

**ECOLOGY
OTTAWA**



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Wednesday, September 14, 2011

Dear Mayor Jim Watson,

It was really kind of you to organize a fundraising dinner tonight for the victims of famine in East Africa. We hope the event is successful. As you know, climate change is one of the most important social justice issues of our generation as those who have contributed least to its creation are suffering its worst consequences.

If politicians around the world do not take this crisis seriously, runaway global warming will increase the number of droughts and resulting famines worldwide, as well as the severity of storms; indeed, climate change is already contributing to the mass extinction of species and threatening the eco-systems we rely on for life to exist on planet earth.

Yet, the City of Ottawa currently lacks an energy efficiency plan, in order to help homeowners and business owners stop wasting energy in their buildings, which are the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in the city. The city also lacks a plan to ramp up renewable energy generation. In fact, compared to the rest of the province, Ottawa is at only one-tenth of the provincial average in household solar installations.

In your 2011 Budget speech, it was wonderful to hear you commit to making Ottawa the number one city in Ontario in the uptake of renewable energy.¹ But we have not yet heard you indicate what your plan is to help us get there.

Now that the consultations are underway related to Budget 2012, Ecology Ottawa wanted to write to you with our suggestions, which we hope you and city staff will ensure are included in the draft budget report. Those suggestions are as follows:

1. Transition Ottawa to clean energy and energy efficient buildings – Many staff working at city hall are engaged in the Choosing Our Future planning process, and they have identified a number of new ideas on building-related energy efficiency and low-carbon energy supply. These new program options are highlighted in [The Future of Buildings and Energy Supply](#) discussion paper, released in June 2011. Highlights from the discussion paper include program ideas related to:

1. Energy-Efficient Buildings (pages 13-19)
 - a) Residential and commercial building retrofit program (see page 14-15)
 - b) Energy-efficient new buildings program (page 16)
 - c) Building-scale renewable (page 17-18)
2. Low-Carbon Energy Supply (pages 20-22)
 - a) Renewable electricity
 - b) District Energy

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The city should quickly implement the recommendations in the discussion paper, and commit funding in Budget 2012 for speedy implementation of the programs and initiatives listed.

2. Stop building new roads – Since at least July 2010, Ecology Ottawa has been calling for a halt to the steady growth of the city's road network. You can read our detailed report on the subject on our website.² If you decide to build new roads anyway (after failing to recognize the astronomical costs associated with ongoing road maintenance and the many millions of dollars required to build the new roads, not to mention the healthcare and productivity costs related to the air pollution and associated negative health outcomes), please, at the very least prioritize cycling and pedestrian infrastructure (bike lanes and sidewalks) in the funding, construction process.

3. Speed up implementation of the Ottawa Cycling Plan – “City Council recently agreed to complete Phase 1 of the Ottawa Cycling Plan (adopted in 2008) by 2014 instead [of] 2019.”³ The implementation of Phase 1 should be moved up, to be completed by the end of 2013, and the rest of the Phases should be implemented shortly thereafter. As you may have seen with case studies of the cities of Montreal and Portland, cycling programs can pay for themselves several times over if they are ambitious enough to stem the growth in automobile traffic. Priority should also be given to addressing the “2010 Top Ten Lists of problems for cyclists.”⁴

4. Stop cancelling bus routes and making public transit expensive – In order to transition as much as possible away from polluting personal vehicular use, Ottawa must have a world class public transportation system. However, we currently have some of the most expensive cash fares in the country, and council's recent decision to remove dozens of bus routes is leaving many people without convenient access to OC Transpo's services. We know that councillors are under extreme pressure to restrain overall growth in spending to limit tax increases. We understand that balancing this demand with the many service responsibilities of the city is no easy task; however, environmentally responsible transportation development is one area in which the city cannot afford to cut corners. Ultimately, the city needs to move in the direction of having the services used by personal vehicular users paid for by those drivers. Parking is currently the only user fee of this sort. Why are there not fees for the use of roads, when fees exist for almost every other service the city provides? In the case of transit, users are expected to cover 50% of the cost of service directly through fares. Yet road building and maintenance costs are covered almost entirely by development charges and the general tax base, to which everyone contributes regardless of whether, or how extensively, they drive on the roads. Something along the lines of road tolls, a municipal gas tax, a vehicle tax, etc. is clearly needed if the city is to balance its budgets in a way that is equitable and consistent across service areas. The boost in development fees on new construction to help cover the cost of public transit is a good first step. Please ensure public transportation remains affordable for its users. Many cities around the world are experimenting with free public transportation, to really ramp up its usage.⁵ Ottawa should consider moving in a similar direction by reducing the cost of public transit for its users, rather than frequently increasing it. And instead of cancelling bus routes, please add more.

