

EX17.1.19

October 21, 2020

Re: EX17.1 Towards Recovery and Building a Renewed Toronto

Dear Members of Toronto City Council,

TEA welcomes the opportunity to provide our comments and recommendation on the report from the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild and the City Manager's response.

1. The TORR Report provides guidance and consolidates feedback - but it's not an action plan

The TORR report includes some key recommendations that were proposed by civil society and residents, and integrated by the TORR team, that provide an important foundation for positive change. Key recommendations include: accelerating bus and transit priority lanes; expanding cycling lanes; applying a wellness lens to transportation and land use planning; developing neighbourhood food security hubs; increasing representation and decision-making by Black, Indigenous and people of colour; and applying a formal climate lens and equity analysis to infrastructure spending.

However, most of the report's 83 recommendations do not make commitments nor do they include clear deliverables or timelines - or any indication of what they will cost and how they will be paid for. This raises real concern about whether the words will be translated into action and how any internal progress on these recommendations will be tracked and publicly reported on in the coming months

There are also a number of key building blocks for a just and green recovery that are missing from the list of recommendations including a green jobs strategy, the expansion of community food gardens, renewable energy, and the rapid scaling up energy efficiency retrofits of buildings. The TransformTO update in the TORR report indicates that some existing commitments are also delayed, including the release of the City's plan to reach net-zero emissions, which appears to be pushed off until 2022 despite being a central climate emergency commitment. Too often in the past, environmental - and social equity - investments have been the first to be cut. How is Council going to demonstrate that it's going to be different this time?

With the Office's mandate now coming to a close, it is unclear how missing elements and emerging strategies for a just and green recovery will be incorporated going forward.



3. The City Manager’s recommendations do not deliver a bold vision or plan to “build back better”

The City Manager has said that this report “will be the first in a series of reports on updates and next steps for our recovery” as this road to recovery will be “more of a marathon than a sprint”. While this is certainly true, critical decisions need to be made - and actions taken - in the coming months that will either put us on a trajectory to “build back better” with equity and climate commitments at the core or entrench the status quo.

Whether it’s collaborating with other levels of government on addressing the social determinants of health, or developing a 2021 Budget that doesn’t cut services and delay implementation of City-led recovery actions, there needs to be a bold new vision for Toronto with a clear set of priorities and outcomes that will get our city on track for a just and green recovery.

4. The City’s fiscal challenges must be addressed with a new financial plan

Cities around the world are realizing that investments in low-carbon housing and buildings, transit and transportation, and green space and infrastructure can improve equity, create good jobs and build climate resilience. Toronto needs a transformative investment plan to accelerate economic recovery and realize these win-win benefits.

Even prior to COVID-19, the City faced an extremely difficult fiscal situation. Now is the time to address the ongoing structural imbalance between the City’s powers, responsibilities and needs of Torontonians.

Many of the recommendations in the report focus on setting up intergovernmental tables to secure the investments needed to move forward with better housing, transit and other key actions. Clearly provincial and federal governments need to come to the table with funding that matches the level of support is needed. However, the City must also show leadership exercising its existing revenue powers to implement new, fair revenue tools to fund Toronto’s recovery immediately. The City must reject austerity measures and service cuts that will be harmful to many residents that are struggling, and measures that hamper its ability to raise revenue (e.g. reducing development charges) and open the door to harmful cuts.

The City needs to put forward a strategy and fiscal plan based on principles of equity, sustainability and wellbeing that informs both current spending priorities and the 2021 budget. This means building on and expanding its successful green bonds program, continuing to pursue payments for climate costs from fossil fuel companies, and by moving forward with planned implementation of vacancy tax, stormwater charge, and parking levy, and by ensuring that any tax deferrals or relief goes only to the most vulnerable residents. Spending that is not aligned to these principles - such as large policing budgets or the expensive Gardiner rebuild - should be reallocated, where possible, to areas that will more positively leverage a green and just recovery.

5. Residents must be meaningfully involved in priority-setting and decision-making

Toronto's Recovery & Rebuild plan is still a work in progress: many more reports and action items are expected to come to Council and the 2021 Budget process will launch soon. We urge the City to commit to meaningful public engagement and decision making as the plan moves forward.

Residents and civil society groups have already invested a lot in providing feedback (see "[Community Voices](#)" report from Social Planning Toronto, and Toronto Climate Action Network [submission](#)) e.g. SPT report; TCAN joint submission) and expect to see their priorities reflected in the plan. The City has an obligation to meaningfully involve residents and communities that have been historically and continually excluded from decision-making processes. Toronto committed to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and yet concern has been raised that Indigenous organizations and peoples were not adequately consulted and engaged in the TORR process.

To accomplish a transformative agenda for our City, we are going to need everyone, and the public should be involved in giving shape to this vision and priorities, before decisions are made.

6. We call on the on the Mayor and City Council to show strong leadership

We recognize the hard work that City officials and staff have undertaken to help Toronto respond and recover from the pandemic. This is the time for City Council to take decisive action:

- Attach clear timelines and deliverables to the TORR recommendations along with transparent reporting and accountability mechanisms to ensure these words are translated into real action.
- Make a clear commitment that current programs and services to Black, Indigenous and other equity-seeking communities will not be cut or reduced during this time of crisis, and ensure the voices and needs of these groups are prioritized in the 2021 Budget process.
- Recommit to action on the climate emergency by reinstating the 2021 timeline for the City's net-zero emission plan and expediting the delivery of other overdue commitments in the 2019 climate emergency declaration.
- Develop a fair and equitable plan to fully finance the implementation of existing equity and climate strategies and a just and green recovery going forward.
- Develop and propose an infrastructure plan to the provincial and federal governments that creates jobs and prioritizes and advances the transition to an equitable, resilient zero-carbon city.
- Begin negotiations, and rally public support, for giving the City the powers and authority it needs to meet the needs of today's residents, and protect the interests of future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts. We continue to stand ready to work with you to achieve a bold, green, and just recovery for Toronto.