

# Revised CC20.2.6 and CC20.3.1

April 29, 2020

Dear Mayor Tory and City Councillors,

**Re: CC20.2 City of Toronto Response and the Ongoing Management of Emergency City Business during the COVID-19 Pandemic and CC20.3 Mayor's Report on the COVID-19 Emergency**

We thank you for the efforts of City Council and City Staff to respond swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that Toronto's public service has been working tirelessly to protect Torontonians' lives and continue to provide critical services.

As critical emergency response efforts continue and are improved on, you have also begun work on Toronto's path to recovery, which includes laying the foundations of rebuilding our city. As the City Manager points out, *"the rebuilding outcomes must be considered now such that the recovery strategies and tactics are aligned to a defined future state."*

**That's why our organizations are joining together. We are writing to encourage you to seize this moment to create a new future for our city, a new normal, underpinned with a bold, green, and just recovery plan. And we are ready and willing to help you in this.**

We cannot return to what was normal in Toronto. The gap between wealthy Torontonians and the rest of us was already widening rapidly and many communities were being left behind. As you know, in the lead up to the pandemic, Toronto already faced:

- an affordable housing crisis;
- a homelessness crisis taking lives;
- an opioid crisis taking lives;
- child care that is unaffordable for 3 of every 4 families;
- a climate emergency requiring urgent action;
- a severely underfunded transit system;
- mounting gun violence claiming young lives;
- inadequate access to recreation services, youth hubs, and libraries;
- streets that put pedestrians and cyclists in danger; and
- growing income inequality that disproportionately impacts racialized communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened these inequities, exposed them as public health risks, and shown that their burden is felt most acutely by people experiencing poverty, women, and Black, Indigenous, racialized, newcomer and LGBTQ2S+ communities, people with disabilities, and seniors - especially those who hold intersecting positions. Those who were already most vulnerable in Toronto are the very people most impacted by emergencies like COVID-19.

Much of this is because Toronto has been starved of resources from other levels of government over the last decades and has had vital services downloaded without adequate funding or revenue sources. Toronto's financial sustainability was precarious prior to

COVID-19, but now, more than ever, the status and work of our city must be re-imagined so that we can proudly and urgently build a Toronto that works for everyone.

Below, we set out 10 principles for your consideration in Toronto's ongoing response, recovery, and rebuilding. These are not detailed demands, those will emerge with community-led consultation. Instead, they are 10 measurable principles that must contribute to planning a **bold, green, and just recovery for Toronto**.

## **10 Recommended Principles for a bold, green, and just recovery for Toronto:**

### **Summary:**

1. <sup>1</sup> For best results, ensure the recovery and rebuilding process is transparent and community-led <sup>1</sup>
2. <sup>1</sup> Make evidence-based decisions, informed by disaggregated race-based and sociodemographic data collection <sup>1</sup>
3. <sup>1</sup> Advocate immediately and powerfully to secure a *New Deal* for Toronto from our Federal and Provincial Governments
4. <sup>1</sup> Fast-track and improve Toronto's existing strategies, plans, and commitments in Toronto's recovery and rebuilding plans, in order to build a more equitable, healthy and climate-resilient city
5. <sup>1</sup> Invest in, protect, and centre workers in recovery and rebuilding plans
6. <sup>1</sup> Prioritize low-carbon infrastructure, social procurement, and equitable local job creation in recovery and rebuilding
7. <sup>1</sup> Invest in public and community ownership of land and housing to ensure everyone is permanently housed, local food production is increased, and jobs are created
8. <sup>1</sup> Support and sustain the community infrastructure that has developed in response to COVID-19 for ongoing response and recovery work
9. <sup>1</sup> Encourage and prioritize community support and discontinue programs that increase surveillance and harm social cohesion and solidarity
10. Make permanent and expand the public supports and services that have been put in place to respond to this pandemic, rather than cutting services

### **Detailed Recommendations:**

#### **1. <sup>1</sup> For best results, ensure the recovery and rebuilding process is transparent and community-led**

While we recognize that the City is operating in emergency mode, which has temporarily altered decision-making procedures, it's important to start meaningful public discourse on future decision-making. Residents of Toronto have stepped up as community members, workers and business owners to support their neighbours and communities during the COVID-19 crisis and they have a strong interest in participating in the City's response to and recovery from COVID-19. Our city's successful recovery will depend on broad and deep participation that is community-led.

