

November 25th, 2020

General Government and Licensing Committee (GGLC)
10th Floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

Item GL19.4 on the November 30th, 2020 GGLC Meeting - Vehicle-For-Hire and Covid-19 Related Financial Hardship.

Dear Committee Members,

In your upcoming meeting on November 30th, 2020 you will deal with the above-mentioned item. I would like to take this opportunity to make submissions about some items that are mentioned in Councilor Wong-Tam amended Member Motion (Item MM25.1 of City Council Meeting dated October 28th, 2020).

The items I would like make submissions on are:

1. The extension of the number of years a vehicle can be used as a licensed Taxicab or Limousine;
2. Waiving or discounting the License Renewal Fees for Taxicabs and Limousines;
3. The Vehicles-for-Hire Accessibility Fund Program.

I will also make some comments on the Staff Report dated November 16th, 2020.

WHO I AM

My name is Hillel Gudes. I joined the Toronto Taxi industry in 1980, and as we speak, I am still active in the industry at the age of 75. During the 40 years of my involvement in the industry, I have been involved in many facets of the taxi industry, including driving for single taxicab owners, as well as for taxicab fleet owners, driving a limousine, owning and operating a Toronto Standard Taxicab, employing drivers, serving as a member of the Board of Directors of Co-op Cabs for 5 years including being its Chairman for 2 years, and Co-Managing Director of Co-op Cabs. I currently own and operate a Toronto Taxi Licence (TTL) under contract with Wheel-Trans. I mentioned all of the above, not because I am applying for a job on this Committee, but rather because I feel I earned the right to speak to you after being part of this industry for 40 years, as well as to assure you, that my knowledge and experience in the industry can be of an assistance to this Committee in concluding what should a relief plan include in order to effectively provide help to the people in the industry during this difficult time as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. THE EXTENSION OF THE NUMBER OF YEARS A VEHICLE CAN BE USED AS A LICENSED TAXICAB AND LIMOUSINE -

a. I am aware that Councilors are always concerned that their decisions may have a negative financial impact on the City, and rightfully so. So for starters, it should be emphasized that extending the maximum age of taxicabs and limousines will have no such negative financial impact. On the other hand, it will have a huge positive financial impact on taxicabs and limousine owners. Take me for example, I am due to replace my wheelchair accessible vehicle by the end of 2021. The cost of that vehicle is about \$60,000. Since the middle of last March (when the Pandemic started), my income servicing Wheel-trans has gone down by almost 70%, and nobody knows how long it is going to last. Borrowing money is easy - paying it back during hard times like this is not. This should be an easy decision for the Committee. Please extend the maximum age of taxicabs and limousines by two years, as one year is not enough. To sum it up, one of the things we recommend as part of a relief plan for the industry is *an amendment to Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 546, Licensing of Vehicles-for-Hire, to extend the maximum age of vehicles used as a taxicab and sedan limousine from seven model years to nine model years for vehicles of the 2013 model year and onward and the maximum age of vehicles used as a stretch limousine from eight model years to ten model years for vehicles of the 2012 model year and onward.*

b. I took the time to read the minutes of City Council Meetings of September 30th, 2020 and October 28th, 2020. It was hard not to notice the efforts of Councilor Denzil Minnan-Wong to try to eliminate that part of Councilor Wong-Tam Motion that recommended a 2-year extension to the maximum age of taxicabs and limousines. All I can do, is just remind the Honourable Members of this Committee, as well as all the other Councilors, that Councilor Minnan-Wong, together with former Councilor Howard Moscoe, share the blame for a lot of the problems from which our industry has been suffering for the last 20 years or so, and for the fact that there are in excess of 800 taxicab owner licences sitting on the shelves of the Municipal Licensing and Standards (ML&S) offices and hundreds more are parked.

c. On October 19, 2020 there was a conference call that was organized by Councilor Wong-Tam (so I am told). During that call, one of the participants, Beck Taxi's Operations Manager Christine Hubbard, spoke against any extension of the maximum age of taxicabs and limousines, and it wouldn't surprise me if she has made a submission on the same line to the GGLC ahead of the November 30th, 2020 meeting. So, I would like to remind the Honourable Members of this Committee, as well as all other Councilors, that Christine Hubbard *DOES NOT* represent most of the taxicab owners in our industry, *NOR* does she represent most of the hired drivers in the industry. Christine Hubbard, whose family owns Beck Taxi, and to whom I have a lot of respect, speaks on behalf of Beck Taxi, as she should, and anyone who chooses to

listen to her, should bear this in mind. Take my word for it, the interests of a taxi brokerage and the interests of the individual taxi plate owner are *NOT* always the same.

2. WAIVING OR DISCOUNTING THE LICENCE RENEWAL FEE FOR TAXICABS AND LIMOUSINES -

Unfortunately, if you choose to rely on the Staff Report dated November 16, 2020, this one will negatively impact the City. There are, however, members of our industry who dispute this conclusion, based on the arguable point that the millions of additional licensing fees being now collected from Private Transportation Companies will more than cover the losses that will occur as a result of waiving or discounting the licence renewal fees. But in any event, there is always the other side of the coin. After all, there is no dispute that people who are making a living by driving a taxicab or a limousine are making about 70% less than what they were making before March 15th, 2020, putting them in impossible situations that I am not going to try to describe here. So, the only decisions that the members of the GGLC have to make are if the City should help, and if so, in what way. I can only convey to this Committee how I look at this, and hope that I am able to convince you to look at this as I do.

