



United Way
Toronto & York Region

Revised EX9.5.17

Susan McIsaac

President and Chief Executive Officer

October 19, 2015

Executive Committee
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Members of Committee

Re: EX 9.5 - TO Prosperity, Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy

I would like to first congratulate all of you for considering what is truly a historic item. *TO Prosperity* is the result of unprecedented collaboration and conversations between City staff, led by Social Development Finance and Administration (SDFA); Councillors, led by Deputy Mayor Pam McConnell and Mayor Tory himself; as well as Torontonians of all stripes. United Way Toronto and York Region is proud to have played a key role in those discussions.

Now, it is critical to build on this momentum and implement the strategy so that its impact is real and transformative for Torontonians. In that regard, I would like to propose the following:

1. **Put residents first.** As I mentioned, the development of *TO Prosperity* involved many discussions with community organizations and foundations, the business community, policy makers, and, most importantly, residents of Toronto's inner suburbs where poverty is most concentrated. United Way was pleased to work with City staff to hire community facilitators who convened the "Days of Dialogue" in neighbourhoods where residents have historically not been heard. That process in itself was a welcome change for many residents, who conveyed their appreciation on being included in policy development that affects their daily lives. The process also has led to a new level of trust that must be sustained and nourished so that Torontonians remain engaged and feel empowered to work with councillors and staff to deliver collective impact in our neighbourhoods.
2. **Track its progress.** Poverty is a complex problem, especially in a jurisdiction as diverse and densely populated as Toronto. And *TO Prosperity* recognizes that reducing poverty will take a long-term commitment. With nearly 70 action items that fall under six focus areas, it will be critical to measure what is working and what is not, and re-align efforts and re-allocate resources to where they are needed most. Therefore, it will be important to develop a monitoring and evaluation tool for *TO Prosperity*. An extremely important yet

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somewhat under-reported part of the development this strategy were “policy deep-dives” that SDFA conducted within City government and external research partners, including United Way. Our organization remains committed to working with City staff on this project so the strategy remains rooted in evidence and nimble to meet the needs of Torontonians.

3. **Bring everyone together.** The City of Toronto cannot and should not fight poverty alone. It already delivers many services and supports that help fight poverty. It will be important to coordinate those efforts between various departments, as well as with other levels of government. Outside of government, United Way is just one of many community agencies and foundations that conduct research, make investments and bring together key partners on specific projects that create opportunities for Torontonians. Partnerships with these entities will be critical to the success of *TO Prosperity*.
4. **Make a downpayment.** The engagement, partnerships and research mentioned above will help *TO Prosperity* move towards strategic implementation. However, none of that will lead to its success unless there is a financial commitment attached to it. We have seen the positive impact of other poverty reduction investments, such as the Ontario Child Benefit. A major municipal investment over the current term of Council will not only help achieve some of the outcomes of the strategy, but also leave a lasting legacy or prosperity for years to come.
5. **Build momentum now.** As the final staff report points out, not everything is about fiscal commitments. Key recommended action items in the staff report, especially those under “Systemic Change” are about a change in the way we do things. Community benefits and social procurement could be great levers to achieve social and economic inclusion.

In conclusion, I would like to once again thank you for your consideration of this item and City staff for working tirelessly to complete this report. Your leadership in adopting this report and your commitment to its successful implementation will help create what we all aspire towards: One Toronto where everyone has the opportunity to succeed and lead a life full of possibilities so that our communities thrive.

Yours sincerely



Susan McIsaac