While the City's response and recovery should be done fast, it should also be done right, and our organizations are ready to help. For example, the loss of Committee meetings has left civil society with one less route, less time, and less opportunities to respond. Relying solely on City Council meetings to deal with all of City Council's business leaves civil society and the public with only a day to digest and responsibly provide input on reports and items before City Council meets. We hope City Council, alongside Toronto's new Office of Recovery and Rebuild, will work hard to ensure community-led input into plans for a re-imagined Toronto.

**Recommendation:** For best results in recovery and rebuilding Toronto, ensure transparent and consistent public reporting that allows adequate time for communities and organizations to respond. And, ensure the recovery and rebuilding plans are community-led with public consultation and engagement centred in their design and delivery. This will ensure that plans reflect the diversity of needs and interests of Toronto residents, and that there is widespread support for their implementation.

**2. <sup>1</sup> Make evidence-based decisions, informed by disaggregated race-based and sociodemographic data collection**

Toronto Public Health's commitment to collect race-based and sociodemographic data is very good for the health of our city. We know that existing systemic and structural inequalities have a significant impact on health and access to care. This data is key to understanding the disparities in how COVID-19 is impacting communities, key to determining the best response by the City, and importantly, key to ensuring Toronto's plans for recovery build a much more equitable city that works to improve health for communities facing deep-seated health inequity. The same principle needs to be applied across City divisions to help inform Toronto's recovery. Through a more democratic process and the use of disaggregated data, the City can better understand which communities are most impacted and better respond. Not doing so would only exacerbate existing inequities and put lives further at risk.

**Recommendation:** Commit to making data-informed and evidence-based decisions on recovery plans that use disaggregated race-based and sociodemographic data.

**3. <sup>1</sup> Advocate immediately and powerfully to secure a *New Deal* for Toronto from our Federal and Provincial Governments**

Starved of revenue and forced to increase spending in certain areas to respond to the pandemic, the City is now facing an unprecedented financial crisis. Now is the time to stand up for Toronto and advocate for a *New Deal* for our city. This pandemic has made more apparent the precarious situation that other levels of government have left Toronto to address. This includes failing to provide adequate operating and capital funding for the TTC, downloading services with scarce dollars (e.g. social housing and

child care), a deadly lack of funding for shelters and permanent housing solutions, a growing State of Good Repair backlog, and much more.

The Ontario Government allowing municipalities to run deficits is not the solution – this would only dig us into a deeper hole. The City accepting funding in exchange for a loss of local democratic decision-making over service provision would be short-sighted and prevent the City from appropriately responding to the needs of local communities. This is why we agree with the City Manager’s call to *re-imagine local government*.

**Recommendation:** Commit to immediate and powerful advocacy to secure a *New Deal* for Toronto that goes beyond relief funding and instead re-imagines the status of our city. Advocate for a new legal and financial relationship between the City and the Provincial and Federal governments. One that recognizes our economic contribution to the country, alongside our shared responsibilities for supporting marginalized and vulnerable residents, and one that provides adequate funding for services with greater access to revenue tools. This must include a commitment from the Province to take cuts off the table and fully fund Toronto Public Health.

**4. Fast-track and improve Toronto’s existing strategies, plans, and commitments in Toronto’s recovery and rebuilding plans, in order to build a more equitable, healthy and climate-resilient city**

We urge City Council to commit to aligning Toronto’s economic recovery with the City’s existing strategies and plans to address inequality and climate change. As Toronto’s Office of Recovery and Rebuild begins its work, it must integrate the City’s existing strategies and plans. Now is the time to fast-track implementation and seek to improve Toronto’s affordable housing plans, poverty reduction strategy, child care growth strategy, seniors strategy, Indigenous health strategy, overdose action plan, climate change and resilience strategies, bold inclusionary zoning policy implementation, waste management strategy, Vision Zero, cycling and active transportation plans, and other priority initiatives our city has built over the years.

