

Preliminary Analysis of *COVID-19: Impact and Opportunities* Report

This document provides high-level, preliminary comments from senior City staff on the *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report. Staff will continue to consider the report, as well as the findings from public and stakeholder engagement, existing City initiatives and actions, forthcoming reports, Council directions, lessons learned from the pandemic and emerging research.

Preliminary comments on the themes in *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report are provided below under the following headings:

1. Collaborating with our Partners on Social Determinants of Health

- a. Affordable Housing
- b. Child Care
- c. Economic and Culture Support
- d. Income and Employment Supports
- e. Infrastructure and Stimulus Spending
- f. Long Term Care Homes and Planning for Seniors

2. City-led Actions for Recovery

- a. Business Support
- b. Climate Change & Resilience
- c. Cultural Support
- d. Digital Infrastructure
- e. Mobility
- f. Modernization
- g. Municipal Finance
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- i. Social and Community Supports

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1. Collaborating with our Partners on the Social Determinants of Health

a. Affordable Housing

Dr. Mowat and Mr. Rafi's report highlights the need for adequate housing as a critical social determinant of health, linked to the ability of individuals to participate in society and the economy. City Council has long recognized the importance of action on affordable housing, reaffirming its commitment with the approval of the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan (HousingTO Plan) in December 2019.

Recommendation 29 of the *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report, suggests that the City “identify affordable housing projects with the provincial and federal governments and establish dedicated and appropriate funding to develop more modular housing units and accelerate the supply of additional housing units to assist in moving people from shelters into permanent affordable housing.”

The recently adopted 24-month Housing and Homeless Recovery Response Plan included recommendations to reduce chronic homelessness by accelerating affordable and supportive housing options. The City's Housing Secretariat, in collaboration with the City Manager's Office and City divisions, is engaged in discussions with other governments on the 24-month plan. The goal is to create 3,000 affordable homes that include 1,000 permanent modular homes; 1,000 new homes through acquisitions, renovations and shovel-ready projects; and 1,000 new rental opportunities through portable (and flexible) Canada-Ontario Housing Benefits (COHB). Investment in this plan will help 2,000 residents experiencing homelessness move into permanent housing with supports. Another 1,000 residents with limited support needs will also be able to access safe, secure and adequate housing.

The Plan proposes to fast-track and expand initiatives under the National Housing Strategy, as well as other federal and provincial funding programs. It is a focused advocacy effort to accelerate delivery of the City's HousingTO Plan, while also reiterating previous requests to other orders of government to fully fund the Plan. On July 2, 2020 the Ontario government announced \$118 million for Toronto under the Social Services Relief Fund. On September 21, 2020 the federal government announced a new \$1 billion national Rapid Housing Initiative. These are important steps in advancing the City's goals, but as they are one-time investments, it is not yet clear how much progress can be made on the 24-month plan as a result of these new investments.

Beyond the 24-month plan, delivery of the 10-year HousingTO Plan remains a priority, including actions to realize the right to adequate housing. The HousingTO Plan is expected to cost all three orders of government approximately \$23.4 billion to deliver 40,000 new affordable rental and supportive homes plus a range of supports to help residents secure and maintain their homes. The required investments and commitments to-date include:

- City investments of \$8.5 billion (\$5.5 billion committed to-date);
- Federal investments of \$7.9 billion (\$1.48 billion committed to-date); and

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- Provincial investments of approximately \$7 billion (\$148 million committed to-date).

Achieving the overall targets in the HousingTO Plan will require enhanced investments from all orders of government. The collaboration that is already underway by the City and its provincial and federal counterparts towards new affordable housing delivery is a good example of alignment with recommendations made by Mr. Rafi and Dr. Mowat, but the level of investment needs to be considerably increased if the city is to recover better, address the housing affordability and homelessness crisis, and make progress towards the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing.

Recommendations 30, 31 and 32 of the *COVID-19: Impact and Opportunities* report also support the City's housing objectives and will be reviewed in alignment with the HousingTO Action Plan and other City strategies.

b. Child Care

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report notes the important role of child care as a support for essential workers early in the pandemic and need for ongoing investment from all levels of government. Access to affordable child care will be crucial for Toronto's recovery and rebuild. Women's labour force participation dropped to 55 per cent, a 30-year low, during the pandemic, and Labour Force Survey Results released in July showed that across all age groups, men were closer to pre-shutdown employment levels than women. Women shoulder a disproportionate responsibility for child care in most households, and accessible, affordable child care is an effective way to support women's return-to-work decisions and their ongoing participation in the labour force.