I know that you have an obligation to the financial position of the City, and you may be concerned how all this will affect the City in the long term. However, look what the Federal Government has done: the Federal Government came to realize the dire situation of many people in this country as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our Federal leaders made the decision to be compassionate during this crisis. They decided that a lot of people in Canada needed help, and they need it now! They were also concerned about the long-term effect of financially helping people. But at the end of the day, they have decided to be compassionate, and they made a conscious decision to financially help people in need *NOW*, and worry about the potential negative consequences of putting this country in close to \$100 Billion debt *LATER*. The members of the Toronto Taxicab and limousine industry are looking up to you during this difficult time and asking you to adopt the same attitude as the Federal Government did, and approve a relief plan that will help us make ends meet. With that said, we recommend that the following will be also included in the relief plan: *A 12-month moratorium on licensing renewal fees for taxicabs and limousines retroactive to January 1, 2020, and elimination of taxicab and limousine licensing renewal fees for 2021.*

3. THE VEHICLE-FOR-HIRE ACCESSIBILITY FUND PROGRAM -

Since I own a Wheelchair Accessible Taxicab and operate it under contract with Wheel-Trans, I am exempt from paying into the Vehicles-for-Hire Accessibility Fund Program, nor am I entitled to get payments under that Program. As such, I have the privilege of being able to express my opinion on it out of absolute neutrality, as an unbiased outsider.

This Program was, and still is, an ill-conceived idea. It is unjust and absurd! It is also most likely illegal, even though it is going to take a court to declare it as such, and I can't see the industry spending money on legal fees at a time when no one is making money. How did the ML&S come up with such a sinister idea that one sector of the taxicab industry should be forced, by way of a Municipal By-law, to subsidize another sector of the industry, is beyond me? Can you see the Provincial Government legislating the Dentists into paying into a Fund for the purpose of subsidizing Family Physicians? Or Urologists subsidizing Gynecologists?

Looking after the disabled community in our City is an obligation of all of us as a society, and no one sector in our society should be singled out and compelled to bear the financial burden of supporting the disabled community, because if you accept the notion that it is the obligation of our society as a whole, then that financial subsidy should come from the general tax pool.

COMMENTS ON THE STAFF REPORT DATED NOVEMBER 16TH, 2020 -

The Motion passed at City Council on October 27th, 2020 (MM25.1) included several recommendations, among them to increase the maximum age of taxicabs and limousines, and *"to undertake a broader review of other relief measures, and report back to the GGLC with any financial impacts to the City, such a review should include, but not limited to, studying the feasibility and impact of..."* and the list goes on to describe five specific items that Council had in mind. Yet ML&S Staff, while doing their best effort to paint a bleak picture of the negative financial impact on the City's financial position if all five items will be adopted and implemented, is only making one recommendation, namely, the extension of the maximum life of taxicabs and limousines, and even on that one, Staff is recommending an extension of only one year, not two years, which is what the industry is recommending and which was the initial recommendation in Councilor Wong-Tam's Motion at City Council in September 2020 (MM24.9). I would submit to you that all the logic that Staff applies to justify an extension of only one year, can be also applied to justify an extension of two years.

While the Staff Report does not specifically tell the GGLC not to adopt anything other than the one item Staff recommends (the extension of the life of the vehicles by one year), their overall attitude is that "the sky will fall" if you go ahead and adopt all the other items as outlined in City Council Motion of October 27th, 2020 (MM25.1). Overall, the Staff Report has the appearance of being defiant. I am saying that because the Report does not just present the *dry* figures and leave it to members of the Committee to *digest* them and independently make decisions, it is presented, at least in my humble opinion, in a way that is *slanted* toward Staff's position.

I must admit that I was hoping that ML&S Staff would have some of the attitude that the Federal Government has taken during this crisis, to which I alluded to earlier in this letter, in the

2nd Paragraph of my submissions on point number 2, on Page 3, namely, that people need some relief *NOW*, and any negative financial implications will be dealt with in the future. Needless to say I was naive.

I am not good with numbers, but there are people in the taxi industry who are willing to argue, using hard figures, that the numbers Staff has used in the November 16th, 2020 Report are not accurate, or not complete, or have been interpreted wrongly. Again, and forgive me for being repetitious, there are members of our industry who argue that the millions of additional licensing fees being now collected from Private Transportation Companies will more than cover any negative financial implications that may be caused by any relief plan that the GGLC may choose to come up with.

Finally, Staff is going out of their way in their Report to remind the GGLC to take what they call *equitable approach* for the entire Vehicles-for-Hire industry. We fully concur; but at the same time we would like to ask Staff, where have they been for the last 7 years or so, when we were begging for an *equitable approach*?

Thank You,

Hillel Gudes

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