COVID-19 is exposing deep inequalities that previously existed, and we must do everything possible to expedite plans for a more equal city. Join with municipal leaders around the world who are committing to an economic recovery that improves public health, reduces inequality and addresses the climate crisis (e.g. the Global Mayor’s COVID-19 Recovery Task Force).

**Recommendation:** Commit to staying on track and fast-tracking Toronto’s existing strategies and plans, while ensuring investments and policies introduced during the COVID-19 recovery and rebuilding phases align to, and advance, the work of creating a more equitable, healthy and sustainable city for all residents.

## 5. <sup>1</sup> **Invest in, protect, and centre workers in recovery and rebuilding plans**

COVID-19's disruption to work has exposed deep economic inequality within our city. Workers and their unions, as well as worker advocacy organizations, have been at the frontlines identifying solutions to assist in tackling this pandemic. It is of pivotal importance that the City ensure workers are at the heart of Toronto's recovery and rebuilding strategy. The City needs to ensure an economic development framework based on fairness and dignity, with living wage jobs and where health and safety are protected. The City also needs to align plans and investments to support a just transition away from fossil-fuel intensive industries in order to stimulate low-carbon economic development.

**Recommendation:** Include workers, unions, and worker advocacy organizations in shaping recovery and rebuilding plans, while ensuring collective agreements are respected, and commit to using City powers to regulate, stabilize and (where needed) transition precarious work.

## 6. <sup>1</sup> **Prioritize low-carbon infrastructure, social procurement, and equitable local job creation in recovery and rebuilding**

Every year, the City of Toronto spends billions of dollars in public funds to purchase goods and services, repair aging infrastructure and increase resilience to extreme weather and climate impacts, and to retrofit and expand our building stock to accommodate rapid growth.

More than ever, our communities are facing complex social, economic and environmental challenges. Through this recovery and rebuilding, our city has the opportunity to leverage dollars already within the budget to fulfill procurement needs while simultaneously meeting policy objectives. Incorporating environmental and social policy objectives - such as growing the circular economy, local food system transformation to ensure access to food, and inclusive local job creation - into procurement can help to support local businesses, especially those owned by Indigenous people and equity-seeking groups, help keep resources and money circulating locally, and reduce costs across governmental departments and programs. This can contribute to the triple-bottom-line of co-benefits, such as improved social equity, increased community wealth, and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

**Recommendation:** Ensure that public recovery spending prioritizes environmentally sustainable low carbon infrastructure and equitable local job creation. Council can achieve this by implementing inclusive, green, circular, and sector-specific social procurement strategies. These strategies should include strong accountability mechanisms by setting hard targets, tracking spending and publicly reporting on progress.

**7. <sup>1</sup> Invest in public and community ownership of land and housing to ensure everyone is permanently housed, local food production is increased, and jobs are created**

As the City Manager’s report on modular housing points out: “*the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that the lack of suitable, adequate and affordable housing is as much of an individual health risk as it is a larger public health risk.*” Persistent homelessness and housing insecurity is a result of soaring rental prices, disinvestments in supportive social housing and inadequate enforcement of tenants’ rights by all levels of government. In the context of a housing crisis, and amidst social isolation mandates, hundreds of units in for-profit housing stock sit empty, tenants are receiving eviction notices, and workers are having to choose between using their emergency benefits for basic necessities like food or for high rents that protect wealthy housing investors’ portfolios.

The recovery and rebuilding plans are an opportunity to re-imagine how the City approaches housing, food access and healthcare. In the City’s emergency response, some of this work has already begun. Rather than selling off land and housing, the City has been moving people into vacant apartments, looking to expedite HousingTO and move more people into more permanent housing. Yet the City still has a long way to go to address the crises taking place across the housing spectrum, from the lack of critical supports and worker protections in long-term care homes to the overcrowding of our shelter system. As the City Manager recognizes in his report, investments in “*affordable housing also has an economic stimulus effect in terms of jobs created due to design, manufacture, construction or renovation, etc. which would also help "jump start" economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.*”

**Recommendation:** As part of response and recovery plans, the City should purchase land and support community ownership and rehabilitation through land trusts, cooperatives, and nonprofits. This will allow Toronto to build permanent supportive and deeply affordable housing, create jobs with local equity employment targets and living wages, prioritize projects that create climate-proof housing, and increase local food sovereignty and security by converting land and building surfaces into productive urban agriculture spaces and other food-related infrastructure. The City should look to acquire housing assets secured during the COVID-19 pandemic, to protect existing initiatives, and to centre meaningful tenant engagement in its planning.

