

March 16, 2021

Dear Mayor Holder and Council,

I am seeking your support in an exemption to the policy on installing sidewalks with concurrent road repairs as presented in the February 9, 2021 report to the Civic Works Committee. Although I was only one delegation representing Friars Way in the Sherwood Forest neighbourhood, I was heartened to hear from many other concerned citizens throughout the city asking for the same exemption for their streets in order to save the mature trees that are critical to our identity as the Forest City.

At the Civic Works Committee on March 15, I heard over 25 neighbourhood delegations speak eloquently about the overwhelming life-sustaining impact of the trees and the layout of the wide streets on their mental health, on their physical health, on their connections to their community and to the city broadly. We all shared the same sense of safety and security in our neighbourhood because the trees provide comfort in its shade; it gives us clean air to breathe; it is one way that we can live safely in the face of a climate emergency.

Among these delegations, I heard from a variety of people, vulnerable and courageous in their public disclosure of their disability statuses, the very people this sidewalk policy is supposed to support and protect, ask for an exemption because a sidewalk, in its traditional definition, actually hinders their ability to live freely and move safely in London.

Our streets are wide and old but they are safer than the sidewalks because they are flat and clear, allowing us obstacle-free mobility all year around.

CWC voted with fear. If we are fearful about a possible tragedy on the road, between a vulnerable citizen and a car, I would rather see changes that squarely puts the responsibility on the perpetrator: cars. There are a variety of actions that we could implement such as further reductions to speed limits and more signage to remind drivers of their responsibility to the citizens in our neighbourhoods than to clear cut 9 streets of their trees in order to install sidewalks. There are other alternative designs we could consider that protect both the trees and supports inclusive and accessible living for its citizens.

Currently, London has a deeply contradictory position on its trees. We embrace the identity of the Forest City. We have bylaws protecting trees on private property. We have financial aid programs to support its citizens in the fight against gypsy moths but the CWC endorsement of the current plan will result in the removal a minimum of 73 mature trees despite the protest of almost 30 delegations and accompanying petitions. The City of Kitchener has an extensive Urban Forestry program focused on sustainability, published publicly. I do not see the equivalent for our city. I would love to see the same kind of integrated and coordinated approach of our civic resources working towards creating an accessible and sustainable Forest City. The proposal at the moment does not reflect these values.

Please help find a better way on March 23 by voting in favour of the exemption for Friars Way and the other 8 streets affected by 2021 Renew London Construction Plan.

CWC did not hear us on March 15. I hope you and esteemed councillors on Council will hear us now.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Lilianne Dang

https://www.kitchener.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Documents/INS_OPS_Urban_Forestry_Developing_a_sustainable_urban_forest_program.pdf