



Social Planning Toronto's deputation to the Budget Committee, December 2, 2013

Good afternoon. My name is Israt Ahmed, Senior Planner with Social Planning Toronto. Social Planning Toronto is a non-profit organization committed to independent social planning at the local and city-wide levels in order to improve the quality of life for all people in Toronto. It is committed to diversity, social and economic justice, and active civic participation in all aspects of community life.

Toronto is a growing city that requires a vision and strategy for community building including adequate investment in people -- especially those who are the most vulnerable and marginalized. We are seeing more individuals and families struggling because of income inequality and inadequate support services. We are also seeing challenging life situations caused by racialized poverty and precarious employment. The City's vision for prosperity should include investments that support these individuals with the services they need to succeed. Investing in people should not be seen as waste but as a fundamental building block of a healthy, vibrant city.

In order to support city building, the City must maintain and diversify its revenue sources. We are concerned about suggestions to reduce the Municipal Land Transfer Tax as a first step toward its elimination. We agree with senior finance staff at the City that the Municipal Land Transfer Tax is an important revenue source for Toronto. This revenue source raises around \$340-350 million annually – funds that help pay for the hard and soft infrastructure that make Toronto a good place to live – a quality of life that is reflected in rising property values. We urge you to maintain the Municipal Land Transfer Tax in order to support our vital City services. Staff prudently did not recommend this cut and we certainly hope that the budget committee will heed their advice.

Social Planning Toronto is an advocate for affordable and accessible public services. We note in the staff recommended budget that many investments in strong public and community services have not been recommended due to financial constraints. For example, the following investments were not recommended in the 2014 budget for affordability reasons: the implementation of Year 2 of the student nutrition plan, an inflationary increase for community services provided through the Community Partnership and Investment Program, community services deemed high priority under CPIP, environmental programs to expand the tree canopy, the Swim to Survive program, the Youth Leadership Program, enhanced maintenance of parks, full funding for the Housing

MAIN OFFICE

2 Carlton Street
Suite 1001
Toronto, ON M5B 1J3
T: 416.351.0095
F: 416.351.0107
info@socialplanningtoronto.org
www.socialplanningtoronto.org

Community Offices

Etobicoke
The Shaver Homestead
450 The West Mall, Suite 205
Etobicoke M9C 1E9

Scarborough
2100 Ellesmere Road Suite 327-E
Scarborough M1H 3B7

York/West Toronto
1652 Keele Street
Toronto, ON M6M 3W3

ANC Mount Dennis
1366 B Weston Rd
Toronto, ON M6M 4R8

Stabilization Fund for homeless prevention and support, expansion of youth drop-in spaces, free indoor swim, equitable hours of programming at our Priority Centres, and expansion of the Multi-Residential Apartment Building audit program to at least 250 buildings. None of these public service investments are recommended in the 2014 budget. When City staff report that we can't afford to fully fund homeless prevention services, to name one service on that list, surely any cut to revenue sources such as the land transfer tax cannot be warranted.

The City's investment in community programs engages communities, leverages funds to build strong communities and creates jobs in neighbourhoods all across the city. Social Planning Toronto is concerned that the Community Partnership and Investment Program (CPIP) grant that funds many important services is flat-lined in the staff recommended budget. This flat-lining ignores the 1.2% population growth, 2.2% inflation, and growing economic inequality experienced by many marginalized groups. Social Planning Toronto calls on the budget committee to consider these factors and increase CPIP funding accordingly. In 2012 CPIP funds supported 2,500 projects, created at least 2,000 jobs, mobilized over 90,000 volunteers and attracted \$430 million in other investments. The \$1.8 million increase recommended by the Commitment2Community Campaign will stabilize this work, and enhance it with limited strategic investments.

In the long-run, we recommend the development of a multi-year plan, such as the case for student nutrition and the arts, to bring the City of Toronto's investment in community services in line with other large cities. Toronto's current total grants investment, including student nutrition, arts and social services in 2013 was \$56 million or \$20 per capita where as other cities such as Calgary invested \$66.72 per capita, Winnipeg \$45.20 and Ottawa \$40.73 in 2011. The sector would like to work with the City to develop a multi-year plan to ensure that community service providers are well positioned to meet the growing and urgent needs in communities.

As a member of the Commitment2Community Campaign, Social Planning Toronto also supports the call for increased investment in student nutrition, full funding for the Housing Stabilization Fund, increased funding of \$100,000 to the Tenant Defence Fund to address previous cuts, the expansion of 10 new youth drop-in lounges, and a Spring start date for the expansion of the City's Priority Centres.

We are recommending a modest increased investment in our city in the 2014 City budget. We hope that the budget committee and City Council will work to find ways to make these important investments in our city. Thank you.