

56 Doncaster Place
London, Ontario N2L 2W1
March 16, 2021

London City Council
By Email to councilagenda@london.ca.

Dear Members of London City Council,

I have been a homeowner in London for 25 years and moved into the Sherwood Forest neighbourhood 16 years ago. The reason I chose this neighbourhood was the calm, low-traffic, tree-lined streets.

I am writing because the proposed road reconstruction for Doncaster Place and nearby will cut down the very trees that inspired me to move into Sherwood Forest. This tree removal would be for un-needed sidewalks. I am writing to City Council to have my voice heard, to ask that the tree removal be stopped, to have my objection included in the materials for the upcoming City Council meeting, and to enter the public record.

Prior to living in Sherwood Forest, I owned three different houses in London, first on The Parkway St, then on Lambton St, and then on William St. All of those houses were served by sidewalks that had been constructed before those streets grew their mature trees. None of those streets were nearly as pleasant to walk along as our Sherwood Forest neighbourhood with spectacular mature trees and without sidewalks.

Doncaster Place may be the street in London with the least traffic. A sidewalk is simply neither needed nor useful. The roadway is wide and visibility is not obscured. There are no cars, except for residents coming and going and deliveries. There are no mobility barriers – I am well-aware of the issue, having myself required a wheel chair in the winter months of 2003.

On Monday, I witnessed some crucial parts of the London Civic Works Committee meeting, conducted by video conference. In particular, following many well-informed presentations by residents – all objecting to un-needed sidewalks, I saw a *pro forma* committee discussion that did not address a single issue raised in objection, that was not based on any neighbourhood-specific data, and that instead relied on a few anecdotes and hypothetical situations in completely different settings. To say that there was any thoughtful discussion or that the needs of the residents, taxpayers and electors had been into account and their issues addressed would simply not be accurate. Indeed, our concerns and specific proposals were not even acknowledged.

Of the couple of dozen presentations, all of those from neighbourhood residents, including those with actual disabilities, were against the cutting of trees. The three presentations arguing that sidewalks were better for accessibility were from individuals who might never have been to the neighbourhood and were certainly not familiar with the traffic patterns and present or foreseeable roadway use. The proposed “improved accessibility” would be minuscule, coming from a theoretical and ideological perspective, rather than addressing real needs. To meaningfully improve accessibility in this neighborhood what is needed is timely snow removal and lighting. These we do not have. Sidewalks are neither needed *de facto* nor *de jure* (AODA).

The fact is that the residents’ presentations **overwhelmingly** objected to sidewalks requiring tree removal, including all those from residents with mobility issues. Sidewalks are not needed at present nor will they be in the future, as this is a stable and mature area. Those who argue for the minuscule incremental benefit have no stake in the neighbourhood – they can make their speech and move on, never having to see what has been destroyed, while we have to live with it for the rest of our lives.

Adding unneeded sidewalks does not absolve the city from real accessibility shortcomings, nor from insufficient sidewalks where they are needed. One cannot simply say that the city has so many kilometres of sidewalks and is therefore meeting its citizens’ needs, even if this measure is part of some performance assessment. Saying sidewalks are needed everywhere is like saying every car needs five seatbelts, which sounds fine in principle, but they are not really needed on two-seat sports cars and tractors.

I urge you to vote against cutting down London’s trees for these un-needed sidewalks.

Respectfully submitted,



Stephen Watt