



Economic Opportunities Action Group

July 16, 2019

Re: City Council Vote on Community Benefits Framework

To Toronto City Council,

The Jane Finch Economic Opportunities Action Group is a sub-committee of the Jane Finch Task Force. We are writing this letter in response to the City of Toronto's Community Benefits Framework. In collaboration with community organizations and residents of Jane and Finch, we work to ensure inclusive economic development that better the lives of residents in the community.

It is great to see the City focusing on local economic development, with emphasis on developing resident workforce. The City must leverage and maximize the return on investment of its billions of dollars in infrastructure spending by adding Community Benefits to all their contracts.

With that being said, the current draft of the Community Benefits Framework leaves us with many concerns.

The following are our recommendations:

1) Mandate strong, hard targets for local hiring, and a plan to support training.

Although there are certain levels of investments by the three levels of governments for pre-apprenticeship and college programs to train equity-seeking groups to address the skilled trades' shortage, only 1.2% of racialized people are registered apprentices in the construction industry. This is seriously alarming especially when statistics show that 30% of Ontario (51% of Toronto) is racialized. Left to their own devices, the trades will not diversify themselves, and the City's proposed 5-10% goal will not be sufficient.

One of the excuses often given is the lack of residents interested in the trades. However, in the Jane-Finch Community and other racialized neighbourhoods across the City, thousands of residents are forced to resort to dangerous, precarious work obtained through temporary employment agencies or other types of contingent employment. Many do not have access to pathways towards a career in the trades. Hard targets, such as a minimum 30% diversity hiring goal for all trade or craft working hours on any development project the City plans to build, buy, authorize or incentivise, as well as penalties for not meeting those targets, will ensure accountability so that these opportunities can be well-promoted and accessible.

2) Ensure community leadership in negotiating and monitoring Community Benefits Agreements.

Local economic strategies must involve leadership from community, who can provide insight when developing the strategy and oversight of its implementation. Over the decades, programs and initiatives parachute into communities with the promise of providing jobs and local development, but fail due to lack of lived experience and understanding of community context.

On June 26, 2019, Ahmed Abdi, a young black tradesperson, deputed at City Hall, sharing his story of bringing more than 20 black youth from his neighbourhood into the unionized trades. Funded organisations whose mission is to diversify the trades, while valuable, can not be as successful in achieving their goals due to the absence of community leaders. Community leadership will increase the impact of Community Benefits.

3) Ensure Community Benefits for private development.

In our communities, many multinational corporations and developers profit off of local residents, yet they barely hire and source their labour from within these communities. This among other factors has led to structural inequities and significant income disparities to the point that we now have what is known as “Three Cities” within Toronto, where most residents in racialized neighbourhoods live 20 to 40% below the poverty line while the rich, who are mainly white, have been getting richer over the past few decades.

The City of Toronto, and other levels of government, with years of neo-liberal and pro-business ideologies, policies and practices, has contributed significantly to the creation of such high degrees of income inequality and discrimination in Toronto. It is critical that the City takes responsibility for this situation and does its utmost to maximize all of its levers to ensure that Community Benefits Agreements are seen in private developments as well, so that long-term investment in the social and economic development of our communities can be met.

At the same time, the City’s Framework must also be aligned, and better coordinated, with other initiatives led by the City of Toronto, such as Toronto’s Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy, Poverty Reduction Strategy, the TransformTO Climate Action Strategy and the Affordable Housing Office.

Regarding the Community Benefits Framework, the Jane Finch Economic Opportunities Action Group is also in support of most recommendations made by the Toronto Community Benefits Network, and believes that, if implemented, they could begin to address many of our short and mid-term concerns.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to hearing a positive response from you. We can be reached at janefincheconomicopportunities@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Troy Budhu & Tamara Jeremie | Co-Chairs
Economic Opportunities Action Group of Jane Finch TSNS Task Force