5. Make composting more available – It is great that the city is moving toward a schedule which will see garbage picked up at the curbside once every two weeks. This is important progress, but the city of Halifax, and most major cities across Canada, is already doing much more, and Ottawa needs to do more, too.⁶ Halifax has made it easy for their citizens to compost, by providing compost bins as a part of the typical waste, recycling bins located on sidewalks in their urban areas. People working in downtown Ottawa should be able to compost their food in compost bins throughout Ottawa's downtown core, as well as at city

facilities (such as City Hall and the main branch of the Ottawa Public Library). Those who live in apartments should also be allowed to contribute their kitchen scraps to Ottawa's compost program, as soon as possible. Backyard composting should also be encouraged.

Please, take climate change seriously – In March 2011, when World Wildlife Fund Canada released its list of Top 10 Canadian cities taking action to prevent climate change, the nation's capital was not even mentioned.⁷ When the new city council passed its term of council priorities in July, climate change was only mentioned once (in the City of Ottawa Strategy Map) but absolutely no details were given about what the city intends to do to lessen its contribution to climate change.⁸ I am sure you will agree, given the severity of the climate crisis (it is already causing famines and droughts), this lack of action in the nation's capital is downright shameful. Implementing our five proposals above will address this important issue and place Ottawa in the forefront of Canadian cities taking action on climate change.

Mayor Watson, thank you for your attention to this important matter. We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with input on Budget 2012. We look forward to seeing the recommendations above implemented into the draft budget report. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



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cc. all Ottawa City Councillors

References:

¹ "I also want to bring special focus to our Hydro to ensuring that we make it easy for our residents to take up the opportunity of Ontario's feed-in renewable energy program. We aren't making fast enough progress on this and I am determined to become the number one city in the province in this area." Mayor Jim Watson. January 19, 2011.

www.ottawa.ca/city_hall/mayor_council/mayor/media_room/speeches/budget_2011_en.html.

² http://www.ecologyottawa.ca/webyep-system/program/download.php?FILENAME=88-4-at-PDF_File_Upload_5.pdf&ORG_FILENAME=Ecology_Ottawa_Roads_Moratorium.pdf

³ www.safecycling.ca/news-and-projects/election2010/election-platform

⁴ <http://ottawabikingproblems.ca/?p=979>

⁵ For more information on the free public transit idea, see "Free roads? Why not free transit?" The Toronto Star. 14 September 2010. <http://thestar.blogs.com/yourcitymycity/2010/09/over-the-past-10-years-if-you-could-identify-one-defining-moment-what-would-that-be.html>. See also www.freepublictransit.org.

⁶ <http://www.cyberpresse.ca/le-droit/actualites/ottawa-est-ontarien/201108/14/01-4425952-ottawa-a-des-lecons-a-tirer.php>

⁷ WWF-Canada. "WWF's Earth Hour List: Cities Taking Action on Climate Change." Website text.

http://wwf.ca/newsroom/?9201/WWFs-Earth-Hour-List-Cities-Taking-Action-on-ClimateChange?utm_source=Earth%2BHour%2BNewsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_term=Cities%2Bagainst%2Bclimate%2Bchange&utm_campaign=Earth%2BHour%2BNewsletter%2BMarch-22-2011. Accessed 23 June 2011.

⁸ www.ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/occ/2011/07-13/fedco/01%20-%20ACS2011-CMR-FED-0004%20-%20Council%20Priorities.htm