



June 26, 2019

Re: EC6.15 Community Benefits Framework

Dear Members of Economic & Community Development Committee,

Since 2017, the Toronto Environmental Alliance has been a proud member of the Toronto Community Benefits Network and we've worked on multiple projects together.

TEA joined TCBN because we agree that community benefits must include neighbourhood and environmental improvements. Some major projects in Toronto are, in their own right, contributing to environmental outcomes such as the Eglinton Crosstown LRT which will provide low-carbon mass transportation to a large segment of our city. But other projects, like the City's redevelopment of the Golden Mile in Scarborough or Civic Centre precinct in Etobicoke, or private developments like a casino or a hospital, may not include neighbourhood and environmental improvements unless communities demand them and City departments plan for them.

We want to recognize the long history of community benefits organizing in our city and the more recent work that's been undertaken by City departments, including staff here today, to build on this momentum. When community-defined outcomes are put at the centre of building a better city, such as the Woodbine Casino, community development and local sustainability can be realized alongside economic development.

Because of all the work that's gotten us to where we are, it's important to listen to the on-the-ground experts, like TCBN, and adopt their recommendations on how to improve the proposed Community Benefits Framework.

The key takeaway here is that this framework still needs work. More work is needed to clarify and improve accountability, set targets, as well as to strengthen and expand the list of existing programs and policies that this framework should cover.

With my remaining time, I want to draw your attention to some environmental aspects of the framework that are sorely missing.

Just over 4 years ago, in April 2015, Executive Committee directed staff to create a Community Benefits Agreements protocol to achieve social, economic and environmental benefits for local communities who will be impacted by proposed development and major infrastructure projects.

Therefore, this framework raises some key questions. Why is there no mention of environmental benefits in this new framework? Why isn't the framework linking its work to other City-wide strategies such as the TransformTO climate action plan and the newly released Resilience Strategy?

In your recent Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy 2017 Report and 2018 Work Plan, community benefits were broadly defined as processes that leverage community-defined outcomes for economically disadvantaged groups. The report goes on to outline how these processes can achieve 6 different types of community benefit outcomes¹. Two of these outcomes are outlined in this proposed framework: workforce development and supply chain diversity. But four other critical outcomes are completely missing:

1. “Affordable Housing – Development of new, or repair of existing, rental or ownership affordable housing
2. Community Assets & Public Realm – Cultural assets, parks, green space, community centres, child care centres, libraries
3. Environmental – Energy retrofits, carbon reduction, air quality improvements, extreme weather resilience
4. Other – Interest-free loans, internet access, computer hardware”²

Employment and business opportunities are not the only outcomes communities are seeking nor are they the only outcomes the City of Toronto needs to respond to when working on community development or implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Economically disadvantaged groups and other equity-seeking communities do not only need jobs. People need affordable and ‘climate proof’ housing, access to green space and community space, protection from extreme weather, and much more. These are intersecting community priorities that belong in the framework.

Just on Monday, General Government and Licensing Committee met and discussed the new City-Wide Real Estate Program. The portfolio of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) centres around creating complete communities and includes specific indicators for four categories: social, economic, transit and environmental.³ Dropping environmental indicators from this proposed Community Benefits Framework does not align with other city-wide or community-specific priorities.

Major City-wide strategies like TO Prosperity (poverty reduction), Long Term Waste Management Strategy (zero waste, circular economy) and TransformTO (climate action) must be linked if we are to build a more equitable and sustainable city for all. Environmental sustainability should be a guiding principle in this framework because the City of Toronto also has a responsibility to maximize the environmental impacts of its economic levers such as public infrastructure, procurement and land development. Furthermore, the future jobs in our city will include many more green industries and if we integrate sustainability and equity into the City’s workforce development and procurement opportunities now, we will be much further ahead.

Sincerely,
Heather Marshall
Campaigns Director

¹ Page 18-19 <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-109105.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/gl/bgrd/backgroundfile-135345.pdf>



Background on TEA & TCBN Projects

In the last two years, the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) has actively partnered with the Network (TCBN) on two key projects. One project researched and engaged low-carbon building sector stakeholders in Toronto because we know that to meet the City's TransformTO climate responsibilities, Toronto needs to retrofit 100% of our old buildings and all new buildings need to meet very high green standards. This project included other Network members, such as the tenant organization ACORN, the Insulators Union, and social enterprise contractor Building Up. Watch our video: https://www.torontoenvironment.org/retrofits_video

The second project we partnered with TCBN on was a feasibility assessment of how community hubs are contributing to climate solutions at the local level. They are doing some incredible work that isn't even on the City's radar and these initiatives are just a taste of the creativity, innovation and reflexivity that can be channeled for community development and local sustainability when community-defined outcomes are put at the centre of this work. Check out our report: https://www.torontoenvironment.org/report_community_hubs_and_climate_change