

**Alliance for a Poverty-Free Toronto**  
**Draft Deputation to Executive Committee Oct 20, 2015**

Good day. My name is Ronny Yaron

I am speaking for the Alliance for a Poverty-Free Toronto, one of the organizations that initially suggested to the City of Toronto the need for a Poverty Reduction Strategy.

We are pleased to see the Strategy is nearing approval and intended to result in concrete action. We congratulate the Mayor and Deputy Mayor on their leadership in pushing forward with the development of the poverty reduction strategy and making poverty reduction a top priority in the 2015 budget.

Toronto has the highest level of child and adult poverty of large cities in Canada *[cite report released by APT and partners on October 13]*. Poverty puts us at an economic disadvantage, with social and economic costs.

But cities can play an important role in reducing poverty, with 40 Canadian cities developing and implementing Poverty Reduction Strategies.

The City of Toronto is a service deliverer in areas of transit, recreation, housing, child care. We are a planner, employer, a player in community engagement, democratic participation, and we have a powerful voice. The City can be a convenor, with the influence to bring other stakeholders to the table.

The APT is pleased with the hard work done on the Poverty Reduction Strategy and we want to affirm and encourage the many good initiatives that make up this report. It is comprehensive, addressing key areas of housing, jobs, transit, food security, and services. It includes low-cost actions, such as leveraging existing City resources, and will lead to positive recommendations and changes regarding social procurement, community benefit agreements, public land for community food markets, zoning powers (inclusionary zoning, rooming house regulation, and private rental unit enforcement).

The Poverty Reduction Strategy recognizes the need for investments in housing, child care, and transit that pay back, and the need to explore new revenue tools and spending priorities to fund investments that build prosperity for all.

It also recognizes the need to change the way that the City does business – to create mechanisms for involvement and decision making by equity seeking groups and neighbourhoods.

We have a few additional comments on how the strategy can be strengthened and improved.

Consultation and engagement can continue to be improved. Many if not all the City Committees held opportunities for public deputations on the Poverty Reduction Strategy - this was good. Prior to that, the Community Consultations were extensive. These could be improved, by being more two-way and iterative (doing them in small steps), so the public feel more involved in generating the results - not just listened to, but having an authentic sense of real influence over the final results. Vital to the effectiveness of the Strategy is the on-going process of inclusion of the public and full-participation of members of the various communities affected by the issues related to poverty.

The report states,

*“Community engagement must be an ongoing process, not a one-off event, and people with lived experience must be at the heart of it.”*

APT affirms that The City must not only act on the concerns expressed by the public, but must engage with them on a ongoing basis in a mutual and reciprocal process.

We are certainly in agreement with the recommendation to increase the availability of affordable housing in mixed income and inclusive, complete communities. We want to be sure that the housing the City builds is truly affordable. We are concerned the City will not stay true to its Housing First Policy which was implemented in 2000. The policy, still in effect, has been responsible for one quarter of all affordable housing built on surplus City land over ten years. “Build Toronto” was established as a development corporation by City Council in

2008 to deal with city surplus lands. We understand that the City's Official Plan policies require new neighbourhoods on surplus City lands to provide a portion of new residential units as affordable housing. The concern is whether the housing built on such surplus lands will be truly affordable. In order to be truly affordable, rents must be geared to income, which requires provincial funding for subsidies, and the province in turn requires federal funding.

We were pleased to hear about the new affordable rental housing complex planned for 200 Madison Ave. The property is being sold to a consortium of nonprofit organizations. Pending approval by City Council, capital funding will come through a Section 45 Agreement, and from the Development Charges Reserve Fund, to cover any additional funding for environmental remediation.

As well, City Council is being asked to exempt the social housing project from normal parking standards, property taxes, and development fees. In exchange, the project will have to comply with reporting and marketing requirements, rent levels and tenant eligibility. This project demonstrates how the City can facilitate the building of affordable and supportive housing by providing incentives, and waiving charges, fees and regulations. The City has tools, not the least of which is City surplus land, which can make a substantial contribution to the building of truly affordable housing.

We would like to see a strong emphasis in the PRS on creating jobs. The City, and indeed the country, is in a difficult economy regardless of whether it is called a "recession". In order for all these recommendations to work, the economy must be strengthened and the city has a role in improving the what is currently a sluggish economy.

Many are concerned some items are Provincially and Federally dependant for funding, or for regulatory or legislative change, and may not be implementable. Focusing on this will prevent action.

The city needs to explore creative ways available to improve the economy; looking at how the City hires, providing a living wage for City employees and for companies contracted by the City. One suggestion would be to review and

remove barriers to employment in hiring practices, and other practices which could create opportunities for employment for more Torontonians.

In closing, we thank you again for developing a strong Poverty Reduction Strategy and we urge you to move ahead with implementation by once again making poverty reduction a priority in the 2016 budget.

Thank you.

for the Alliance for a Poverty Free (APT)