

To the Members of Council,

We, the undersigned, are writing to you only to ask for respect as it relates to the Attawandaron portion of the Medway Trail. We ask you to respect a rigorous public consultation process, the work of staff and members of various committees – including the accessibility advisory committee, and respect for a commitment to making the City of London inclusive.

As such, we strongly disagree with the Aug. 12 vote by PEC to halt the work on this project and we recommend the council does NOT approve the committee's recommendation. We ask you to respect the significant amount of work that has brought us to this point and to allow the plans – built on years of collaboration, expertise, and despite claims to the contrary, significant community consultation and involvement.

Before we rebut some of the erroneous statements made leading up to the Aug. 12th decision – a meeting where some residents received delegation status to speak, but no accessibility representatives received notification that this was on the agenda so we did not get the chance to represent, leaving council only hearing from disgruntled neighbours and not from the other informed and opposing interests – we would like to ensure this debate is framed appropriately.

We would like council to view this effort as part of its ongoing efforts to reduce anti-ableist structures. The City has listed Inclusivity and Respect as its first value. It lists "Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion" first amongst its list of strategic areas of focus. However, too often "accessibility" is seen as a ledger item that can be negotiated away. We would like council to view this through the lens of "abelism" in the same manner that if they would with any City-perpetuated structures that prevented BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, or any other equity seeking group from fully participating in the community.

With that said, we would like to start with the claims that the community has not been consulted. There was extensive public consultation and the community had a neighbourhood representative present for these meetings. His attendance and regrets have been recorded, listed below, including his comment that he was "good with MCP except for the bridge at location A" and "likes that the MCP takes into consideration people and the preservation."

We are going to be charitable and attribute this to oversight or a lapse of memory. However, while the consultation sessions may not have been memorable to the citizens making this claim, we can assure you that does not change the fact that they did, in fact, exist:

- Feb 21 2013 – EEPAC (CMP Phase 1 TOR)
- July 25, 2013 – Public Meeting Project Initiation
- Jan. 15, 2014 – (MCP Phase I first draft circulated with presentation by Dillon)
- Jan. 27, 2014 – Notice in Londoner Presentation of Key Findings
- Dec. 11, 2014 – second draft circulated with responses to EEPAC, Nature London
- Apr. 16, 2015 – responses to EEPAC's second round of comments provided.
- 2017 – circulation to everyone 120m from entire valley edge; publication in Londoner
- Feb. 6, 2017 – phase one approved by PEC
- Feb. 15, 2017 – phase one approved by Council resolution

- 2018 – again, circulation to everyone 120m from entire valley edge
- Apr. 16, 2018 – PEC meeting. CMP referred back to staff.
- 2021 – again, circulation to everyone 120m from entire valley edge and publication in Londoner
- Apr. 8, 2021 – Medway Valley community meeting on eastern edge of study
- July 26, 2021 – PPC meeting and PPM.
- Aug. 11, 2021: CMP adopted by council
- Dec. 14, 2023: community meeting at Sherwood Forest Library
- 2024: Circulation to everyone 120m from eastern edge and Londoner
- Feb. 21, 2024: PEC meeting re: deferred loop
- Sept. 12, 2024: community meeting held at Museum of Archeology.
- Phase 2 – B. West noted as neighbourhood contact.
 - Apr. 27, 2017 (p91)
 - May 4, 2017 (p95)
 - July 27, 2017 (p100, regrets)
 - Sept. 7, 2017 B West (p106)
 - Nov. 2, 2017 B West (p113, 117, 120) “Good with MCP except for the bridge at location A” “likes that the MCP takes into consideration people and the preservation”
 - Feb. 21, 2018 B West (p122, regrets)

ACCAC/ACAC has worked diligently with various experts and committees to ensure reasonable compliance. We have acquiesced to certain changes based on community member feedback (such as the bridge) that do not dramatically negatively impact the overall spirit of the trail. However, the only proposed level 3 trail in the entire Medway Valley south is this portion. Without that element in the plan, ACCAC (as it was known at the time) would never have approved it. Removing the one fully accessible part of this trail system is dismissive of the disabled community, perpetuates systemic ableism, does not meet the standards of exclusion for AODA compliance, and opens the City up to the very real possibility of a human rights complaint or lawsuit.

There was also an argument from a member of council that adapting this area is not possible from an engineering perspective and that they “believe” they will find archeological artifacts. This argument has been countered by city staff and the Museum of Archeology has been a part of these discussions for years. They are well aware of how to mitigate that risk and this would not prevent installation of the trail. We would ask council to trust the experts and not be swayed by subjective speculation as to what “might” happen, when these contingencies have already been addressed..

In addition, the one section at the end of the trail that may cause issues can be mitigated in other ways, including sending the trail out to a neighbourhood sidewalk for a small portion of the trail, should that be the case.

As we have said in the past, building accessible pathways is not just good for people with disabilities. It opens up the trail to people of all ages and abilities and dedicated paths have a wonderful benefit of keeping people on the dedicated paths – so it serves to further protect environmentally sensitive areas by discouraging (or even mandating the need of) blazing one’s own trail and unintentionally damaging protected flora and fauna.

Council has already done much leg work on this. We are certain the three current members of council who were in elected positions back in 2017 will well remember the tremendous efforts made by the citizenry, staff, and committee members to find a solution that benefits all. We have chosen not to address citizen concerns about their backyards and access, as we want to focus on the facts: the existence of consultation, the inclusion of key participants (including residents, archeological representatives, and environmentalists), and the desire to adhere to London's own strategic plan and commitment to inclusivity.

In conclusion, accessibility is not a "nice to have" or a line item on a spreadsheet that can be budgeted away. We have long watched inclusivity be sacrificed at the altar of political considerations (see sidewalks, which are specifically included in the London Plan when significant street repairs are required, but have been eliminated due to political pressure – even at the risk of exposing the City to litigation). We ask that you strike the term accessibility from this debate and replace it with the appropriate term:

Ableism.

The Medway Valley trail (like many structures in London) was not built with the entire community in mind. It was an unintentional barrier that prevented people within the accessibility community (as well as others, including small families and elderly) from fully experiencing this resource. Council now has a decision: do you rectify this oversight, based on years of consultation, expertise, and community compromise? Or do you knowingly perpetuate an inclusivity barrier due to misinformed and/or misrepresented community feedback after the fact? The latter makes that unintentional barrier an intentional one. As 2025 is the year in which Ontario is supposed to be barrier free as per AODA, we would hope council chooses to err on the side of accessibility.

Our belief is that the City's vision and strategic goals are more than just empty words on a document. We believe that council supports that direction, appreciates the work that has been undertaken, and, as such, will not support the PEC recommendation.

Thank you for your time,

Jay Ménard, ACAC/ACCAC chair, 2020-2025
Jacqueline Madden, ACCAC chair, 2018-2020
Michael Dawthorne, ACCAC chair, 2012-2018
Bonnie Quesnel, ACCAC chair, 2011-2012
Ashfaq Husain, ACCAC chair, 2002-2006