Recognizing this challenge, the federal Speech from the Throne committed to a significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and child-care system. This is a promising development, and the City will recommend that the policy development process be informed by the first-hand experience of municipalities like Toronto with expertise in planning and delivering large child care systems. New investments will add to the supports that other levels of government provided during the pandemic such as the funding of emergency child care by the Province, and the federal commitment to child care through the Safe Restart Agreement. These investments have helped to sustain the ongoing viability of the child care and early years system so far, despite additional costs related to cleaning and staffing, and the revenue impacts of reduced enrolments. Resources will be needed to maintain this viability going forward without relying on parent fees to cover these additional costs, as many families are not able to afford any increase in costs.

The City previously communicated the need for all governments to be at the table through the City's Child Care Growth Strategy and City Council's recent call for a National Child Care Strategy. As a result, the City Manager supports Dr. Mowat's and Mr. Rafi's recommendation 24 to call on the other levels of government to create a bold plan for more affordable child care spaces, and that this process should be informed by the City's service system management and delivery experience. This recommendation

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will be reviewed for inclusion in the intergovernmental strategy, in collaboration with the General Manager, Children's Services.

c. Economic and Culture Support

Strong, effective intergovernmental partnership to support Toronto's businesses and cultural sectors will be crucial for recovery. As the City supports recovery and rebuild, it will work in close partnership with the federal and provincial governments who have greater powers to enable more equitable, meaningful employment and increase labour force participation. The City will continue to advance economic and culture supports within its jurisdiction, fostering employment and investment opportunities, encouraging Toronto's cultural vibrancy, and partnering in the planning and development of the city's economic resources.

The success of business and cultural sectors is fundamental to economic prosperity and are also a key social determinant of health. Economic success and cultural vibrancy shape the conditions of daily life. Income, employment, working conditions, and social and cultural inclusion have a significant impact on health.

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report recommends the City work with the provincial and federal governments across several areas to support economic development and the cultural sector, which has faced a disproportionate impact due to the recession, social distancing, and limits on large gatherings. Comments on the recommendations related to economic development and culture can be found in the Business Support and Culture Support sections below.

d. Income and Employment Supports

Recommendation 23 of the *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report calls for the City to recommend to senior levels of government various income supports they fund to ensure the City's perspective informs how these are designed, and to monitor changes to the Employment Insurance system so that the City can continue to offer input.

On August 20, 2020 the Government of Canada announced significant, albeit temporary, changes to Employment Insurance (EI) and proposed the creation of three new income support benefits, including a Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) to support gig and part-time workers not otherwise eligible for EI. On September 23, 2020, the Government of Canada announced the extension of the Canada Wage Subsidy for businesses. As with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), which ended on September 26, 2020, the benefit paid to eligible recipients through EI and the CRB for the next year will be up to \$500 per week. These time-limited measures for Canadians with recent labour market attachment will help them remain employed or provide them with an adequate income supplement while the economy recovers.

The City supports the temporary changes to EI and new federal income benefits, as they will provide a measure of financial security to thousands of households in Toronto and help sustain consumer spending which local businesses across the city depend on. In the consultations conducted by the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild, income security and the high cost of living were repeatedly cited as key concerns that

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Torontonians had about the impact of the pandemic. These critical benefits made available by the Government of Canada have prevented individuals and families from falling into poverty or deeper poverty, or turning to the provincially funded, locally delivered, Ontario Works program – which provides just one-third the amount of money made available through CERB or now the enhanced EI or CRB program – for financial assistance.

As these supports are time-limited, however, the City also welcomes indications from the federal government that it is committed to making sustained improvements to EI to ensure, as noted in the recent Speech from the Throne, that Canada has an "EI system for the 21st century, including for the self-employed and those in the gig economy."

The City has been calling for EI and broader income security reform – to enhance the accessibility, duration and adequacy of income replacement (EI) and income support (social assistance) benefits for a number of years, including through Council positions endorsed in *Working As One: A Workforce Development Strategy for Toronto (2012)* and, more recently, in *TO Prosperity: Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy (2015)*, a core recommendation of which is to improve the quality of and access to income supports. Too many under-employed or unemployed Canadians, and especially those living in large urban centres like Toronto who work in part-time roles, remain unable to turn to EI when they need support even if they are paying into the system through employee contributions. This inequity disproportionately impacts racialized Toronto residents, youth, women, and newcomers to Canada – precisely the same groups which have experienced the most significant COVID-19 related job loss.

The federal Speech from the Throne commitment to introduce free, automatic tax filing for simple returns also reflects the opportunity identified in the *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report. This initiative would help especially low-income citizens receive the tax-administered benefits they need and are entitled to and should be pursued as part of broader income security reform.

