



21 February, 2018

Councilor Tim Outhit
Chair
Transportation Standing Committee
c/o Office of the Municipal Clerk
PO Box 1749
Halifax, NS B3J 3A5

Dear Councilor Outhit and Members of the Transportation Standing Committee,

RE: South Park Street Bicycle Lane Extension and Improvements

I am writing on behalf of the over 320 members of the Spring Garden Area Business Association (SGABA) regarding the South Park Street Bicycle Lane Extension and Improvement report dated January 2, 2018.

Over the last year and half, SGABA has spoken on several occasions with city staff to share our concerns over the proposed designs of the bicycle lane extension and improvements. We appreciate the opportunities we were given to meet with city staff. However we are very disappointed to read the Report which indicates our position was not considered an 'official position.' The Association expected further communication from city staff before this report was completed. As this did not happen, the Association requests the Committee to view this letter as the Association's official position.

Spring Garden is often referred to as the "heart of Halifax" with the highest pedestrians counts this side of Montreal. That distinction only exists because of the commitment and pride the business community has shown in the area. With a total commercial assessment of over \$232 million, businesses in the Spring Garden area carry a significant share of the tax burden to the benefit of the entire municipality. A 2015 study by the Business Improvement Districts showed that Spring Garden businesses have the highest assessments per square foot of all the BIDS and business parks. Averaging over \$292.00, Spring Garden businesses struggle to compete with Bayers Lake who benefits from average assessments of just over \$16.00 per square foot, and Dartmouth Crossing at just over \$38.00.

SGABA has been very consistent. The loss of any on-street parking whether it is a result of changes to bicycle lanes, construction or otherwise, is harmful to Halifax's primary retail district. Convenient short term on-street parking is critical to the success of business in this area. It must be maintained until Halifax has stable, consistent and reliable public transportation. While the city is taking steps to achieve this, we are far from delivering on a transit system that will encourage people to choose public transit over personal vehicles as the better option, particularly for those that live off the peninsula. Removal of on-street parking, to the extent proposed to accommodate bicycle through traffic to the South-end of the peninsula, will be at the expense of the business community and a vibrant downtown.

SGABA supports the city's efforts to encourage cycling or other forms of active transportation as a vital asset in our community. However planning and implementation must not result in an unnecessary burden or create undue hardship on the very downtown businesses the city is trying to attract and retain.

Option 2, as is recommended in the report, will eliminate 55 parking spaces to accommodate bicycle lanes while option 2A lessens the impact with the elimination of 17 fewer parking spots. The report rejects option 2A yet, fails to adequately explain why. Some vague references are made to costs but they are neither quantified nor explained. Nor is any cost-benefit analysis provided. We urge the Transportation Standing Committee to seek further clarification on why more parking will be eliminated than is necessary. If cost is the sole factor, we hope that this committee and Council will carefully examine and weigh the intrinsic value of on-street parking to appreciate the consequences of a poorly designed bicycling route and choose the option that recognizes the value of on-street parking and supports all who visit or frequent the downtown.

Option 2 does not appropriately balance the desires of the 161 cyclists with the NEEDS of the business community or the 9500 motor vehicles that drive this "key north-south spine route" on a daily basis. The loss of on-street parking will be felt year round in the Spring Garden district while cycling, for most people, is limited to a few months. The report fails to show cycling counts in the middle January and February when snow, slush and ice are deterrents for most cyclists. The report also fails to tell us when the vehicle traffic counts were taken. Were they taken during the disruption caused by the numerous construction projects in the area? SGABA members have felt the impact of losing on-street parking due to these projects and anxiously await the return of these metered spaces.

The success of Spring Garden Road depends on those who shop here, the retailers who operate vibrant business, the workers who are employed in the area and our residents. From all these constituents, the Association hears complaints and frustration about the lack of convenient short-term parking. If this situation is worsened, which implementation of the report's recommendations will cause, we know many will exercise their ability to shop and conduct business elsewhere. Convenience is a key factor influencing where people choose to shop.

Another area of concern for SGABA is the impact option 2 will have on traffic at key intersections. South Park Street already experiences significant backups at Spring Garden Road and Sackville Street. Disruptions to the flow, by the elimination of one turning lane, will create a nightmare. The impact will considerably impede the flow into and out of the Spring Garden area. This will cause businesses to locate elsewhere and visitors and customers to stay away from the downtown.

In a time of big box stores with free parking and indoor shopping centres, "outdoor malls" like the Spring Garden area already struggle. Convenient on-street parking is not a luxury, it is vital to our success.

The diversity of our businesses showcase our city, provide entertainment, dining, shopping and services for residents and visitors. The business mix speaks to Halifax's cultural diversity but the customer base is not, and cannot, be limited to those who can reach us by bicycle. Until Halifax has that stable, consistent and reliable public transit system, all on-street parking must be protected.

The Transportation Standing Committee should understand other pressures that the Spring Garden area is facing. The planning department, supported by SGABA, is proposing a pilot bump-out project on the north side of Spring Garden between Dresden Row and Birmingham Street. This will significantly narrow the

street making it difficult for cars to travel and cause a backup of traffic behind buses. The Association is supporting this pilot to test the impact of the altered street design before plans are finalized for our major streetscaping project. Recently Halifax Transit also unveiled their proposal to make Spring Garden a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor with dedicated bus lanes. Narrowed streets, dedicated bus lanes through the heart of the city's shopping district, fewer and fewer on-street parking spaces – how are people supposed to access and enjoy the downtown? Spring Garden is also facing the possibility of losing even more on-street parking along Brunswick Street to further accommodate cyclists. Businesses that need not be in the core will relocate for the convenience of their customers and their employees. Those that don't will face high taxes and fewer people supporting them. This is not a recipe for a vibrant and thriving downtown.

The Association has been trying for years to improve the parking situation in our area. We have been advocating to make Dresden Row and Birmingham Streets run one-way. This change would create not only better flow for traffic, it would create opportunities for more parking on both sides of the street. It is disappointing this report does not mention this as a possibility for increasing parking to help offset the loss expected with the South Park bike lanes.

Businesses that operate in the Spring Garden area have chosen to locate here as they see the importance of a healthy downtown. Many, however, have based their business models on available on-street parking. Some sell furniture, others quick take-out meals. Regardless, they rely on their customers parking on-street. While it has been communicated to the Association it is the desire of the city to force a change in the public's parking habits, encouraging them to more fully utilize private parking garages, this form of parking is not conducive to quick stop businesses.

Based on our highlighted concerns, it is our hope that the Transportation Standing Committee will reject the recommendation of the staff report. We do not believe the report adequately considers the alternatives. We note that many of the suggestions made at the public consultation sessions are not reflected in the report which suggests the options provided at the outset of this process were the only ones considered and that citizen input was largely ignored. The Association urges you to commit, when removing on-street parking, to build cycling infrastructure in this city that considers the serious limitations of our public transit system and supports and recognizes all businesses and citizens, not a select few.

SGABA looks forward to working with and supporting the decision of this committee in option 2A.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Juanita Spencer".

Juanita Spencer
Executive Director
Spring Garden Area Business Association