



EX16.3.12

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June 28, 2016

Dear Executive Committee Members:

Please accept this written submission in lieu of my verbal deputation before the Executive Committee today regarding item EX16.3, the Updated Assessment of Revenue Options under the City of Toronto Act, 2006.

I am a community development worker at Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, a shelter and outreach centre for women and their dependents who have experienced violence. I am writing on behalf of Women's Habitat, and a group of women from Ward 6 in South Etobicoke who regularly attend our Thursday Drop-in Group.

We are writing to ask that you look at the revenue options before you as important opportunities to fund programs and services that are crucial to addressing the poverty faced by women and their children in South Etobicoke, and across the city.

As we sat and talked last Thursday, the women at our drop-in told me about the poverty they face in their neighbourhoods, and what they think the City could do about it. They wanted you to know that, although South Etobicoke hasn't been identified as a priority neighbourhood, their neighbourhoods are struggling just as much as other neighbourhoods in other wards.

They talked about their struggle to find affordable, accessible, and adequate housing. The housing they *can* afford is poorly maintained – bed bugs are a problem, and then there's the backlog of repairs. They have very little faith in the services available to address bed bugs, and said they need the city to take a more active role. They also want the city to tackle long wait lists for housing, and address the disproportionate burden of property taxes for people living on low incomes.

They had some ideas about how the city could begin to do this work, such as:

- incentivizing landlords to fill empty units, rather than keep them empty,
- implementing a progressive scale for property taxes,
- ensuring there are more measures in place to keep tenants housed and secure their tenure, and
- implementing additional taxes or fees for land developers as a means of bringing in revenue to address the lack of affordable and adequate housing.



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They went on to explain how their experiences of poverty are impacted by expensive transit fares and an inadequate and unreliable transit network in South Etobicoke. They stressed that a lack of reliable and affordable transit isolates them in their communities. That isolation has serious impacts on their mental health. People are “shut-in,” unable to access volunteer and job opportunities. They wanted to point out that not all agencies accepting volunteers can afford to cover their transportation costs, or should be expected to. And for those women who do have jobs, unreliable transit means they might often be late for work, risking their employment and contributing to the impact transit delays have had on the city’s economy.

They said the best way to improve access to public transit was to reduce fares for people living on no or low incomes, including seniors and social assistance recipients. Some suggested discounted rates or rebates, while others recommended free access. Many thought it would be a good idea to offer free or discounted service during off-peak periods.

Then, the women went on to describe the fear and isolation they experience when they don’t feel safe in their communities. Feeling too scared to come out of their homes only isolates them further, they explained. They recognized the roles the City and the Toronto Housing Corporation should play in addressing safety concerns, by working closely with the community to identify and implement solutions.

Before I left last Thursday’s drop-in, the women there asked me to stress that inadequate, inaccessible, and unaffordable transit and housing isolates women from their communities, from employment and skill-building opportunities, and from valuable services and programs. This isolation has a very serious impact on their overall health and wellbeing, and on their capacity to escape violence and realize financial security and independence.

These women, and those of us working in the VAW sector, understand the link between gender-based violence and gender-based poverty. We understand the link between gender-based poverty and the unsettling levels of child poverty in Toronto. We spent the last 2 years talking to over 2,000 women across the city, and they said that the top three barriers they face to achieving wellbeing for themselves, their children, and their communities are:

- the lack of affordable, accessible, safe and well-maintained housing,
- isolation from, and the struggle to find good job opportunities and steady employment, and
- accessing affordable childcare.

Women are already disproportionately affected by poverty, and the compounding impacts of underemployment, and unaffordable, inaccessible, and inadequate housing, childcare, jobs and transit. So many women struggle daily to access crucial programs and services, and we’ve seen the impact this has had on the safety, security, and wellbeing of children in our city. Addressing gender-based poverty means investing in the programs, services, and infrastructure women need to provide for themselves and their families.



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The 2016 budget left out a significant chunk of funding needed for services and programs that could help realize a shared vision of prosperity in Toronto, and we are worried that this will be repeated in 2017. You're being asked to consider a 2.6% cut across the board later in today's meeting. We urge you to reject further cuts to programs and services, as they will only compound the impacts of poverty on women and the people who depend on them.

You have been presented with an opportunity to address these threats to the wellbeing of marginalized and vulnerable women, and their families, across the City. The revenue tools you're reviewing today could cover some of the costs required for important poverty reduction initiatives; initiatives that could go a long way in addressing the serious problems facing women who are trying to escape violence and poverty. Reviewing the revenue tools from KPMG's report against the list of needed investments for poverty reduction initiatives, we believe there are ample opportunities to address the issues these women raised and the challenges women living in poverty face across the city.

The tools are before you. The opportunities identified and costed out. I urge you – on behalf of Women's Habitat, our Thursday Drop-in Group, and all the women we support – to seize the opportunity to actively address gender-based poverty in Toronto, today.

Thank you,

Laura Buccioni
Community Development Worker, Women and Micro-Enterprise Project
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke