

May 27, 2020

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

Re: CC21.1 City of Toronto Service Restart and Recovery Update

I am writing to you on behalf of Progress Toronto regarding public consultation on recovery and rebuild plans and CC21.1's report - *City of Toronto Service Restart and Recovery Update*.

Pages 11-15 of the report outline the work of the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild (TORR) and include a description of how TORR plans to inform its recommendations to the City Manager and City Council.

Unfortunately, there is no commitment to inform the City's recovery and rebuild plans with broad-based public consultation and proactive outreach to Indigenous, racialized, low-income, and equity-seeking communities most impacted by this pandemic.

We are asking City Council to direct City Staff to ensure broad and inclusive public consultation takes place.

In these times it is no doubt challenging to have broad public consultation, but it remains necessary. And we understand the urgency felt on moving forward. That's why we are asking for broad and direct consultation, proactive outreach to the most impacted communities, and for the City to support organizations and community groups, including the newly established mutual aid networks, in community-led consultation that feeds back into the City's consultation (similar to the HousingTO consultations).

Preliminary data from Toronto Public Health has already demonstrated that the impacts of COVID-19 are not felt equally. Toronto Public Health research points to a higher COVID-19 case and hospitalization rate for lower income people as well as "people from racialized communities, newcomers to Canada, people with lower education levels, and unemployed people" (*COVID-19 and the Social Determinants of Health: What do we know?*, Toronto Public Health, May 14 2020).

Without public consultation and transparency, the recommendations that come forward will be disconnected from the realities facing too many Torontonians. The outcomes will not be as effective or as good a use of time or resources as they could have been.

Transparency and input in the decision-making and consultation process surrounding the Recovery and Rebuild Strategy has been sorely lacking the last few months, making it very difficult for stakeholders and the public to engage, particularly at a time when it is already more challenging to do so.

As mentioned in the report, in March, the Mayor convened an *Economic Support and Recovery Task Force*, that had various round tables hosted by Councillors. It was good that Councillors and the Mayor moved quickly, but the process lacked transparency.

Who was invited to sit at these tables, how the public could also provide input, and the results of these conversations were never made public along the way. However, the report says that the recommendations stemming from them, alongside the work of City Staff, created the starting point for the work of the City's new Recovery and Rebuild Office.

The process for stakeholder input and engagement outlined in the report on CC21.1 makes it very clear that stakeholder engagement will continue, but how broad based public input takes place is not outlined. Importantly, who these stakeholders are, who determines who is invited to the table, what meetings are taking place and when, the agendas for those meetings, and more are not readily available to the public. This process needs to be transparent and inclusive if it is to be effective.

Torontonians have a right to know who is being convened, how they can participate, and what recommendations have been made. This is more important than ever before because these decisions will have a lasting impact on our health, safety, and prosperity.

There are some tables that have been set up for direct input into decision-making but since they are not part of the City's democratic structure, they also lack transparency and accountability to the public. This includes the [Toronto Region Board of Trade's steering cabinet](#) that is re-imagining recovery and [Civic Action's Re:Action Task Force](#). City Staff and Councillors are directly involved on these committees and both are feeding into decision-making at the City, yet is not clear what conversations are being had. Importantly, some of these involve corporations with a direct financial (profit) interest in the decisions that will be made.

For the April 30 meeting of Toronto City Council, Progress Toronto signed on to and formally submitted a letter alongside dozens of other organizations across the city. This letter calls for City Council to adopt 10 recommendations in recovery. You can see the full letter and list of signatories here:

<https://www.progresstoronto.ca/letter-bold-green-just-recovery>

We want to highlight a few of these recommendations for your consideration in consultation plans. All 10 recommendations are important and also outlined below. You can read more about each of them at the link above.

Recommendation #1: For best results, ensure the recovery and rebuilding process is transparent and community-led

For best results in recovery and rebuilding Toronto, ensure transparent and consistent public reporting that allows adequate time for communities and organizations to respond. And, ensure the recovery and rebuilding plans are community-led with public consultation and engagement centred in their design and delivery. This will ensure that plans reflect the diversity of needs and interests of Toronto residents, and that there is widespread support for their implementation.

Recommendation #2: Make evidence-based decisions, informed by disaggregated race-based and sociodemographic data collection

Commit to making data-informed and evidence-based decisions on recovery plans that use disaggregated race-based and sociodemographic data. This data is key to understanding the disparities in how COVID-19 is impacting communities, key to determining the best response by the City, and importantly, key to ensuring Toronto's plans for recovery build a much more equitable city that works to improve health for communities facing deep-seated health inequity. The same principle needs to be applied across City divisions to help inform Toronto's recovery. Through a more democratic process and the use of disaggregated data, the City can better understand which communities are most impacted and better respond. Not doing so would only exacerbate existing inequities and put lives further at risk.

Summary of the 10 Recommended Principles for a bold, green, and just recovery for Toronto:

1. ¹ For best results, ensure the recovery and rebuilding process is transparent and community-led
2. ¹ Make evidence-based decisions, informed by disaggregated race-based and sociodemographic data collection ¹
3. ¹ Advocate immediately and powerfully to secure a New Deal for Toronto from our Federal and Provincial Governments
4. ¹ Fast-track and improve Toronto's existing strategies, plans, and commitments in Toronto's recovery and rebuilding plans, in order to build a more equitable, healthy and climate-resilient city
5. ¹ Invest in, protect, and centre workers in recovery and rebuilding plans
6. ¹ Prioritize low-carbon infrastructure, social procurement, and equitable local job creation in recovery and rebuilding

7. ¹ Invest in public and community ownership of land and housing to ensure everyone is permanently housed, local food production is increased, and jobs are created
8. ¹ Support and sustain the community infrastructure that has developed in response to COVID-19 for ongoing response and recovery work
9. ¹ Encourage and prioritize community support and discontinue programs that increase surveillance and harm social cohesion and solidarity
10. Make permanent and expand the public supports and services that have been put in place to respond to this pandemic, rather than cutting services

At City Council this week please vote to direct staff to ensure broad-based public consultation and proactive outreach to the most impacted communities informs the recommendations put forward by the Toronto Office on Rebuild and Recovery.

Sincerely



Michal Hay
Executive Director
Progress Toronto