

Dear Council members,

I am emailing to ask for your support in overturning decisions made on Monday March 15th by the Civic Works Committee (CWC) to deny any exemptions for sidewalk installation on quiet neighbourhood streets, including but not limited to, Friars Way, Doncaster Place and Abbey Rise, during street resurfacing in the summer of 2021. I am requesting your support for one reason only; to facilitate further discussions and interactions with the council to achieve outcomes for all citizens of London.

Essentially, I am requesting your support of two major and laudable pledges by our city:

Pledge #1) to enhance accessibility for all in accordance with AODA guidelines
Pledge #2) to pursue policies that help mitigate climate change

First, let me express my unconditional support for both of these pledges.

Unfortunately, based on the hastily prepared plans provided by the city for resurfacing Friars Way, Doncaster Place and Abbey Rise, and our subsequent unsuccessful interactions with the CWC to engage them in discussions about enhancing these plans, it appears the CWC are either unable or unwilling to implement any plan that simultaneously supports both of these goals.

In an effort to support pledge#1, the CWC has chosen to continually champion its simplistic and myopic approach of “adding a sidewalk” without further discussion or review.

To achieve this, the CWC regrettably endorses the removal of large numbers of mature and irreplaceable trees in the densely tree lined, quiet neighbourhood streets of London, which is obviously contrary to pledge #2.

In parallel, the council has initiated some excellent policies in support of pledge #2, including financial support for maintaining old trees (<https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/have-an-old-tree-london-has-money-to-help-you-keep-it-alive>) and other efforts aimed at providing ongoing expansion of both tree numbers and tree canopy in our “Forest City”. These excellent policies are designed to enhance carbon dioxide fixation, mitigate flooding, cool neighbourhood streets, counter gypsy moth infestation impacts and provide a calming influence on the mental health of those who have suffered during the recent pandemic.

In an effort to assist the CWC embrace more progressive, modern and impactful approaches that are consistent with both pledge #1 and pledge #2, I was one of many who contributed to delegations to the CWC on March 15th. Multiple powerpoint presentations and speeches cohesively indicated that many of the streets under review are already highly accessible, due to their original and intentional traffic calming design and generous width (~ 8.5 metres). It was also noted that there are practical strategies that could facilitate street resurfacing with minimal tree loss. For example, tree loss could be minimized by narrowing some very wide streets, notably Friars Way, to provide extra room for accommodating the roots of the many mature (50 year+) Little Leaf Lindens (*Tilia cordata*) that are close to the curb and have genetic potential to grace our street for another 50+ years as a graceful legacy for our Forest city. The CWCs current plan endorses the clear cutting of every mature Linden (30+ trees) on city property on the north side of Friars Way to facilitate the inclusion of a sidewalk.

Sadly, the majority of the CWC dismissed all of our presentations by making the remarkable claim that any suburban street that lacks a sidewalk is inherently inaccessible to, and dangerous for, the visually impaired. The CWC offered no supportive evidence of this assertion beyond two personal accounts of visually impaired individuals suffering in conditions that bore no discernible resemblance to any of the locations being discussed. It is notable that the CWCs assertion that sidewalks are major factors in enhancing accessibility for the visually impaired in any street are contrary to reputable international studies that indicate that readily detectable walking surfaces, directional indicators and other road surface features are more important

additions for enhancing accessibility for the visually impaired than a sidewalk. I have attached an informative example of such a study to this email for your interest.

Our delegation, which was appropriately entitled "A Better Way", should be available to all council members from the March 15th CWC meeting. It includes some examples of internationally implemented street design alternatives, such as variants of "shared streets", that could be readily incorporated by the City of London to coherently achieve both pledge #1 AND pledge #2 simultaneously. I and many other residents in our neighbourhood have already demonstrated our willingness to work with the CWC to achieve these better outcomes for all.

We simply ask that our suggestions not be summarily dismissed by council members, as they were by the CWC on March 15th, and that we are afforded the opportunity to assist the city implement more progressive, consistent and effective strategies to enhance accessibility for all in our city AND mitigate climate change.

Yours respectfully

David B. O'Gorman M.Sc., Ph.D.
Associate Professor,
Department of Biochemistry,
University of Western Ontario