

February 17, 2021



TO: Toronto City Council

Re: EX21.2 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on Toronto's 2021 budget.

Many Torontonians hoped that the 2021 budget recommended by the Executive Committee to City Council would look substantially different than what you are being asked to approve.

Last year, Toronto's labour community met with the Mayor, with Councillor Layton leading the labour table, and in externally organized COVID recovery tables, to discuss and provide our best advice about what should be done in the short run and the longer run to address the impact of COVID-19 at the municipal level. We also joined with other organizations to provide advice. Key recommendations were provided to the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild. In the short run, the City stepped up, demonstrating social solidarity with communities, and pressing other levels of government to do more. Thank you for this.

Unfortunately, the proposed budget does not take that same approach.

More must be done to meet needs related to COVID-19 recovery and to the huge equity gaps the pandemic has highlighted. There are minor commitments for new equity and reconciliation programs. Adding some funding to existing programs is clearly inadequate to address the scale of the problems we all know exist. Whether addressing homelessness and mental health challenges, confronting anti-Black racism, getting buses on the road to move people quickly, keeping child care centres afloat, or expediting COVID testing and contact tracing in marginalized neighbourhoods, more funding is required to meet COVID needs and address equity gaps. This is especially true when we are still in the midst of the pandemic.

Delivery of quality public services relies on adequate staffing. Allowing de facto staff reductions by built-in delays filling vacant positions means services and programs can't be delivered. "Gapping" is not an appropriate strategy for managing budgets when people are crying out for services. Governments must lead the way on delivering services and employing enough people to do so, especially at this time.

We know the climate emergency has not abated while the world is dealing with the pandemic. The Transform TO strategy should be a huge priority. Yet, the proposed budget for Environment and Energy represents a 33% cut from what it would be if the previous commitment for 2021 was fulfilled. We must not lose any more time in tackling the climate crisis. We also call for establishing a genuine climate lens for evaluating all departments' decisions.

Aside from \$1.7 Million targeting a pilot project for crisis response, there has been no attempt to reallocate police budgets this year as Torontonians expect. As is clear by harmful policing of people experiencing mental health crises, over-policing Black, Indigenous and racialized youth, or addressing homelessness through policing, the current model is problematic. There are civilian workers, including those from the very communities where people experience police negatively, who are trained and capable of addressing community safety differently. We call for development of a plan for de-tasking police of a variety of services in time to apply to the 2022 TPS budget.

We support the assumption that provincial and federal revenues will be available to fill the projected budget hole and to address the other COVID-highlighted and exacerbated inequities above. We call for the City to engage in negotiations with both levels of government in an accountable way, so that Torontonians can see what is being requested and offered.

Finally, City Council should keep the future in mind. Next year – 2022 – is likely to see us in full recovery and rebuild mode. We need to prepare for ambitious thinking to help put Toronto back on track to be the great city it can be. We will want to use a broader range of revenue tools, to negotiate for a new deal for cities, and to work for a just green recovery for all.

In conclusion, the Labour Council calls for the following:

- Fund Toronto's response to COVID, including addressing inequities exposed and exacerbated by COVID
- Deliver quality public services by budgeting and maintaining adequate staffing levels
- Address the climate emergency now
- Establish a plan for re-allocating police budgets so the right services are dedicated to community safety
- Prepare for a just green recovery for all

The budget process and timeline has become very truncated in the last couple of years. In future years, the City should allow Torontonians to participate meaningfully in the budget process.

Yours truly,



Susan McMurray
Executive Assistant
Toronto & York Region Labour Council