



City of London

300 Dufferin Ave, London, ON

Nov 26th 2021

Dear Councillors, Budget Chair Peloza and Honourable Mayor,

We are writing in support of staff's Recommended 2022 Wastewater & Treatment Budget Amendments, Part B:

Part B of this amendment is being recommended to use the permanent reduction outlined in Part A to develop a new capital program. It will fund small to medium size standalone bypass and overflow elimination projects, as well as similar components of larger wastewater projects. (Page 24 of the budget presentation).

As many of you will know, rainstorms in September of this year led to the release of 60 million litres of untreated sewage into Deshkan Ziibi/Thames River. While we recognize the City has been working to separate the combined sewers and reduce the amount of sewage released into the river, the timeline for completion of this work is still years away. We support any initiatives that will speed up this work and put a permanent end to sewage pollution in the river.

Deshkan Ziibi is the reason we exist as a city. It is the lifeblood of the delicate ecology and biodiversity that defines our region and sustains our health, and it is also at the heart of Treaties that the Crown entered into with First Nations of this region.

These treaties included agreements on the part of the Crown to protect the water and land and not to impinge on First Nations constitutionally protected relationship with the land and water of their traditional territories, including the river and the river water bed, which is unceded territory.

As you will know, Oneida Nation of the Thames is currently on a boil-water advisory, and Chippewas of the Thames First Nation was on a boil-water advisory as recently as this past summer. Raw sewage released into the river contributes to the ongoing water issues faced by neighbouring First Nations including their inability to drink their water.

In recent years, there have been efforts in this country to forge new relationships with Indigenous peoples and their Nations. The health of these relationships is contingent on the health of the land on which these relationships are built. We must do everything in our power to restore the river to its pre-colonial health. The staff recommendation is in accordance with the stated goals of the London plan, which are outlined in the Key Directions of the Strategy section, and include the following sections:



10. Protect and enhance our watersheds and the Thames River as the backbone of our public and ecosystem health.

7. Collaborate with regional partners to deliver a safe supply of drinking water

5. Create a working relationship with neighbouring First Nations communities and explore opportunities for collaboration on common objectives.

Remediating the problem of raw sewage as quickly as possible is thus paramount to ensuring a “safe supply of drinking water” for First Nations communities, to “protect[ing] and enhance[ing] our watersheds and the Thames River as the backbone of our public and ecosystem health,” and to observing our Treaty obligations and to building a “working relationship with neighbouring First Nations.”

The “working relationship” aspired to in the London Plan is given more specific shape in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Report. As council members will remember, on September 30th of this year—just days after 60 million litres of sewage was released into the river—the City of London observed the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. While the day holds symbolic importance, that symbolism must be backed up by the Calls for Action that arise out of that important commission. Call number 43 states:

We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.

This call is important as UNDRIP lays out specific rights of Indigenous Peoples as those rights pertain to land and water. Three of these articles are outlined below.

Article 24

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

Article 25

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.



Article 26

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.

Releasing raw sewage into the river violates all of the above rights, as it compromises the health of the river, which is the cultural, spiritual, and material lifeblood to Indigenous peoples and their Nations.

Environmentalism and Truth and Reconciliation are inseparable. Deshkan Ziibi flows through our collective history; our relationship to the river will determine our future as a city and our collective goal to honour our treaty obligations and forge a new path forward built on mutual respect and benefit. We encourage you to adopt staff's recommendations and thank you for your time and consideration.

Signing organizations*:



London
Environmental
Network



Friends of Kilally Meadows ESA



EnviroWestern

**More signing on, we will send along an updated letter on December 1st with all the signing organizations*