

LONDON COMMUNITY ADVOCATES NETWORK

February 26, 2019

To: City of London, Strategic Planning stratplan2019@london.ca

From: London Community Advocates Network

RE: CITY OF LONDON- STRATEGIC PLAN

The London Community Advocates Network (the “Network”) is comprised of approximately 50 community organizations that assist recipients of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program benefits in London and Middlesex County. We meet as a group on a quarterly basis with staff from both program areas to provide input into local issues and policies affecting the vulnerable population we serve. In addition, the Network advocates on behalf of low-income Londoners to ensure they are represented vis-à-vis poverty issues at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

The Network facilitated a focus group of our member agencies in February to support the Strategic Planning process with discussion and to provide feedback on the Draft Outcomes, Expected Results, and Strategies being developed. Our submission is specifically focused on the “Strengthening our Community” section of the draft plan.

Despite the efforts of London organizations, the number of London and Middlesex individuals living in poverty has increased in the last decade. A recent 2017 study by the London Poverty Research Centre noted that of 15 large cities reviewed, London has the highest per capita of its population on Ontario Works assistance and that the time individuals stay on Ontario Works is the highest as well. A 2015 Poverty Trends in London paper noting the increase in poverty [At 17%, London’s poverty rate eclipses provincial levels], was the impetus for the City to have extensive community consultations that led to the creation of the 2016 London For All—A Roadmap to End Poverty Report. This report notes that 24% of our children are living in poverty, as are 41% of indigenous people of London. In order to “Strengthen our Community” we need to implement programs that improve the quality of life for those living in poverty and to reduce the level of poverty in the community.

Specifically, we would like to highlight some of the recommendations that would meet our previous request for changes:

1. Londoners have access to the supports they need to be successful.

- a. **Affordable & Quality Housing Options**

The average rent for one-bedroom apartment in London has risen 15% during the last year to \$980/month, including a 3.2 per cent jump in June. The last annual survey conducted in October by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. (CMHC) that pegged the vacancy rate for the metro London area at 1.8 per cent,

the lowest rate in 18 years. There are 4,700 people on waiting lists for affordable housing.

Recommendation: Creation of portable housing benefit. In London there is a lack of affordable units. There is a very long waiting list for RGI units. No RGI units are being built in London.

Recommendation: The affordable housing units being created in London have rents in the \$1,000.00 range. This is beyond the financial means of those on OW and ODSP. To meet the **London definition of Affordable Housing**, 50% of the Affordable Housing units need to be affordable to families earning less than \$20,000 per year (those in the 30th percentile). The few being created in London only meet the needs of those in the 60th percentile and we urge you to direct staff to utilize the Affordable Housing Reserve appropriately and to review the reports to ensure this is being implemented. This definition also needs to be enforced when negotiating bonusing with developers requesting zoning bylaw changes.

Recommendation: Direct staff to implement the **Home Ownership Reserve**.

Recommendation: Direct staff to budget the **Ontario Renovates** funding back to the program that was not implemented since 2015. It was offered late in 2018 and the funding was depleted within 2 weeks. Clearly, the need is high and the budget was redirected by administration. Implementation was restricted to seniors and disabled. Those who would benefit include low-income families in critical need. The recovered funding could be directed to meet those excluded from the criteria.

Recommendation: London Middlesex Housing Corporation housing units are valuable **community assets**. These RGI units need to be repaired and maintained for safety and security of potential and current tenants.

b. Support improved access to mental health and addictions services

Recommendation: Housing First demands three cornerstones be met. Clinical supports, Community Supports, and Housing. Those individuals suffering with mental health and addictions need these criteria to be met in order for them to successfully live independently. Any programs that purport to deliver this model must be accountable to show all three criteria are being met.

c. Decrease the number of London residents experiencing poverty

Recommendation: Implement the business case for City of London funded programs/services to pay a living wage and promote it to other businesses (see recommendation 2.10 of the London for All report). The City needs to set the example as a Living Wage Employer.

Recommendation: Create more Childcare spaces and subsidies.

Recommendation: Increase the funding and eligibility criteria for Discretionary Assistance and the Housing Stability Bank access.

Recommendation: Support Londoners to access affordable public transportation where they live and work; the current plan focuses on getting students to school. We need transit focused on getting residents to where there are jobs and serving our aging population where they live, shop, and access health care services. Accessibility to bus stops needs to be improved to accommodate seniors and disability access.

Recommendation: Advocate to the Province for adequate livable rates for citizens accessing Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support programs.

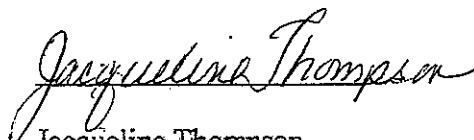
Recommendation: Advocate to the Province to make minimum wage a living wage that is linked to inflation and the Ontario Market Baskets Measures.

Improving accountability and transparency in decision making will enable more Londoners to support decision making. We believe these recommendations need to be prioritized in the budget. As per the above recommendations, clear budget line items specific to the implementation will also promote better opportunity for council to audit the outcomes of the strategies.

Yours truly,



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cc Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee - City of London