

Mr. Mayor and members of Hamilton City Council,

I am writing you today to sincerely ask that in budget deliberations, you take under advisement the very practical and ever-present need to ensure we as a city invest in improving accessibility in Hamilton.

One very important element in this is maintaining the funding for the 10 Year Local Transit Strategy. As established in the 2018 budget proceedings and many of the delegations, including one that I had presented, withholding the increased annual funding in this plan has already once before resulted in a transit crisis. Transit users like myself were faced with frequently cancelled buses, overcrowded buses, and extremely late buses while trying to get to school, work, or around the City of Hamilton. When a bus is at full capacity, or near full capacity, it often cannot accommodate a rider using a mobility device. If Hamilton ever returns to another transit crisis, I question whether it is truly appropriate to advertise our buses as “fully accessible” if the buses become consistently too full to accommodate riders with mobility devices. Annual funding increases along this transit strategy plan is linked to the HSR’s success this past year in arriving on time, consistently, and getting us where we need to go in the city. Transit should be an ideal and primary choice for people to get around a bustling and ambitious city like Hamilton, and the only way to encourage more people to use transit services is to ensure that services are funded so that the HSR can consistently meet the needs of riders.

Another issue that should be top of mind in budget deliberations is funding sidewalk maintenance across the City of Hamilton. The Disability Justice Network of Ontario launched a “Snow and Tell” campaign this past winter season. This organization was highlighting the gross accessibility challenges facing people using mobility devices, people using strollers to get around with young children, and people in general who have difficulty walking through inches of snow and snow banks along unmaintained sidewalks. Hamilton should not advertise itself as the best place to raise a child and age successfully if it is only possible for everyone to use our sidewalks during seasons without snow.

The most common reason I feel would arise in the debate of whether or not the City of Hamilton would maintain sidewalks is that it will cost taxpayers more money than members of Council feel they are willing to pay for such a service. I would like to reiterate that this is not just a decision to have the city clear the sidewalks, it is a commitment and step in the right direction from the City of Hamilton that we ensure everyone using our sidewalks can do so regardless of what device they may be using. The City of Hamilton prides itself in its branding as “The Ambitious City”, but there is nothing ambitious about a city inaccessible to pedestrians.

It is with this that I urge all of Council to not only advance into the next year of 10 Year Local Transit Strategy funding, but to also invest all funding needed to provide sidewalk snow removal maintenance.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the items I have brought forward today, and I look forward to hearing your debate on these items in the near future.

Deanna Allain