The following lays out Ecology Ottawa’s initial assessment of the City’s proposed Term of Council Priorities, a document outlining what the mayor and council are planning to prioritize in the coming years. The Term of Council Priorities will guide city action on issues like healthy watersheds and clean water, trees, cycling, pedestrians and public transit, and renewable energy and action on climate change.

So here is what we think.

**Healthy Watersheds:**
There are about 4,500 kilometers of streams, creeks and rivers inside the City of Ottawa and they are being choked by development, eroded by flash-flooding, and poisoned by a cocktail of contaminants that get swept off our streets every time it rains. Ecology Ottawa called on the City to help restore our rivers and protect our homes from flooding by developing a new Water Environment Strategy that focuses on green infrastructure. Also known as low-impact development, green infrastructure is about using vegetation, soils, and natural processes to manage water and create a healthier urban environment. For example, if we strategically expand certain kinds of greenspace and transition from pavement to more permeable surfaces we can use nature to help slow down, soak up, and keep our stormwater clean.

We are happy to report that the Term of Council Priorities released by City Hall does include a commitment to develop a new Water Environment Strategy, along with five or six other water-related documents. The bad news is that there is no mention of green infrastructure or low-impact development. We are hoping that this is an oversight and that the City will be adding a more explicit reference in the Term of Council Priorities document. We are also looking forward to working with Ecology Ottawa supporters in the coming years to ensure that the City’s water-related studies and strategies include a strong emphasis on green infrastructure.

**Tree Ottawa:**
You’ve probably seen the big red “Xs” on Ash trees in your community. This means that these trees - along with millions of other Ash trees across the City of Ottawa - are dying as a result of the Emerald Ash Borer infestation. As many as 20 million trees in Ottawa, including hundreds of thousands of trees in the urban area, will be lost. In response, Ecology Ottawa called on the City to join other organizations and institutions in a collective effort to plant a million trees in Ottawa as a gift to Canada for its 150th birthday in 2017.

We are happy to report that the City has embraced the “million tree” goal and joined the Tree Ottawa initiative, and they have explicitly referenced this commitment in the Term of Council Priorities. More specifically, they commit to (i) plant about 125,000 trees a year (up from about 110,000 in the past); (ii) plant two trees for every tree that they cut down, and; (iii) ensure that we see an overall increase in forest cover over the next four years. This won’t solve the problem, but it is a step in the right direction. One obvious oversight is that the Term of Council Priorities do not mention the need to develop and
implement a new Forest Management Strategy. We are hoping the city will clarify their commitment to this important initiative.

**Complete Streets, Cycling, Pedestrians and Public Transit:**
Many Ottawa streets are dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists, and too many neighbourhoods lack affordable and convenient public transportation options. Badly designed streets not only discourage active lifestyles and limit transportation choices, they can also increase traffic congestion and raise road maintenance costs. Ecology Ottawa called on the City to adopt and implement a new Complete Streets policy that will help ensure that our streets are designed with all ages, abilities and usages in mind, not just cars. We also called on the City to accelerate proposed investments in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.

The proposed Term of Council Priorities do include a long list of actions that the City of Ottawa will take to improve walkability, cycling and public transit, including full implementation of the Pedestrian Plan, the Cycling Plan, and completing the first phase of light rail by mid-2018. There are also new initiatives related to traffic calming and pathway connectivity that should make our city a little bit safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Strangely enough, however, the Term of Council Priorities do NOT mention the adoption and implementation of a new Complete Streets policy, even though the City recently unveiled a proposal for moving the policy forward. We are hoping that this was a simple oversight and we are calling on the City to specifically mention the Complete Streets policy in the Term of Council Priorities. We are also disappointed that the City does not appear to be accelerating its plans for investing in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and we are expecting this to be an ongoing challenge in the coming years.

**Climate Change and Clean Energy:**
The Air Quality and Climate Change Management Plan (or Climate Change Plan) that the City of Ottawa adopted in 2014 is a multi-dimensional and unwieldy beast. It’s like a grab-bag stuffed with all kinds of initiatives related to water, greenspace, energy and transportation. This is in part because in addressing climate change it’s in fact necessary to address a range of environmental issues; the climate issue is actually a good means of addressing other green issues that people care about. However the City of Ottawa’s plan is not particularly ambitious.

It is worth acknowledging though that for the first time since Ecology Ottawa was created eight years ago, the City has BOTH a Climate Change Plan AND a Chair of the Environment Committee who is serious about fighting climate change. It’s also worth pointing out that implementing the Climate Change Plan is included in the Term of Council Priorities, so the issue is definitely on the agenda. There is also a long list of commitments in the Term of Council Priorities related to trees, water and transportation (such as those mentioned above) that are also found in the Climate Change Plan because they will help us deal with severe weather and/or transition away from fossil fuels. Finally, there are specific programs related to energy efficiency (such as a major investment in more efficient street lighting) as well as a commitment to develop a Renewable Energy Strategy that should help us move in the right direction.

The bad news is that it all adds up to a lackluster response to an urgent problem and that a lot of important climate-related promises are not included in the proposed Term of Council Priorities. In 2013, Mayor Jim Watson stood up in front of a crowd of more than 200 people and said that the City of Ottawa would not only set goals to reduce greenhouse gas pollution but it would meet and exceed those goals, but there is no mention of reducing Ottawa’s overall greenhouse gas emissions in the proposed Term of Council Priorities (or using reductions as a way to measure success). During the 2014
election the Mayor rightly acknowledged that the City has “a moral and ecological responsibility” to do its fair share to fight climate change and he responded to an Ecology Ottawa election survey by saying that, if elected, he would push for the full implementation of the City of Ottawa’s Air Quality and Climate Change Management Plan, but that is not what he is doing today.

We know what it looks like when Mayor Jim Watson throws himself into an issue. When he really cares about something he: rallies the bureaucracy; puts out a compelling vision; proposes a substantial investment; spells out what he needs from the federal and provincial government; and then he works hard to make it all happen. We’ve seen the Mayor prioritize getting sewage out of the Ottawa River and building light rail and he deserves credit for this leadership, so we know what it looks like when he really gets behind a cause. We don’t think he is there yet on climate change.

Our detailed analysis of the proposed Term of Council Priorities documents a long list of climate-related promises that are now at risk of being broken. This includes important things like creating a fund to purchase threatened greenspace, establishing a task force on district heating in the downtown, and making a major investment in energy efficiency at Ottawa Community Housing. It is our hope that there is still time to get these and other issues into the proposed Term of Council Priorities.

Ecology Ottawa has numerous points where we’d like to see more but in summary here are our four most important recommendations:

- Mayor Watson should throw his weight behind his words and through ambitious action on the climate change plan, achieve lasting and important gains across the entire environmental portfolio.
- We recommend that “green infrastructure” be explicitly included in the Term of Council Priorities.
- We recommend that a new Forest Management Strategy be explicitly included in the Term of Council Priorities.
- We recommend that a new Complete Streets policy be explicitly included in the Term of Council Priorities.