

March 18, 2021

To: Members of Corporate Services Committee

Dear Colleagues,

World Press Freedom Day will be recognized around the world on May 3. Therefore, it would be timely for London City Council to also recognize that a healthy, professional news media is essential for the proper functioning of civil society and democracy at the local, regional, federal and international levels.

“First, the press is a distinct political institution with a unique and critical role in a democratic society. It performs an oversight function, holding powerful government and corporate actors to account, and keeps the general public engaged and informed of relevant information. This watchdog function allows the press to help rein in those most likely to infringe human rights.”
(<https://ricochet.media/en/3154/a-free-press-is-no-luxury-time-for-canada-to-recognize-press-freedom-as-more-than-a-form-of-free-expression>)

Despite the critical role that a free press plays in our society, between 2008 and 2018, the residents of 190 Canadian communities lost 250 established news outlets due to closings or mergers. As the pandemic was bringing the world to a standstill, there has been growing recognition that accurate and timely reporting of important information is an absolute necessity. Nevertheless, the pandemic has accelerated the decline: More than 3,000 editorial and non-editorial workers have been permanently or temporarily laid off since March 2020. (<https://j-source.ca/article/a-year-of-mapping-media-impacts-of-the-pandemic-in-canada-covid-19-media-impact-map-for-canada-update-march-11-2021/>)

As we continue to navigate the choppy waters of a global pandemic, now more than ever, a thriving news media is a truly essential service. Locally, the news media in London have been instrumental during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring local citizens have accurate local information and making it as easy as possible to access that information with the suspension of paywalls for Covid-19 related stories in some cases.

I, therefore, respectfully request the Corporate Services Committee to consider the following motion:

London City Council recognizes that a healthy, professional news media is essential to the proper functioning of democracy in the region; urges other municipal councils within the region and across Canada to recognize that a robust news media is essential to the proper functioning of democracy in their jurisdictions; endorses legislation and regulations to support and rejuvenate news outlets across Canada; and urges the federal government to move quickly to pass legislation to ensure an ecosystem for a healthy news media to serve all Canadians. And that the resolution be forwarded to the area municipalities, local M.P.s and M.P.P.s and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

Respectfully Submitted

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Councillor, Ward 5