

Parks and Environment Committee
10th Floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queens Street West,
Toronto, ON., M5H 2N2

June 23, 2014

RE: “Resilient City: Preparing for a Changing Climate”

Members of the Parks and Environment Committee,

I am writing to both 1) commend the proposed budget resources set-aside to enhance community-based resilience to climate disruptions in the City’s June 9, 2014 report, “Resilient City - Preparing for a Changing Climate;” and 2) encourage the city not to ignore the important role that faith-based organizations can play in helping their local neighborhoods respond to climate disruptions.

Our diverse faith communities have great track record of helping their neighborhoods respond to crises. Faith communities:

- Want to help. Its part of their DNA, regardless of tradition, to serve their communities, especially the poor and vulnerable.
- Are highly visible and integral to the social infrastructure of the community. When people are fearful and overwhelmed, they will turn to these sites with expectations of help.
- Are already on the front line serving vulnerable populations. They have local resources to bring to this problem – volunteers, buildings, social outreach channels. More than 27,000 faith buildings across Canada. In every community.

There are many examples of faith communities responding to extreme weather emergencies in Toronto over the past year. To name just a few:

- @ Don Mills Jamatkhana (WARD 26), Ismaili Muslims opened their doors to the public in the December ice storms as a warming center.
- @ Beth Emeth Synagogue (WARD 10) invested in an emergency power generator to act as a community refuge center. The currently have an agreement with Eva’s Initiative to provide shelter for their homeless youth program in times of crisis.
- @ Metropolitan United Church (WARD 27) is currently spearheading a multi-faith extreme weather refuge project by inviting local faith communities to come together to think about how they can better respond to extreme weather events.

Best practices in emergency management around North America demonstrate that faith communities are often the backbone of emergency response:

- Faith communities are seen as the first in and last out in emergency situations;
- Faith communities are key not only to response, but also recovery.
- Faith communities provide huge support to first responders – when communities come together, first responders can focus on critical needs.

In Toronto, Faith & the Common Good has recently begun a proof of concept study, surveying faith communities and emergency response actors to assess both neighborhood vulnerability needs and faith community capacity, in order to determine how faith communities could be better utilized as local service centers during extreme weather emergencies.



We are in the early stages of this project. Much more work needs to be done to understand how to effectively engage our faith based community partners in enhancing local resilience to climate impacts. I encourage you all to insure that our shared climate disruption response mechanisms reach out to include our diverse faith communities.

Thank you very much.

Lucy Cummings
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Faith & the Common Good
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