Going forward, Toronto's place at tripartite tables will be essential as the federal government considers long-term reforms for income support based on learnings from the pandemic. The City remains committed to engaging in intergovernmental discussions on this topic to ensure that the interests and dignity of Torontonians who faced a high degree of precarious work as well as those with more tenuous attachment to the labour market, are fully considered as Canada works to strengthen the nation's social safety net and income security system.

e. Infrastructure and Stimulus Spending

Federal and provincial stimulus funding for infrastructure projects can boost the economy, create jobs and help the city recover and rebuild. All governments have an opportunity to leverage local infrastructure projects to support economic, green, and social outcomes as part of recovery efforts. The federal and provincial governments are also expected to seek out shovel ready projects as part of a future infrastructure plan, construction that has the potential to be approved promptly and create jobs.

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The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* recommendations 56 and 57 call on the City to submit proposals for projects under provincial and federal infrastructure programs targeted at improving resilience and equity, including addressing mobility limitations for frontline workers and addressing impacts on Indigenous and Black communities, making specific mention of the federal government's COVID-19 Resilience Funding Stream. The report also recommends that the City formalize the application of a climate lens, alongside equity analysis, in any decisions around infrastructure stimulus funding in recommendation 55 and makes specific mention of the federal government's COVID-19 Resilience Funding Stream; however the Province of Ontario has not yet indicated if it will opt-in to this stream and accept project applications.

The City continues to seek intergovernmental funding through all eligible funding programs and will respond once stimulus funding opportunities become available. Among prioritization criteria is a project's ability to benefit equity seeking groups (including those in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas) and its ability to meet the goals outlined in TransformTO. The City Manager will review the ability to add further criteria from a recovery lens including those that consider the ability of projects to benefit frontline workers. As the City seeks to balance a number of strategic priorities in determining its capital plan, it will consider a wide range of impacts prior to making formal project applications.

A looming challenge is the remaining COVID-19 related financial impacts for 2020, which are dependent on additional provincial/federal contributions through the Safe Restart Agreement, and the opening budget pressure of \$1.5 billion in 2021. The City has already slowed capital spending in 2020. Should there remain a gap in 2020, the City will have limited options and may reduce funding intended for capital infrastructure spending and also lower the amount of capital funding for 2021 by deviating from the Surplus Management Policy. A recast of the 10-Year Capital Plan will also be required as part of the 2021 budget process, which will include a reprioritization of capital work, with a focus on legislated, health and safety and state-of-good repair capital projects. Ultimately, without additional emergency operating funding from federal and provincial governments in 2021 the City's ability to achieve the goals outlined in the *COVID-19: Impact and Opportunities* report related to stimulus is at risk.

f. Long Term Care Homes and Planning for Seniors

The loss of life among seniors through the first wave of COVID-19 across the country points to the critical need to reform Canada's approach to long term care. The provincial government has announced a Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission with a mandate to investigate how and why COVID-19 spread in long-term care homes, what was done to prevent the spread, and the impact of key elements of the existing system on the spread. The City is engaged with this Commission, which is due to report in April 2021 and has the potential to significantly change long-term care in Ontario.

Many changes have been implemented in City-operated long-term care homes since the start of the pandemic which have relied on collaborations with other parts of the City, the redeployment of available City staff, and rapid implementation of health and safety measures.

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The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report recommends actions that would continue to focus on health outcomes in long term care homes across the City through improved safety for residents and working conditions for long-term care staff (recommendations 34 and 35). Reports, such as the City's Seniors Services and Long-Term Care Implementation Plan considered by City Council in December 2019, have identified needs for increased staffing hours per resident per day, and enhanced technical training along with physical environment enhancements. Additionally, several lessons learned from the first few months of the pandemic have been documented in a June report from Seniors Services and Long-Term Care, resulting in recommendations related to partnerships; screening and testing; personal protective equipment, infection prevention and control, and physical distancing; staffing; and visitors and families. All of these actions will form the basis of the City's input to the provincial Commission and the City's ongoing response to the health threat.

The General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care has been asked to review these two recommendations and to continue to prepare advice to the provincial Commission while continuing to work with the Medical Officer of Health on implementing evolving public health measures. In addition to the improvements in long-term care homes, the City's work should also take the broader view that seniors rely on a wide range of services. When COVID-19 forced many community services to shut down, significant social issues faced by seniors were exacerbated. All governments should be advancing efforts that support options to age in place, by looking at elements like isolation, poverty, access to technology, supports to caregivers, community care options, and the continued delivery of services that form such an important part of healthy, active living for many seniors.

