

May 9, 2019

To: Mayor Ed Holder and City Council

CC: Cathy Saunders, City Clerk

From: Martha Powell, President & CEO, London Community Foundation
Greg Playford, Board Chair, London Community Foundation
Fred Galloway, Chair BTTR, Community Mobilization Committee, London Community Foundation

RE: The Importance of Back to the River (BTTR) to our community

London Community Foundation wishes to thank the City for their continued partnership and support of Back to the River. The intent of this letter is to reaffirm our commitment to this partnership as well as to share in detail why we believe Back to the River is critical to our city's culture, economy and social fabric.

The City of London, Upper Thames Conservation Authority, and London Community Foundation began this journey together four years ago. Our shared vision was of a unique opportunity for citizens and the City to undertake this exciting revitalization together – a project that has the potential to continue to transform our downtown core, strengthen our sense of belonging and civic pride, and create opportunities for economic impact and environmental stewardship. We believe in this project because of its ability to impact all Londoners and to move us closer to *what London can be*, the central focus of our 2018 Vital Signs report, which can be found here: <https://www.londonvitalsigns.ca/>

This is a project for *all* Londoners

At its core, Back to the River has always been about creating an accessible, inclusive community space for *everyone* to enjoy. This is not about one group, one neighbourhood or one project feature: it's about all of us.

Back to the River will ensure our community has a space where families can enjoy free, family friendly activities. While not every family can afford to participate in higher priced, ticketed experiences or attractions, everyone is welcome at the Forks of the Thames. The river, the splash pads, the ducks and wildlife, social gatherings, festivals and events are experiences for all Londoners to enjoy, equally.

Housing & Quality of Life

In 2015, 45.6% of London renters spent more than 30% of their income on rent. Furthermore, in 2017, the rental vacancy rate in London was just 1.8%, a drop from the already low 2.1% in 2016. A core component of this project addresses one of our community's most urgent needs – accessibility and affordability of housing.

Like the City of London, London Community Foundation and our donors care deeply about the quality of life for our most vulnerable. LCF is proud to grant millions of dollars annually toward important community issues and this particular issue could not be more pressing, both in terms of actual housing stock and also in the vital sense of belonging and community that comes with having a stable home. Back to the River will create more opportunities for affordable housing in places where Londoners want to live.

Further, the key to a successful downtown is to have a mix of economic, cultural and residential opportunities. With over 2,500 new homes approved in downtown London in at least 8 new residential developments, and 600+ units already under construction, the City knows this well and is continuously acting to ensure the vibrancy and livability of our downtown. We want to help. The river and the Forks of the Thames will be the backyard and neighbourhood park of these individuals and families, and contribute significantly to their quality of life and retention in our downtown.

Economic Impact

Through extensive research we have discovered that river revitalizations have the power to breathe new life into communities. The direct and indirect economic impact they bring is tremendous as they facilitate the creation of spaces where talented people want to come, stay and build a life. This helps ensure that small businesses and large employers thrive. We also want to help create a space that attracts visitors (locally and from afar) through conferences, major music and sporting events. Back to the River is about supporting the efforts of the City, Tourism London, London Convention Centre, Downtown London and others to bring more investment to our community. It's about continuing the momentum of downtown revitalization, a vision shared by the City and private partners that has brought us community, cultural and tourism gems like Budweiser Gardens, Covent Garden Market, Fanshawe College and Dundas Place.

Environmental Stewardship

Back to the River is about caring about the environment, the health of our community and our river's role in that. It's about recognizing the river's important role in our community as a heritage river and about honouring our history and the important connection of the river to local Indigenous Peoples. Back to the River will provide opportunities to create awareness and educate Londoners about the history of our river and its ecosystems while providing more inclusive (free) opportunities for Londoners of all ages to enjoy this beautiful natural asset.

We are proud and grateful to have had a partnership with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority from the very beginning of this project. It is a testament to our commitment to environmental sustainability and stewardship.

Moving closer to *what London can be*

The possibilities for river revitalization extend far beyond the Forks of the Thames. This is a project with a long-term vision that will stretch north, west, and south throughout the river corridor. Created out of a desire to lead transformational projects that make bold strokes for change, Back to the River has the potential to move our city closer to *what London can be*. We believe in a community that is inclusive, green, full of opportunity and growth, and most importantly, ensures that our most vulnerable are taken care of and included in everything this great city has to offer.

This is a project about our local environment, economy and quality of life, and about the overall livability, growth and business success of our community. This is also a project about the power of the City's partnerships with local organizations, and future opportunities to work with private citizens who want to invest their own dollars in shared, affordable and attractive public spaces for all Londoners.

Over the past four years and even more recently, citizens from all walks of life have demonstrated the importance of this project to our community. From families, to entrepreneurs, businesses, environmentalists, neighbourhood associations, ethnocultural groups and our Indigenous communities, the message is clear – Back to the River will benefit our community on many levels.

We sincerely value our partnership with the City of London and Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. We trust that the City believes in the vision of this project and *what London can be*. We look forward to continuing our journey together.



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Respectfully submitted,

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