

Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild Recommendations

Good day everyone.

My name Beryl-Ann Mark and I live in Parkdale.

I currently work at Parkdale People's Economy.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak here Executive Committee.

I will start by saying that the recommendations put forward by the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild are amazing, but there's a significant lack of recommendations for housing and wrap-around supportive services for the City's homeless population.

The pandemic we experienced in 2020 and the public health calls for 'shelters in place' to house Toronto's homeless has clearly revealed that we need to create both new social housing for Toronto's homeless and preserve affordable housing for tenants, by enforcing rent control and halting evictions.

One of the things we have to do is look at the many encampments and people sleeping on city streets.

COVID-19 has caused many people to not be able to pay their rent, which they risks getting evicted and becoming homeless.

I believe that city staff can redistribute tax payer's money to pay for deeply affordable housing.

In July, the Parkdale People's Economy consulted with community members in the neighbourhood to understand their visions for a just recovery and rebuild from COVID-19.

Most of the respondents were racialized and low-income and the number one thing that people said that they need was affordable housing.

But even before the consultations took place, I knew people would say that housing is the key priority, because I know many people who are living at someone else's home, because they can't afford to pay rent in this city.

A few months ago a close relative of mine became homeless, and my twenty three years old daughter gave her a place to live that same day and she did that because she knew that it was the right thing to do.

The country where I was born, Grenada, is considered a "third world country" yet we don't have people sleeping in encampments.

Meanwhile in Canada, which is considered one of the richest countries in the world, we have people sleeping on the streets and in encampments and many of whom are Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ.

I can tell everyone that it's disheartening to observe and realize that.

I know what it feels like to not have a decent roof over my head, because I was homeless a few times in this city and I can tell you that it's very difficult to function properly.

Our lack of affordable, adequate and supportive housing is causing a public health crisis, and it shouldn't be difficult for city staff to collaborate with apartment building owners hoarding vacant units to house Toronto's homeless or mandate developers to create deeply affordable housing in their new developments.

Through my research, I discovered that many cities around the world are redistributing their police funds to pay for educational programs, deeply affordable housing, mental health programs and employment training programs and residents have seen vibrant and healthy communities and cities as a result.

If the City is serious about building transformative change, it should reconsider its largest and most harmful line item in the budget and defund the police in order to invest in communities.

I am going to conclude by saying that the city needs to protect and create homes and if they don't, history will repeat itself. I can tell everyone who is listening that an ounce of prevention is much better than a pound of cure.

The winter season is almost here, therefore the city needs to collaborate with grassroots groups like the Encampment Support Network and Toronto Indigenous Harm Reduction so that they can provide basic humanitarian aid to Toronto's homeless residents.

If the city delays in providing the necessary services and programs that Toronto's homeless need, such as mental health and harm reduction supports, along with income supports and food security, then there are going to be many fatalities on our city streets.

If you refer to the written submission from the Parkdale People's Economy, you can see many of the unique recommendations on how to support housing justice in the City's recovery and rebuild, such as reclaiming vacant units and properties, halting evictions of tenants and encampments, waiving rents for missed payments during COVID-19 and de-commodifying housing. One of the organizations in Parkdale that the city can collaborate with is Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust and they can help the city with the process of equitable land use and community development priorities.

Finally the city should enforce an equity lens in all land use, decision making and development application review, to ensure that community members have a say in the future of their neighbourhoods.

Thank you everyone for your time, attention and consideration.