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Thursday March 11, 2021

City of London

300 Dufferin Ave.

London, Ontario

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Attention: Special Civic Works Committee

RE: Special Meeting – March 15, 2021

Dear Committee Members,

We reside in the Oakridge Acres area, near Tarbart Terrace, and have recently become aware of the controversy regarding sidewalk installation during upgrades in the coming months. We have also heard arguments supporting and opposing the installation of sidewalks. Our street does not have sidewalks, but believe it is only a matter of time before an upgrade plan is put into action. At this time we neither support nor oppose sidewalks being installed, but strongly believe that the topic should be discussed and all opinions considered in a fair and respectful manner. We are writing this letter because we are both stunned and upset by comments made by Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair Mr. Jay Menard accusing those opposed to the sidewalks as “excluding” people with disabilities, the elderly and parents with strollers and causing “systematic ableism.” Mr. Menard, however well intentioned, as the chair of such an important committee, must be respectful of others and the different opinions they may have. It appears that he has taken this debate personally, with a closed mind and the attitude of “sidewalks at all cost.”

Oakridge Acres itself was designed with the clear intention of traffic calming by street design resulting in confusing navigation for those who do not reside in the area. As a direct result, there are very low traffic volumes in the area – especially on tertiary roads like Tarbart Terrace. This is something residents living on the road would be able to speak to with first-hand knowledge. We also believe it is important not only to solicit the opinions of residents but to respect what they have to say even if it interferes with city planning. Furthermore it is unfair to label them as discriminating against others who don’t live on the street or even in the immediate area. We have two school aged children and have had many occasions to walk on Tarbart Terrace, including walks, bike rides, and at Halloween, and have never felt in danger or limited in mobility due to a lack of sidewalks. Valetta Street is the main secondary road in our neighbourhood and there are sidewalks on both sides. There were times this winter, and every past winter, when it was safer and easier to walk on the road because the sidewalks were either not plowed or extremely icy after being plowed. Having sidewalks does not solve all problems and not having sidewalks does not limit mobility in this neighbourhood – even if someone has a disability, are elderly or pushing a stroller.

Another important consideration, for us, is the city budget and the fact that COVID-19 spending has led to major spending increases in the past year resulting in substantial increases to property taxes for residents. Creating sidewalks, especially where they may not be needed (or wanted), has a high initial cost with the added yearly cost in the future to maintain in winter and as they age. Not installing sidewalks on every single street may be a major way to save money now and in the future and certainly worth considering.

Finally, we do like the idea of living in the “Forest City” and believe that the City of London takes great pride in this recognition and makes decisions to keep our trees healthy and great in numbers. We do not like the idea of removing any greenery, including trees, shrubs and grass and replacing it with concrete. This is what separates London from many other cities across the world. Winding and confusing streets, the lack of sidewalks, and low traffic volume are just a few of the characteristics of Oakridge Acres that is highly sought after and gives it its charm.

Sincerely,

Chris Golder & Keiko Yano