



November 14, 2019

**Re EX10.1 - Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy - 2019-2022 Action Plan**

Dear Members of the Executive Committee,

The Toronto Environmental Alliance urges your committee, and City Council, to help build a more equitable and sustainable city by adopting and fully funding actions outlined in the 2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Term Action Plan.

All five themes in the Poverty Reduction Strategy align with Toronto's climate action commitments, especially: affordable housing, transportation equity, food access, and quality jobs.

We ask you to take specific actions for two reasons.

First, our city faces a social and economic crisis. Hundreds of thousands of residents lack access to basic food, housing, and transportation. And the need - and the suffering - is growing. Every single indicator on Toronto's Dashboard shows that the situation for low-income people in our city is worse today than it was a year ago. Food bank use is up. The waitlist for social housing is up. Shelter use is up. The waitlist for subsidized child care is up.

Second, as Council formally declared last month, our city faces a climate emergency. And increased storms, heatwaves, floods and illnesses are disproportionately affecting children, seniors, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, people with low-incomes as well as Indigenous peoples, racialized groups and newcomers who face discrimination and added systemic barriers to employment, housing and other supports.

Today, and in the coming months, you can take action to address both the poverty crisis and the climate emergency.

Our detailed comments in the pages below highlight specific PRS activities that have added urgency in the context of climate change impacts and necessary actions we must take as a city. We hope this serves as a demonstration of how a 'climate lens' can be applied to the Poverty Reduction Strategy action plan and how an 'equity lens' can be applied to the TransformTO climate action plan.



**1) Existing affordable housing needs to be preserved & ‘climate proofed’ and new ‘green’ developments needs to be affordable.**

When you are reviewing the upcoming HousingTO 2020-2030 action plan, we urge you to add a ‘climate lens’ to your decision making. In order to avoid backsliding on the total amount of affordable housing in Toronto, it is critical to immediately improve the quality of all existing affordable housing - starting with the oldest purpose-built rental housing stock. These buildings need significant repairs for health & safety as well as building retrofits to increase climate resiliency and reduce emissions. However, this work needs to be done in a way that protects tenants from ‘renovictions’ and above-guideline rent increases. Without swift action to preserve these buildings and affordable rents, Toronto risks displacing entire vertical communities from their neighbourhoods and support systems.

In order to ensure that all new residential developments (including those achieving higher tier Green Building Standards) increase the supply of affordable housing it is critical for Toronto to adopt a strong Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw. This zoning must go beyond the Provincial Government’s current scope, which is limited to major transit hubs.

**2) Transit must serve the inner suburbs and be affordable for all**

We urge you to support - and when budget time comes, fund - three key transit actions in the Poverty Reduction Strategy work plan:

- the full implementation of the Fair Fare pass
- action to prioritize surface transit
- action to meet equity-based service standards

These three actions will not only help get to jobs, medical appointments and other commitments, it will reduce emissions and prevent the worst of climate impacts by making transit a more viable option for more people.

It is critical that you fully fund and complete the roll-out of the Fair Fare program as soon as possible, and no later than 2021. Given that the TTC is expected to recommend yet another fare increase in 2020, City Council must move quickly to implement the Fair Pass as soon as possible for all eligible people.

Given the growing number of free transit proposals, pilots and initiatives in Canada, the US and Europe, we encourage the City to explore the costs and benefits of implementing deeper transit fare discounts, and moving towards free transit in Toronto.



A start could be offering free transit during extreme heat and extreme cold days. This service would help to protect vulnerable populations in our city from immediate health risks and enable people to access cooling centres or warm shelters. Additionally, free transit on extreme heat days would provide an incentive for motorists to reduce their contribution to emissions & heat levels.

### **3) Access to nutritious food can be a recipe for health and sustainability**

We agree with the Food Policy Council that food should be considered a public good and that strong food policy can be used as a tool to increase the health and wellbeing of Torontonians and build equitable and sustainable communities.

We support Toronto's recent adoption of the C40 Good Food Cities declaration and the Board of Health's commitment to transform Toronto's food system in response to climate change. The food system needs to change in order to adapt to the impacts of climate change and increase food security as well as to significantly reduce consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions.

We urge you to:

- maintain or increase funding to student nutrition programs (#8.1.2) and do so in ways that link to sustainable food initiatives
- pilot collaborative food purchasing models between the City, anchor institutions and the For Public Benefit sector (#8.2.2) and prioritize procurement of healthy, plant-rich and - wherever possible - locally grown or produced food.

### **4) A low-carbon jobs strategy should be a poverty reduction strategy**

One of City Council's recent commitments when you passed the climate emergency declaration was to create a "low-carbon jobs strategy that supports a decent work agenda, career pathways for equity-seeking groups, and the expansion of green industry sectors across Toronto"<sup>1</sup>. This presents a major opportunity to use the City's economic power and climate leadership to support a just transition for our local economy in ways that create many good, green jobs.

TEA is a proud member of the Toronto Community Benefits Network and we believe that large public investments in infrastructure and development projects need to equitably increase prosperity across our communities.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.MM10.3>



In April 2015, Executive Committee directed staff to create a Community Benefits Agreements protocol to achieve social, economic and environmental benefits for local communities. The Community Benefits Framework recently passed by City Council can help to create quality employment opportunities for low-income groups (#11) and leverage the City’s economic power “to stimulate job growth, support local businesses, and drive inclusive economic growth” (#13).

We urge you to support and fund in 2020:

- the hiring of a Community Benefits Coordinator (#13.1.2)
- the expansion of social procurement practices (#13.1.1)
- opportunities to increase participation of equity-seeking and Indigenous communities in growth sectors (#11.4.2) as well as the growing green/clean industry sector defined by the Sector Development Office of Economic Development & Culture