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report recommendation 33, that the City seek provincial funding for a long-term care home specifically for the Indigenous community, will be considered by the General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care and the Director of the Indigenous Affairs Office.

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2. City-led Actions for Recovery

a. Business Support

The *COVID-19: Impact and Opportunities* report recommends the City, provincial and federal governments assist businesses to create internships, apprenticeships and demand-driven skill training programs with an emphasis on expanding job opportunities for youth, women, gender-diverse peoples, Black and Indigenous populations, and other vulnerable populations (recommendation 39). City staff are discussing labour market development with counterparts from other governments to move this, and other actions forward. The federal and provincial governments are key to supporting funding and frameworks for labour market policies. Ultimately internships and apprenticeships are driven by employers, and so it will be critical to work with the private sector, unions, post-secondary institutions, and community organizations to advance these initiatives.

The report's recommendation 40, to encourage the provincial and federal governments to provide support in developing the local innovation ecosystem for emerging technologies, aligns with existing efforts by City staff to develop key sectors in Toronto and create opportunities for workers to upskill and retrain. There are opportunities to encourage innovation across a wide range of sectors, in addition to those highlighted by TORR – artificial intelligence, data analytics, the cleantech sector, advanced manufacturing and sensor technologies.

The City will continue its work with the provincial government and affected unions related to recommendation 41, to develop an investment strategy to retain and grow jobs as Toronto is an employment hub, and provincial programs are integral to supporting Toronto-based companies.

Recommendations 51 and 52 refer to assessing the feasibility of property tax rate capping and creating additional tax bands for commercial properties to support small, main street businesses. City staff will continue to analyze these and other options to support small businesses. From an administrative perspective, these policy changes can pose efficiency and logistical challenges. For example, it is a challenge to accurately identify and define property types to support businesses in need, and due to the nature of property classification and assessment supports, these interventions may not be targeted to those businesses truly in need. Assessing the feasibility of these options will be considered against other options to provide support to small businesses.

City staff are already developing mechanisms to more accurately measure equitable growth (recommendation 43), including social mobility, distribution of economic gains, per capita income, and other indicators. City staff will work to create a dashboard that visually tracks, analyzes and displays this data.

Recommendation 53 asks that the City convene a table with the federal and provincial governments, major employers, major landlords and BIAs to assess the impact and develop solutions for the "ecosystem" of companies that provide support services to these employers and their employees; the impact of a prolonged work from home approach; and, considerations for economic development and a long-term vision for Toronto's downtown. City staff are working with BIAs and the Toronto Region Board of

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Trade to assess the impact on Toronto's downtown, and city centres in Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke which presents a real challenge as office workers continue to work from home, students are absent from campuses, and tourism is at historic lows. City staff will advise how existing intergovernmental and intersectoral tables can be leveraged to develop solutions and recommend next steps including convening other stakeholders as required.

Toronto Global seeks and connects global companies with opportunities in the Toronto Region, and business missions led by Council Members demonstrate Toronto's many competitive advantages to the world. The City will continue this work as a means of attracting further foreign direct investment (recommendation 63). City staff are taking steps to leverage new investments to support a green recovery.

City Council has approved modifications to existing programs to encourage residents to visit businesses and cultural events this winter, in a safe manner that follows public health guidelines (recommendation 67) such as allowing heaters for locations participating in CafeTO and supporting winter animation opportunities, efforts that will be carried into the ShowLoveTO campaign.

The City continues to partner with Toronto's universities and colleges to find solutions to support local businesses (recommendation 74), and staff see the value of accelerating these partnerships to facilitate recovery including additional opportunities to work with other anchor institutions, such as hospitals and innovation hubs.

City staff will continue to support Toronto's businesses, including monitoring and improving existing successful programs implemented in response to the crisis, or modifying programs to yield results (recommendation 75). These programs may require additional funding support from other governments.

Reducing regulatory burden (recommendation 78) is more important than ever to encourage economic development, especially in communities hardest hit by the pandemic and entrepreneurs from Black, Indigenous and equity seeking populations. City staff will continue to move forward the report's recommendation to reduce regulatory burden, develop small business initiatives and continue revitalizing main streets. The City will work with the provincial and federal governments, as business regulations exist at all orders of government. A key to improvement is helping businesses and organizations navigate the rules and working in partnership with applicants and stakeholders to remove unnecessary or duplicative administrative burdens while continuing to protect the public interest.

b. Climate Change & Resilience

The pandemic is prompting cities around the world, including Toronto, to reflect on their resilience as part of recovery and rebuild from COVID-19. Work in this area must consider the vulnerability of both the city's infrastructure and communities. It must also acknowledge that like COVID-19, the impacts of climate change and investments in resilience will disproportionately affect vulnerable people.

