



Councillor Joe Mihevc
Toronto City Hall
St. Paul's West
Ward 21

MEMO

TO: Community Development and Recreation Committee

FROM: Councillor Joe Mihevc, Ward 21, St. Paul's West

RE: Developing a Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy

DATE: March 3, 2014

Recommendations:

That City Council direct staff to develop a City of Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy. The strategy should:

- 1) Include input from any and all departments, agencies, boards and commissions that may contribute to its development;
- 2) Include broad public consultation in its development;
- 3) Be developed in 2014 with a report back in time for the 2015 Budget process;
- 4) Be primarily focused on actions and ideas for the City of Toronto with its ABC's to implement, as well as areas where inter-governmental advocacy is required, and those where leadership from the community sector and other partners is needed;
- 5) Be guided in development by high level staff and community steering committees to be established by the City Manager;
- 6) Identify indicators to track progress of the strategy.

Discussion:

Numerous reports have identified poverty and social exclusion as key issues that require community and governmental attention. The Toronto Community Foundation's 2013 *Vital Signs* reports that "more than 1 million Torontonians live in low-income neighbourhoods (20% or more below average incomes) and the polarization of wealth and poverty is deepening." Another indicator is "the growing problem of food insecurity— running out of food, limited access to culturally appropriate foods, compromising quality or quantity or even going days without meals. In housing, a third poverty indicator, the report noted, "72,696 eligible Toronto households were waiting for affordable housing at the end of 2012; that's 3,354 more than in 2011, and a 44% increase since 2004." The number is even greater at the end of 2013.

United Way Toronto's 2013 report "It's More than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Wellbeing" highlights the impacts on social wellbeing, family life, and overall prosperity of low wage, unstable, and precarious work. UWT's work has also highlighted the growing concentration of poverty in inner suburban neighbourhoods. "Toward a Poverty Elimination Strategy for the City of Toronto," a new report from Social Planning Toronto and the Alliance for a Poverty Free Toronto begins to outline a policy framework to tackle poverty at the city level here in Toronto. As a city, we should take up that work.

The causes of poverty are complex. The solutions will be equally so. Fighting poverty is about income security, equitable life chances or life opportunities, accessible childcare, stable and affordable housing, fair and equitable access to employment, access to and affordability of transportation, inclusion in social entities like schooling, public services like libraries and recreation, among other issues.

Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5H
2N2

Community Office
747 St. Clair Ave.
Toronto, Ontario M6C 4C4
Telephone: (416) 392-7460

councillor_mihevc@toronto.ca
www.joemihevc.com

The city's historical response to poverty has been largely to re-direct the concern to other orders of government. Indeed there is much that other orders of government are not doing and need to address, including major investments in affordable housing, increases to social assistance, providing for fair and equitable access to employment and an increased minimum wage.

It is important to recognize that the City is already doing important work to address poverty in Toronto, including social housing (both new construction, state of good repair maintenance, and as the operator of TCHC), Tower Renewal projects, Student Nutrition, community services focused on priority neighbourhoods, Sanctuary City initiatives, homelessness work, and the Recreation Department's focus on priority centres to encourage recreation for all. Toronto has also adopted a range of strategies that aim to address the inequities Toronto residents face and improve Toronto's quality of life, including the Housing Stability Service Plan, the Workforce Development Strategy, Seniors Strategy, Newcomer Strategy, the Economic Growth Plan – Collaborating for Competitiveness and the soon to be adopted Youth Equity Strategy. These are just a few examples of the work the city is already proudly undertaking. Council's Strategic Directions for 2013-2018 (December, 2013) speaks to some of these goals. For example the Strategic Goals of Social Development include ensuring "Individuals have access to an adequate standard of living including income, health, nutritious food, housing and clothing" and that "Individuals and groups have a collective sense of belonging and contributing to the city, and have the capacity to participate in the city's social, political, economic and cultural life."

The motions propose to put these City initiatives, as well as new ones, into a single framework that will allow for greater coordination, cross-departmental programming, tracking, change over time (particularly for historically disadvantaged groups and communities – Indigenous Peoples, peoples of colour, persons with disabilities, single mothers, new Canadians, youth, seniors, etc) public reporting and evaluation. It will allow departments and outside agencies to develop longer term plans and understand how their work fits into the larger poverty reduction framework. It will allow for evaluation of what is working and what is not.

The proposal here is to also include departments and ABC's who have not traditionally been partners in anti-poverty work. This initiative would see, for example, Police and EMS, Procurement, Economic Development, and City Planning, having seats at the table and contributions to make.

Numerous cities across Canada, faced with similar growing rates of poverty, are in the midst of similar processes – Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton, and Vancouver are in various stages of creating plans and implementing anti-poverty strategies. Closer to home the Region of Peel also launched a Poverty Reduction Strategy with a dedicated office and staff to coordinate services, recommend investments and report to Council. We can learn from their initiatives and adopt an exemplary practices approach.

A Toronto-made poverty reduction strategy would encourage other municipalities and orders of government to follow suit. The Province of Ontario released its Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2008. The Toronto strategy should build on this body of work but also focus on the unique circumstances Toronto residents face. The bolder we are, the more we make trails for others to do what they can. Not to be exclusive, the initiative would also be an invitation to the private and community sectors to support in ways that they can and to undertake their own initiatives. Good job creation and socially principled purchasing and contracting are examples of how the private sector can engage the issue.

The motion proposes that 2014 be the year to put together the plan and to begin the Toronto-based community conversation. This would allow for actions to follow in 2015 and beyond.

Sincerely,

Councillor Joe Mihevc
Ward 21, St. Paul's West