

Mar 1, 2021

CWC Members and Councillors of the City of London;

Submission Re Sidewalk Exemption for Friars Way and Doncaster Ave

We are 30 year residents of Sherwood Forest subdivision. While our street address is on Doncaster Ave, our side yard is on Friars Way, where a sidewalk is proposed.

The issue before the Committee and ultimately Council, is one of competing City of London Policies (London Plan), By-laws (Tree Protection), initiatives (Urban Forest, Climate Emergency Declaration) and design guidelines of walkability (Complete Streets Design Manual). We appreciate the opportunity to provide our feedback into this decision making process by outlining our experiences within this specific community; although likely echoed throughout the City in areas with mature trees lining the boulevard.

Our submission to you is one that suggests the efforts to protect our mature Urban Forest should outweigh the desire for sidewalks. Our quiet internal roads are walkable and do not pose mobility issues.

The Case For Good Existing Mobility and No Need for Sidewalks

We moved to Sherwood Forest as a young family, precisely for the cultural heritage of a community designed with tree preservation and walkability in mind. The roads are wider than the typical street width outlined in the City Complete Streets Design Manual. The small local roads feed to the busier main streets with sidewalks within our community. These sidewalks lead you to local public schools, the shopping mall, transit and the University. Our kids grew up from being walked in strollers through our peaceful tree-lined streets, to walking to public school; all the while learning to ride bikes, play road hockey and visit friends. Their ability to do all these things safely, without sidewalks on the smaller local roads, speaks volumes of the good planning and design that went into Sherwood Forest and Orchard Park communities. We have seen the generation that moved in before us, transition to the need for canes and walkers, yet they remain undeterred in walking our local roads without sidewalks.

The greater mobility and walkability challenge is in the winter where existing sidewalks are barely walkable for able bodied people and virtually impossible for mobility devices. Also, one of the greatest impediments to mobility, is the efforts required beyond our subdivision to reach the mall and transit across Wonderland Road. The City should, with its limited resources, target the resolution of the more obvious and constraining mobility challenges first.

The Case for Retaining Our Mature Tree Canopy

In the London Plan, there is a full chapter on the Urban Forest. Its' guiding policies in Policy 389 speak to a City desire for an increase in tree canopy over time. It speaks to the urban forest be managed as infrastructure and trees are valued as important assets. The policies aim to ensure the structure and functions of the Urban Forest are not harmed. Most telling however is

“Policy 391.1 “Protect more – protect existing trees, woodland ecosystems and other vegetation”.

Removal of mature trees is contrary to these policy objectives. In the short segment of Friar's Way alone, 30 trees represent nearly 0.25 ha of Urban Forest to be removed. We suspect more trees will be impacted than suggested as boundary trees and private trees will also be impacted by sidewalk construction; and these have not been accounted for to date. Across the city, street tree removal would add up to a considerable amount of Urban Forest loss if street tree preservation is not considered at all.

The City of London Tree Protection By-law over-riding objective, as stated at the beginning of the by-law is:

“A by-law to regulate the injuring and Destruction of Trees and to encourage preservation and planting of Trees throughout the City of London”

A few other subsection of the by-law state;

“7.2; No Person shall injure or Destroy or cause the injury or Destruction of a Distinctive Tree, unless a Distinctive Tree Permit has been issued by the City Planner to permit Injury or Destruction.”

A distinctive tree is one that has “has attained a trunk diameter of 50cm or greater, measured from the natural ground level to 1.4m above the Natural Ground Level...” . The trees slated for removal are all 40 cm and greater, with many that meet the distinctive tree category.

“7.6 (c) If the Tree is a Boundary Tree, written consent to the application by the adjacent landowner”

There has been no discussion about impacts to boundary trees or privately owned trees near the boundary that will be affected by sidewalks. At this stage of the process, it is our feeling many more trees will be affected than suggested. Sidewalk construction is very impactful on tree roots as deep excavation is needed to provide a gravel base to prevent future heaving of the sidewalk.

The City of Toronto Tree protection zones within the Private Tree Bylaw suggests that for the trees along Friars Way, a 3 to 3.6m protection zone is needed beyond the trunk. While recognizing this distance is not needed on the street side of the tree since anchor roots have been constrained since the beginning, any work on the house side of the street will be substantially within this 3 to 3.6 m zone for City and private trees.

An Urban Forest Strategy was authored by the City in 2012. In that report, it valued the Urban Forest at more than 1.5 billion dollars. The carbon storage and sequestration was valued at 15.8 tonnes/ha/yr. The removal of approximately 0.25 ha represents a loss of nearly 4 tonnes/yr of carbon management for climate change. Furthermore, these trees provide shade to the homes and, as a result, provide even greater benefit in energy use reductions. Map 8 of the report actually used this neighbourhood as an example of good Urban Forest cover.

In addition, these Urban Forest Trees, by their very presence near the Medway Valley Environmentally Significant Area, provide added support to the wildlife that call the Medway Valley ESA home. We often see Cooper's Hawk, Red-tail Hawk and Red-Bellied Woodpecker, to name a few, perching on these trees slated for removal. Many evenings, Screech Owl are heard in these, and other street trees in the subdivision, as they move about on their hunting rounds.

International Society of Arboriculture has developed a system of valuing trees. This system is used in determining compensation for tree removals. A 45cm diameter tree (average size of tree for removal) in front of a house would be valued at \$28000 /tree. This represents an Urban Forest asset loss of nearly 1 million dollars on Friars Way alone.

Once all trees are actually evaluated for removal, including private trees, this number will be much higher.

In the City of London Climate Emergency Declaration, amongst the top five actions recommended are the encouragement of making more walking and cycling trips and make your home more energy efficient. Walking and cycling is prevalent on our local streets, without sidewalks. The streets of Sherwood Forest and Orchard Park have been designed for traffic calming and tree retention. Residents of the neighbourhood are in virtually unanimous agreement that the streets are very walkable given the low traffic volumes, wide streets and knowledge that pedestrians will be using the side parts of the road. We have seen people in motorized wheel chairs and aged people using canes and walkers on the streets, so the walkability in the neighbourhood is not limited to just able bodied people under current conditions. For energy efficiency, the trees slated for removal, provide shade to the homes, particularly the south facing ones. And as noted earlier, this shading provides for energy efficiency.

Walkability and Mobility Initiatives

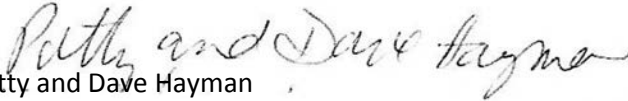
We recognize the driving force behind sidewalk construction in the City of London is to improve walkability and mobility. As residents of London, we too want our areas to be safe for mobility such that individuals requiring assistive mobility devices can get around and enjoy our beautiful leaf-lined streets.

However, the City has adopted a one solution approach to mobility. While sidewalks are absolutely necessary on busy streets, other options should be considered for low traffic settings such as Friars Way and in the other mature neighbourhoods in London.

It is our opinion, as long-time residents of Sherwood Forest, that the tree protection and preservation should be the defining principal in this decision. This approach will preserve the cultural heritage of our subdivision design, the Urban Forest and Climate Change Emergency initiatives. Sidewalks will not encourage more walking and cycling nor improve mobility in an already walked, cycled and mobile local road.

City Council should exempt this sidewalk plan, or at a minimum, put it on hold, until there has been more dialogue with residents. A mutual understanding of the goals for both the City and residents and more details on the construction plans and tree preservation techniques employed or could be employed are needed, to find the appropriate balance.

Respectfully yours


Patty and Dave Hayman
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cc. P. Squire