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The *COVID-19: Impact and Opportunities* report affirms the importance of building a resilient city that can adapt to various shocks and stressors, especially to the effects of climate change. Following the declaration of a climate emergency last year and in anticipation of a new City net-zero plan in 2022, climate change and resilience will remain key priorities for the City throughout the recovery and rebuild period. Addressing climate change was also highlighted in the federal Speech from the Throne with updated national goals, tax measures, and direct investments in energy and other infrastructure projects.

The recommendations in the report will help to support jobs and an inclusive economy, resilience and equity, and health and well-being, which are the categories of actions set out in the C40 Mayor's Agenda for a Green and Just Recovery. It is important that these objectives, and all action on climate change and resiliency, become City-wide responsibilities, including for the City's agencies and corporations. Opportunities will come with new and expanded infrastructure and other programs and the City must recognize where recovery and rebuild actions can simultaneously pursue climate change and resiliency goals, and vice versa. The Toronto Region Board of Trade, for example, has illustrated the connection between green recovery and economic development by suggesting programs and incentives that would target greenhouse gas emissions while accelerating job growth.

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report recommends specific actions to support the City's climate change mitigation strategies (recommendations 55, 63-65). Some of the proposals in the report would extend ongoing work. For example, the City already applies a climate lens to help ensure new infrastructure projects are climate-friendly and the Director, Environment and Energy, will continue working with staff across the City to support the formal application of that lens as described in recommendation 55.

The City is also continuing to develop its expertise and competitiveness in sustainable finance. On recommendation 63, related to attracting new investments in the cleantech and green industries, among others, the City Manager has asked the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture and the Director, Environment and Energy to explore further steps and seek out partnerships and initiatives that would improve the region's competitiveness for these important investments.

Recommendation 64 speaks to working with the province on net-zero retrofit projects that advance innovative financing mechanisms and provide opportunities for training and upskilling, as part of the commitment to "net-zero retrofits of Toronto-owned buildings". By supporting the green economy as an engine of economic growth, such projects should create value for both governments. The Director, Environment and Energy will review this recommendation with the objective of encouraging new and co-developed intergovernmental partnerships on climate action.

The Director, Environment and Energy will review recommendation 65 on working in collaboration with Toronto Hydro to accelerate the shared goal of improving energy efficiency and supporting the adoption of green technologies. City and Toronto Hydro staff continue to work in close partnership on several levels, for example, by increasing

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the availability of charging stations for electric vehicles, supporting the TTC's move to electric buses, and supporting renewable energy generation. Partnership with Toronto Hydro is imperative to aspects of the City's net-zero program and green recovery more broadly, and this recommendation should initiate more discussions on opportunities to support this direction.

Other contributors to the City's resilience such as internet access, access to green space, and food security are discussed in greater detail in other sections of this report.

c. Cultural Support

Supporting the culture sector through recovery will be critical. Toronto's cultural sector is critical to the social and economic recovery of the city. The culture sector includes for-profit and not-for-profit businesses and organizations in screen-based media production, interactive digital media, music, publishing, theatre, dance, museums and art galleries, heritage sites and collections, and special events. As highlighted in the *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report, while many industries have experienced negative impacts from COVID-19, arts and entertainment, along with the closely aligned industries of accommodation and food services, are among the hardest hit, and may experience the longest lasting impact because they are dependent on public gatherings in their business models.

Section 12 of the *COVID-19: Impact and Opportunities* report provides detailed analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on cultural industries, pre-existing challenges, City-led initiatives for recovery, and what was heard from the culture sector.

The following priorities are critically important to the recovery and rebuild of Toronto's cultural sectors and so the General Manager of Economic Development and Culture will:

1. Work to ensure that, within relevant City divisions, culture is recognized as a key component of healthy and complete communities, and build necessary supports and resources into City Planning policies and processes;
2. Play a key role in addressing gaps in the talent pipeline for the cultural industries, by working in partnership with community programs, colleges, universities, unions and employers;
3. Work cross-divisionally and with private sector partners to address both immediate and long-term needs for cultural space by developing municipal solutions such as creative hubs, streamlining and innovating permitting processes, and using financial and planning incentives to create more accessible, affordable and safe space for cultural creation and consumption
4. Work with the private sector, industry organizations, and other orders of government to advance the digital transformation of creative and business practices in the cultural sector, with an emphasis on supporting workers, equity-seeking communities, and people living with disabilities;
5. Develop, in partnership with other funders, new frameworks for cultural funding that address inequities historically faced by Black, Indigenous, and people of

