

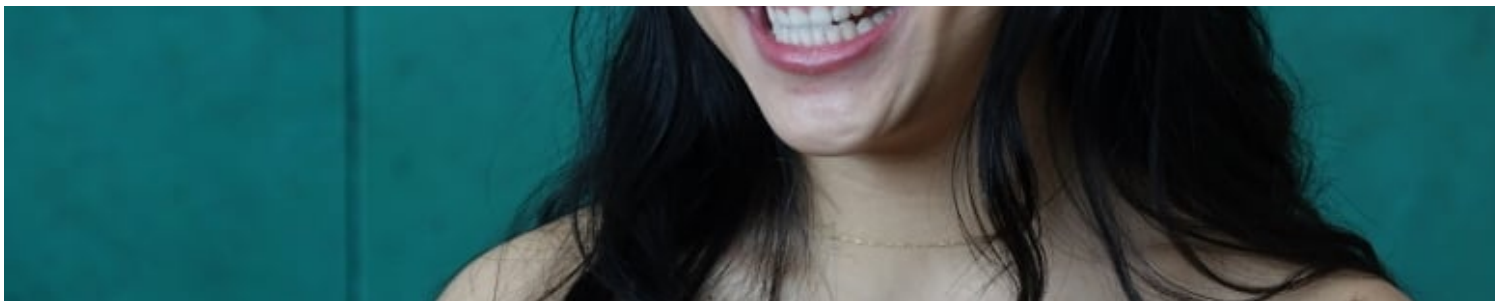
Ottawa

Zexi Li gets city award, but won't back down on critique of 'Freedom Convoy' response

Ottawa resident also won't rule out getting into politics herself someday

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Zexi Li may have received an award from the city Wednesday, but she isn't backing down on her criticism of how it handled the weeks-long occupation. (Giacomo Panico/CBC)

The public face of a multi-million class-action lawsuit against protesters with the so-called Freedom Convoy, who [helped secure an injunction to silence their incessant honking](#), has received an award from the city.

In remarks to reporters after accepting the civic honour Wednesday, Zexi Li said the award, which comes with grins and handshakes, won't absolve her critique of Ottawa's response to the weeks-long crisis.

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson and Somerset ward Coun. Catherine McKenney presented Li with the Mayor's City Builder Award on Wednesday during a city council meeting.

The civic honour recognizes an individual or group demonstrating an "extraordinary commitment" to making Ottawa a better place — from inspiring charitable work to outstanding acts of kindness.





Zexi Li receives city award for efforts to restore calm during convoy protest

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Ottawa resident Zexi Li, who helped secure an injunction against Freedom Convoy protesters, received the Mayor's City Builder Award in recognition of her efforts to help downtown residents affected by the occupation.

'An incredibly difficult month'

Li, 21, was honoured for stepping up to be a lead plaintiff in lawyer Paul Champ's [now \\$306-million class action](#), alongside other residents, businesses and employees whose lives and livelihoods were affected by the occupation.

Truckers rolled into downtown Ottawa around Parliament Hill on Jan. 29 and occupied the area illegally for weeks, until police from across the country finally cleared streets in a massive operation that began on Feb. 17 and lasted several days.

"It was an incredibly difficult month of February for Ottawa as a whole, no matter if you were a resident that was directly affected or if you were an individual that held the reins of responsibility in managing this whole mess," Li told council in a short speech moments after Watson handed her the award.

"But at the end of the day we were able to make it through this horrible situation, and while there are stragglers here and there that continue their relentless harassment, I believe that Ottawa as a city will move forward and come out stronger in all of this."



Li holds the Mayor's City Builder Award at City Hall on Wednesday. (Giacomo Panico/CBC)

'Ums, ahs and excuses'

Speaking to reporters after receiving the award, Li's remarks were more pointed.

She said she personally was "consistently disappointed" with the city's inaction and the "ums, ahs and excuses, really, for why they weren't doing anything."

"I am a private citizen with the perspective of a private citizen, and I don't necessarily understand or recognize all of the intricacies of the politics that are at play here," she admitted. "But at the end of the day, politicians are supposed to be serving the community and helping us, and when that was not done, it speaks louder than any justification ever could."

Li also acknowledged becoming part of "the political puzzle, political games" by accepting the award, but that she's "not necessarily hiding any of my thoughts."

"I would love to be proven wrong, because I, like many other people, would love to have more faith in our institutions, but unfortunately that trust has most definitely been broken. And regardless of the smiles and congratulations ... the reality of the situation still exists underneath," she said.

The self-proclaimed "introvert" also didn't rule out getting into politics herself someday, saying, "it is a door that I have opened but I don't necessarily know if I want

to step through it."

After the council meeting, Mayor Watson told reporters Li was "touched and honoured" when he offered her the award a couple weeks ago, and Li accepted it with "good grace" Wednesday.

Watson also said the city is working with police "to ensure that we regain the confidence of people like Ms. Li and any other individual who continues to feel threatened as a result of the horrific experience they went through."

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