

briefing note



Date: January 13, 2016

To: Councillors, Budget Committee

From: Franz Hartmann, Executive Director

Re: TEA Deputation to Budget Subcommittee on January 12, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Franz Hartmann. I'm the Executive Director of the Toronto Environmental Alliance which has over 50,000 supporters spread across every ward in the city.

I have two key messages for Councillors:

1. This budget fails to invest in 4 key areas that will help improve the environment and save us money in the long run.
2. We need to use new revenue sources to fund necessary environmental infrastructure.

Let me begin with where the budget fails the environment.

First, there is no money to avoid a TTC fare increase. We need to reduce car use not just to deal with congestion, not just to reduce poverty but also to improve air quality and help Canada meet its Paris climate change commitments because cars are a key source of ghg emissions. We want to encourage people to use the TTC, so raising fares every year sends the wrong signal to people who are doing the right thing.

Second, there is no new money for more tree planting or for taking care of existing trees. In 2008, Council committed to a plan to improve Toronto's tree canopy, which is vital to keeping the city cool during heat waves and soaking up flood waters. The Mayor committed to planting more trees during the 2014 election. Yet, the budget does nothing to increase tree planting. Rather, the tree maintenance budget is cut even though Toronto's trees still need lots of TLC. As well, there is no new money to get the city back on track to meeting its 2008 timetable to increase Toronto's tree canopy.

Third, there is no money to live up a July 2014 Council commitment to hire staff needed to prepare Toronto for climate change. Council adopted a host of recommendations aimed at building a resilient city. These recommendations included hiring new staff and public engagement activities, worth \$1.35 million. Last year, \$250,000 was set aside to hire on new staff. This year, no new money.

Fourth, there is no money to provide even minimal inspection and maintenance for Toronto's ravines. Toronto's ravines are important recreational spaces and green infrastructure. During

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floods, they channel water to the lake minimizing property damage. The rest of the time, they provide important green spaces that Torontonians and wildlife rely on. Yet, the proposed budget could not find \$624,000 to help Parks staff do minimal maintenance in our ravines.

These are just 4 examples where this proposed budget undermines the environment, and Canada's global commitment towards creating a low carbon future. There are many more.

How do we stop this? By investing our taxes into more transit, more trees, nurturing our ravines and preparing the city for climate change. In a city as rich as Toronto, where people now buy million dollar homes, where high end retailers and businesses are thriving, surely we can find a way to invest in these green assets that are fundamental to ensuring the value of our property and other economic and social assets is maintained.

So why isn't this happening? Because we are caught in a circular argument. We have those who say we should raise property taxes citing the fact that Toronto has the lowest property tax rate of GTA municipalities. Then we have those who say we can't raise property taxes citing the old widow who lives in East York who couldn't afford it. Both sides are right. It's time we moved beyond this simplistic discussion of revenues.

TEA joins the growing number of residents and organizations that are saying it's time the city started using the revenue sources that the Province made available through the City of Toronto Act (such as the Vehicle Registration Fee, tobacco and alcohol taxes, and entertainment taxes.) We urge Council to move as quickly as possible to use these new revenue sources.

But, as you know, other organizations are already calling on Council to use these potential sources to fund other vital city programs, especially actions to reduce poverty.

Put simply, even if the city used all the revenue tools it currently has access to under the City of Toronto Act, there still wouldn't be enough. It's time City Council asked the Province to change the City of Toronto Act to allow the city to have a municipal income tax and municipal sales tax.

This would allow Toronto to raise the money it needs to maintain our vital social and environmental infrastructure. Let's end the current cycle of inaction. Please fund the important green infrastructure I mentioned above and ask the Province to give Toronto the power to raise the revenues it needs.

Thank you.