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colour (BIPOC) creators and organizations, and support equitable growth, setting five-year targets for recipients to meet representative governance targets;

6. Commit to working with Indigenous communities and organizations to advance Indigenous visibility in Toronto with an emphasis on Indigenous place-making through projects that are led by Indigenous communities;
7. Make Toronto a national leader in building a strong future for the cultural sector through advocacy to other levels of government for financial support for artists, culture workers and creative enterprises, and through creative partnerships with the private and philanthropic sectors;
8. Ensure the viability of street festivals and the neighbourhood cultural and economic vitality they create by developing a festival and events strategy, including options to provide security and safety.

In addition to these priorities, the report provides targeted recommendations to support the culture sector which are well-aligned and complement these actions.

Digital infrastructure and connectivity are foundational elements for recovery in the culture sector. The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report recommends (#44) the City advocate to the provincial and federal governments for major investments in digital infrastructure as stimulus spending to expand the culture sector's digital infrastructure and adaptation to enable online and virtual delivery of cultural events and experiences. An investment in this area from other orders of government – who are best positioned to act in this space, and recoup the economic benefits that will be generated – will provide both short- and long-term advantages to Toronto's culture sector and enable a more effective recovery. City staff will work to advance these investments and will request authority from Council as required.

Given the prolonged impact the pandemic has had on cultural industries and operations, Recommendation 45 is to work with the federal and provincial governments to provide additional supports for business continuity through COVID-19. In addition to the extension of federal and provincial benefits to individuals and businesses that are unable to resume work at full capacity due to health restrictions, additional supports could include the advancement of shovel-worthy infrastructure, income security or affordable housing for workers with precarious incomes.

For cultural industries to recover and rebuild, long-standing issues related to space which have become acute as a result of COVID-19 must be addressed by developing expedited processes related to unlocking, planning, building and permitting cultural spaces. As recommended in the report (#46), the City will continue its work to streamline and simplify permitting processes for both permanent and temporary spaces for cultural production and performance.

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report also recommends (#42) enabling new partnerships and funding sources for the cultural disability community by facilitating connections between the technology industry and disability organizations. Support to the culture sector must include vulnerable populations. Cultural organizations are facing unprecedented challenges to connect with their audiences. Governments need to focus

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on how to help these and other businesses transform to digital, which includes accessibility for people with disabilities. This will require workforce development, upskilling, and developing new business models. Digital technology will be critical to enable cultural industries to survive and thrive.

Providing guidance to sectors experiencing significant constraints on their activities, such as performing arts, is recommendation 47. City staff continue to provide guidance across sectors to support safe operations and adherence to public health guidelines, including reviewing proposals for events, disseminating guidance, and supporting academic and sector efforts to identify and expand best practices.

d. Digital Infrastructure

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report recommends that the City advance internet and technology access for residents (#36, 58, 76 and 81). Internet access is increasingly essential, and accelerating as school, work and social events move online in response to the pandemic. Connecting underserved communities to high speed internet is a critical necessity that emerged from the TORR's engagement. It is also an enabler for equity, social, economic and environmental development objectives. Communities are experiencing a lack of access and affordability, impacting their ability to access the City's online services and participate in the digital economy. The federal Speech from the Throne announcement on expanding access is welcomed, and the urgency to implement solutions is critical. The Toronto Region Board of Trade has suggested a target of connecting all Canadian households to the minimum 50 megabits per second of broadband by 2025.

Other municipal governments are increasingly involved in this area. The City of Toronto has an opportunity to leverage its fibre assets to expand broadband access to underserved communities. It is essential that solutions include public and private partnership-based models, with service providers delivering internet access to communities. The City has been working with technology and telecom companies to provide free hotspots in key locations, including temporary shelters, lower income tower neighbourhoods, and long-term care homes. During the pandemic the City initiated a partnership with the private sector, resulting in temporary internet access to underserved apartment buildings and is planning further opportunities to leverage City assets to provide more access in buildings for low income residents. The City is also working with other Canadian municipalities on approaches to digital infrastructure, data, and service delivery issues.

Recommendations 36 and 58 would make it easier for vulnerable people and community groups to use City-owned spaces in a safe, inclusive manner, and see the City partner with industry leaders to deliver high speed connectivity infrastructure. The City Manager has requested the Chief Technology Officer to consider recommendation 58, and to work with the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration on recommendation 36 as work occurs to pursue the partnerships that will expand internet access to households and public spaces.

