of sidewalks on both sides of the street on Lola St, as well as other streets in the neighbourhood around Byron Southwood Public School. I support the installation of sidewalks as a Byron Southwood parent and a resident of that neighbourhood. I also support the installation of sidewalks as a community organizer and a PhD candidate in Geography whose work focuses primarily on urban landscapes.

As a parent of three children who attend Byron Southwood P.S., I want to feel certain that my children are safe when walking to and from school every day. Active transportation (walking as well as cycling) is an important aspect of my family's healthy lifestyle and my children are expected to walk to school every day. These walks allow them to not only get some exercise but to feel connected to our neighbourhood and to have some engagement with nature. However, when they have to walk on the street as part of their journey to school I, and they, worry about their safety. This worry is not unfounded. According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, the leading cause of "unintentional injury deaths" for children from ages 1 to 19 are motor vehicle accidents¹.

From my own experience as a pedestrian in Byron, not all drivers watch for, slow down for or expect pedestrians to be on the street, even in sidewalk-less neighbourhoods. One of the most striking things I noticed when I moved from central London to Byron, was the lack of people walking around the neighbourhood in Byron, especially during the daytime and later evening. Suburban areas built for cars have, unsurprisingly, become dominated by them. As a woman, walking around empty streets feels quite unsafe, something I spoke to the media about earlier this year². I believe sidewalks on both sides of all streets in Byron will have a positive effect on encouraging more people, including children, to walk.

As an urban geographer and community organizer I believe that we need to create livable, human-scale cities that encourage people to engage in active transportation. I draw inspiration from the work of urban organizer and scholar Jane Jacobs, who argued 57 years ago that cities are safest, healthiest, and most vibrant when people are out on the sidewalks and city streets interacting with their neighbours and other community members³.

Originally the developers of sidewalk-less neighbourhoods may have hoped that the streets would become multi-use, allowing for cars, pedestrians, and cyclists to share the space. This is not how these streets are used or experienced in everyday life. On sidewalk-less streets, car drivers continue to drive fast and to expect an unobstructed roadway. I believe these streets are less safe but, more importantly, they *feel* less safe to people and, thus, discourage active transportation something supported by numerous academic studies⁴.

Additionally, I firmly believe that sustainable cities will help urban-dwellers to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Active transportation, both walking and cycling, will be an important part of urban climate change mitigation and adaptation. We need

¹ <https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/child-and-youth-injury-prevention>

² Please see <https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/london-begins-long-journey-to-become-a-safer-city-for-women>. Interestingly, academic studies have shown a gender difference in parents' perceptions of street safety for children, so this is very much a gendered issue <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214140515006805>

³ Please see Jacobs 1961 book *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*

⁴ For example: <https://europepmc.org/abstract/med/22217568>

to redesign cities in North America that encourage active transportation and public transit and this requires the appropriate infrastructure.

London has an opportunity to create a more vibrant, sustainable city. Sidewalks on both sides of city streets may seem like a small thing compared to other initiatives, but I believe it will have a positive impact, increasing safety for pedestrians and encouraging people to engage in active transportation.

Thank-you,

Rebecca Ellis

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