



February 22, 2015

Mayor John Tory and Executive Committee Members
City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5H 2N2

Dear Mayor and Councilors,

Neighbourhood Universalist Unitarian Congregation (NUUC) is pleased to share with you our reflections on the City of Toronto's proposed 2015 City Budget.

We are a congregation of 150 members from across the city of Toronto.

Our mission is to empower spiritual growth and shared action for the care of our world.

Government budgets are moral documents: they determine priorities and decide how resources are collected from and invested back into our community.

Toronto is home to a wonderfully diverse, tolerant and talented population. We are grateful to live here.

But there is reason to be concerned about the state of our city:

- Toronto has the highest poverty rate amongst Canadian cities
- There is stark inequity in life opportunities and circumstances across Toronto neighbourhoods and between people of different racial backgrounds
- Too many residents lack access to crucial human services like housing, childcare, transit and income supports.

Luckily, there are actions the city can take to address these problems. In this budget, the city has shown leadership by stressing the importance of reducing poverty in Toronto. The expansion of shelter spaces and the introduction of free transit for children are good stepping stones to a bold and comprehensive poverty reduction strategy to be released later this spring.

However, investments in poverty reduction must not be funded through cuts in other programs and services. Indeed, NUUC is concerned about proposed cuts to the Parks and Recreation Department budget (\$700,000 cut to Welcome Policy and \$300,000 cut to equipment), cuts to accountability offices of the Ombudsman and Integrity Commissioner, as well as the reduction in Street Outreach Workers and Parks Ambassadors.

We are also greatly concerned about the possible delay of roll-out of 3 badly needed safe drop-in spaces for youth and the lack of full funding for the third year roll out of student nutrition programs in high-need Toronto schools.

We are concerned about the continued prioritization of private automobiles over public transit in the budget. For example, transit users will pay about \$60 million more in transit fares (Toronto has the highest fare box contribution in North America) while drivers will pay no more, even as they benefit from a \$433 M investment to *speed up* the repair of the Gardiner Expressway.

We are concerned that the city's lack of conscious effort to shift funding to investments that reduce poverty and deprivation (e.g. decent housing and affordable child care) rather than spending on the effects of poverty and injustice (e.g. policing, shelters).

Finally, we are concerned about the city's failure to reform a municipal taxation system that hits lower-income people the hardest through a regressive flat-rate property tax. Now is the time to start to examine and develop taxation measures that are fair and adequate to fund the essential services the city provides.

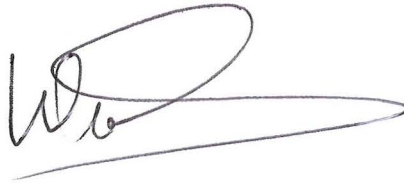
In summary, we urge you to reflect on and make more explicit the aims of the current budget – which we believe should center on building a city that is prosperous and sustainable for all residents.

Our congregation stands ready to work with you to this end.

Sincerely



Lauren Renzetti
NUUC Board Chair



Wayne Walder
Minister

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