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The City quickly moved many services online in response to the pandemic, and many of the City's services now rely on these channels. As recommended in the *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report (#76), continuing to make those services more digitally capable will make it easier for residents and businesses to access services safely and conveniently. Delivering public services online, however, can create an equity gap for residents without internet access. As per the Digital Infrastructure Plan considered by City Council in January 2020, digital infrastructure will be used to create and sustain equity, inclusion, accessibility, and human rights in its operations and outcomes. Digital Infrastructure will be flexible, adaptable, interoperable and responsive to the needs of all Torontonians, including equity-seeking groups, Indigenous people, those with accessibility needs and vulnerable populations. This work is ongoing and will continue to be led by the Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services

Finally, recommendation 81 would have the City work with the provincial government to develop an app that could provide a single source for information on services related to various needs including food insecurity, clothing provision, and public health guidance. The City Manager has asked the Chief Technology Officer, in consultation with the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, and Medical Officer of Health, to review this recommendation and consider how these objectives can best be achieved.

e. Mobility

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report calls for the City to continue to apply a wellness lens on transportation operations and planning as the City did in its initial response to the pandemic. Within a few months of the pandemic-related closures, Transportation Services staff worked quickly with other City staff to enable pedestrian queuing areas through the CurbTO program, facilitating physical distancing outside of essential stores and businesses. The CafeTO program enabled restaurants to expand patio space in the transportation right-of-way, as well as enacting the ActiveTO program to give cyclists and pedestrians increased access to public space. These new and rapidly deployed programs were labour-intensive to implement in the timeframe necessary, and they quickly became a priority to both meet the physical and mental health needs of Torontonians and to support businesses in operating and reopening. The programs have been well-received by residents and businesses and residents are commenting in feedback to Transportation Services that they have helped to bring some vibrancy again in the life of the City. The demands on staff to deliver such programs have come at the expense of slowing down or pausing implementation of other 2020 deliverables with the focus being on response and recovery from the pandemic.

In recommendation 59, the *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report calls for the City to accelerate or make permanent the transit initiatives the City undertook quickly to support crisis response and restart, such as instituting priority bus lanes, improved cycling infrastructure, expansion of bike share and weekend recreational street closures and mobilizing transportation demand management initiatives to address new bottlenecks in mobility. Staff will consider the learnings from these pilot initiatives and balance the response and recovery lens with other Council directed priorities as they

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bring forward reports to Council such as the report provided by Transportation Services on surface transit planning.

The City Manager has asked the interdivisional Transportation Leadership Table, which includes staff from City Planning, Transportation Services, Transit Expansion Office and the TTC, to consider other recommendations made in the report, including those related to priority bus lanes and others (#61 and 62).

f. Modernization

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report affirms the value in the City continuing the significant business process efforts, focusing on digital and streamlined services (recommendation 76). The City will continue to accelerate this work, which has become imperative to serve customers safely.

The report identified procurement as an opportunity for continued modernization. Goods and services procurement are a significant cost driver. The City is continuing to modernize its procurement operating model to transform procurement policies, processes and technologies in order to achieve the highest value for money for procurements. The City is moving forward with the recommendation to continue modernizing the City's procurement system and incentivizing procurement from Toronto-based companies (#77). Procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) will continue to be integral to protect the lives of City staff and clients accessing City services. Businesses and non-for-profits also require ready, affordable access to PPE. City staff will explore the recommendation (#79) to support businesses and not-for-profits by using the City's purchasing power to competitively select companies that can provide end-to-end PPE solutions, while recognizing that it is not an appropriate role for the City to directly supply PPE to these organizations.

g. Municipal finance

Recommendations in the *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report related to the City's finances have been discussed in above sections, such as property tax support for small businesses and improvements to City procurement. The recommended renewed intergovernmental strategy also addresses other recommendations pertaining to intergovernmental partnerships and funding, including those focused on improving the social determinants of health.

Other recommendations target action related to the City's capital planning and budgeting, as well as development charges.

Physical and social infrastructure supports Toronto's growth and quality of life. Investing in new capital assets and maintaining existing infrastructure in a state of good repair will continue to be vital for Toronto's success. The City's capital asset modernization – including ongoing improvements to planning, budgeting, condition assessments, and investment decisions – supports City staff to bring forward advice to Council on where to prioritize expenditures and achieve the highest and best use of capital priorities. Continuing this work is a recommendation (#80) that the City agrees with.