**8. <sup>1</sup> Support and sustain the community infrastructure that has developed in response to COVID-19 for ongoing response and recovery work**

Effective community responses to COVID-19, such as mutual aid networks and grassroots support systems, are grounded in an equity framework that leverages local social networks and community organizing. Communities who have been historically and persistently marginalized have shared critical tools and knowledge about how to respond to the gaping inequities of existing food, income, housing, health,

communication, and education systems that have been brought to a breaking point by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our city's resilience will depend not only on broad and deep community leadership and participation but also on supporting community spaces (e.g. community hubs), community groups and community organizing. For example, community hubs are supporting grassroots climate action, through local food projects, waste reduction initiatives, ecological restoration projects and much more, which TransformTO has identified as a key driver for climate mitigation and resilience in our city.

**Recommendation:** The new Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild should leverage the work of community-based groups and grassroots initiatives that have already played a strong role in the COVID-19 response by establishing participatory and democratic mechanisms that enable sustained direct engagement, partnerships and support for these groups so they can continue to play a lead role in building economically vibrant, sustainable, and resilient neighbourhoods.

**9. <sup>1</sup> Encourage and prioritize community support and discontinue programs that increase surveillance and harm social cohesion and solidarity**

The City has been doing important work through its City-Community Response Table to connect with dozens of front-line agencies and grassroots community-based initiatives who are serving marginalized and vulnerable people. Agencies and City divisions have been meeting frequently to identify and respond to issues facing Toronto's most vulnerable residents. Torontonians have stepped up as community members, workers and business owners to support their neighbours and communities during the COVID-19 crisis. These acts of solidarity are beautiful and represent the city we strive to be.

**Recommendation:** The City should continue working to foster community support and solidarity. All City of Toronto divisions, agencies and corporations should discontinue programs and practices that put people at risk, such as the City's new tool which encourages individuals to privately surveil and report on other individuals. Such actions undermine the solidarity and social cohesion being built in our city, make people feel unsafe, and disproportionately harm people experiencing poverty, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and LGBTQ2S+ communities.

**10. Make permanent and expand the public supports and services that have been put in place to respond to this pandemic, rather than cutting services**

While there is much more for the City to do, in response to COVID-19, the City has taken some incredible steps to support Torontonians. Toronto has provided free child care to working families, moved to permanently house people experiencing homelessness, expanded protections and services in long-term care homes, expanded free access to mental health supports, increased affordable food access, increased pay and supports for some front-line workers, and recently expanded road safety for

pedestrians. This work should not stop when the pandemic is over. This can and must be a turning point for how our city takes care of each other. At the same time, the City has taken the unfortunate step of reducing transit service and laying off transit workers. This is a step in the wrong direction and sends a signal that service cuts are being implemented and considered as part of recovery and rebuilding plans. That will only further marginalize vulnerable communities in our city and is not an option in a healthy rebuilding of Toronto.

**Recommendation:** As part of our rebuilding of Toronto continue expanding public ownership and public delivery of services, and work to make permanent new services introduced during the pandemic response period to ensure we are building a city that leaves no one behind.

Thank you for considering our recommendations above. We stand ready to work with you to achieve a bold, green, and just recovery for Toronto.

Sincerely,

Blue Green Canada  
 ClimateFast  
 Council of Canadians  
 David Suzuki Foundation | Fondation David Suzuki  
 Good Jobs for All  
 Green Neighbours 21  
 Millennial Womxn in Policy  
 Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care  
 Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre  
 Parkdale People's Economy  
 Progress Toronto  
 Ryerson City Building Institute  
 Social Planning Toronto  
 Toronto ACORN  
 Toronto Community Benefits Network  
 Toronto Community for Better Child Care  
 Toronto Environmental Alliance  
 Toronto & York Region Labour Council  
 TTCriders  
 Urban Alliance on Race Relations  
 University of Toronto | School of the Environment  
 Women Win Toronto  
 Zero Waste Hub Toronto