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Development charges are the focus of two recommendations (#69 and 72). As recommended, City staff are continuing to monitor the implications on development charges and other growth funding tools given the legislative changes introduced by the provincial government. The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report also recommends implementing different development charges across the city to support revitalization in areas experiencing slow growth. This recommendation aligns with previous Council direction to staff, who continue to assess its feasibility.

h. Public Space

The engagements conducted by the TORR identified the issue of availability and accessibility of various forms of space, public, open, community and housing. Participants called for a coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing the lack of:

- Accessible and inclusive public space, including open green space and recreation amenities (centres, programs, washrooms, playgrounds etc.);
- Local, appropriate and affordable community space for organizations and residents to use; and
- Options across the housing spectrum (shelter, assisted living, long-term care, affordable)

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report calls for coordination and collaboration between the City and other levels of government and large property owners to free space for additional housing opportunities to create new opportunities for access to space, to support economic development, adapt to the impact of the shift to remote working, and to build the City's resilience (recommendations 36, 66, 68).

The City Manager has asked staff to initiate a Public Property Owners Working Group to advance these recommendations, in partnership with the other levels of government and large public property owners. The Working Group will formalize the City's current ad hoc collaboration, allowing for a more strategic approach to leverage publicly owned real estate assets and unlock shared space (office, community, public facing) to benefit residents and businesses. Membership on the Working Group could be extended to other municipalities to foster regional collaboration and address shared challenges and solutions.

i. Social and Community Supports

The *COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities* report reflected the input from residents and community organizations about the impacts the pandemic closures have had on a range of communities and confirmed that recovery is likely to be hardest for those who already faced significant challenges prior to the pandemic. As described, addressing inequities and considering how individuals and families experienced greater vulnerability is critical. New needs emerged since the start of the pandemic related to food insecurity, mental health and family violence as a result of the strict closures. While the City and community partners responded nimbly and flexibly to meet those urgent immediate

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challenges, the report recommendation some suggestions for longer term initiatives to address needs around food access and critical access to community space that may be prolonged.

Recommendation 28 of the report suggests the City continue to work with community partners to coordinate and support the development of a Neighbourhood Food Hub model that builds food supply chains and distribution methods with vulnerable and racialized communities; creating effective, streamlined emergency food access in community spaces, and establishing sustainable community food resilience into the future. Emergency food provision became an unexpected and new responsibility for the City during the pandemic. The need for food quickly became great and is expected to remain high for the foreseeable future. A model that relies on community partners and accessible space is needed to support the ongoing basic need of food access. The City Manager has asked the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to consider this recommendation.

Recommendation 36 suggests the City make it easier for vulnerable people and community groups to use City-owned spaces in a safe, inclusive manner, including office buildings, parks, Toronto Community Housing facilities, recreation centers and libraries, so that individuals can gain internet access, helping to bridge the digital divide that exists for many households and neighbourhoods, and so that there are spaces for groups to organize and engage communities in recovery. The report also recommends that school boards work with the City and faith groups to identify opportunities to combine programs and better utilize public assets and create new opportunities for accessible, safe and inclusive access to space for not-for profit groups and vulnerable community agencies, not just in the downtown core. Recommendation 66 also suggests the City look for opportunities to enhance access for those least able to access greenspace. Parks have become even more critical to Canadians' health and well-being during COVID-19. The City's parks and recreation system – especially for the approximately half of Torontonians who live in apartments and condominiums – functions as a vital part of residents' daily living space. Parks and recreational facilities are some of the most essential elements of the City's resiliency and recovery from the pandemic. As such, improving the provision, accessibility, and quality of parks, ravine system, and shared facilities are priorities to support the economy, and residents' individual and collective public health.

These recommendations speak to the need for the City to look at access to services that promote health and well-being of residents including access to key public health information, ensuring internet access an essential resource, and activities and social connections that enable greater mental health. The City Manager has asked that these recommendations be considered through the collaboration of several City divisions and City agencies through the leadership of the Deputy City Manager Community and Social Services.

Mental health and addiction are the focus of recommendation 37 which suggests the City work with the Province on solutions based on evidence from a broad cross section of affected communities. Providing mental health and addiction support was part of the City's initial response to the pandemic and have been ongoing challenges for some

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time. There is a need for provincial and federal governments to continue to invest in mental health care and services. Many participants in the engagement process highlighted these issues, which are at risk of worsening during the pandemic. The pandemic revealed how essential municipal assets, spaces, and community supports are to residents' physical and mental well-being. This includes the importance of the City of Toronto's extensive network of parks, ravines, and trails, as well as the playgrounds, pools, splash pads, community recreation centres, which people of all ages and incomes across the city have relied upon for play, exercise, relaxation, and opportunities for safe social interaction. Several City divisions will consider these recommendations for making access to such resources easier for vulnerable people and community groups.