



January 25, 2021

Dear Budget Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

In addition to working at the Toronto Environmental Alliance, I am a resident of Ward 19, Beaches East-York

My partner and I raised our two boys near Woodbine and Danforth.

Our sons are in their twenties now.

They both worry about the future.

They sometimes wonder why they should work hard, study for a university degree, and try to prepare for a career, when the future is so uncertain.

They read the news.

They know scientists say that just two to three degrees Celsius warming of the earth is expected to cause the collapse of the ice sheets, flooding of hundreds of coastal cities, widespread permanent droughts, extreme heat and famine, and up to a billion refugees.

They know that extreme weather is already causing billions in damage in Canada in 2020 topped \$2.5 billion and that one unprecedented rain storm in Toronto caused \$1 billion in damage.

They know the world is currently headed for at least 3 degrees warming, unless cities and countries drastically reduce GHG emissions in the coming few years.

The Austrian neurologist and holocaust survivor Victor Frankl once observed that human beings can bear almost anything, except the loss of hope.

Today many young people, like my own sons, are losing hope. I find that heart-breaking.



Some days I am hopeful that our leaders are starting to finally take the climate crisis seriously.

The City of Toronto's Corporate Strategy Plan of 2019 names fighting climate change as a key priority.

In 2019, Toronto declared a climate emergency and promised to ramp up climate action - and achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

The recent COVID-19 Recovery and Rebuild Report names climate action and resilience as key priorities.

And "climate action" is named as one of the 3 top priorities for the 2021 City Budget 2021.

But, as my sons would say, actions are more important than words.

The proposed budget includes \$193 million in new capital funding over 10 years for retrofits and renewable energy initiatives.

But 20 million dollars a year won't get us to net zero.

Other elements of the proposed budget are concerning.

If the climate emergency is really a top priority in this budget, why is the budget for the Environment and Energy Division being reduced by 17% from the level previously planned?

Current staffing levels in the Division are already insufficient: this department was unable to deliver key climate emergency commitments - including a net zero strategy, a climate lens, a dedicated climate action fund, a low carbon jobs strategy - that were promised for 2020.

While I recognize the significant impact of the pandemic on staffing capacity, instead of trying to make up lost ground, it now appears from the EED Budget note that the full net zero strategy won't be released until late 2021 - too late for initiatives to be included in the 2022 budget.

If climate is a top priority, why is the City spending 40% of its transportation capital budget rebuilding sections of the constantly crumbling Gardiner expressway, while cities around the world reclaim their waterfronts and city centres from vehicles?

Here are six recommendations we think would make the budget better advance equity, health and climate resilience:

- 1) Don't reduce the Environment and Energy Division budget by 17.6% from what was planned. Instead, ensure the Division has the resources to deliver overdue Climate Emergency commitments in 2021, including a net zero emission strategy, a climate lens on City spending decisions, a low-carbon jobs strategy, and a dedicated climate action fund.
- 2) Prioritize investments that enhance health, equity and climate action. Increase TTC service levels and accelerate the installation of priority bus lanes (Recovery and rebuild recommendation #25<sup>1</sup>) to improve reliability, reduce commuting times and address the health impacts of overcrowding for essential workers, communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and all Toronto transit riders.
- 3) Focus and move resources to where they are needed most. This is especially important with regard to community-led alternatives to policing that will make life safer for persons with Disabilities/Disabled people; for Black, Indigenous, and racialized community members; for the LGBTQ2S+ community; for people experiencing gender-based violence; and for people with lived experience of mental health issues.
- 4) Instead of prioritizing low property taxes for homeowners, increase the residential property tax by a slightly higher percentage (while continuing to provide targeted relief to homeowners who are struggling), and invest the revenues in support for the tens of thousands stuck on subsidized housing waitlists or worse stuck living on the street.

---

1

<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-157346.pdf&sa=D&ust=1611506512261000&usq=AOvVaw3Df8j6XV13CtxRhNrnfSjK>



- 5) Apply a robust climate, health and equity lens to ALL budget decisions to ensure that spending advances, rather than hinders, the creation of a more prosperous, inclusive, equitable and resilient city.
  
- 6) Fix the chronic underfunding of housing, transit, community programs and climate action by implementing revenue tools that are within the City's powers, such as a commercial parking levy and vehicle registration tax, with consideration given to equity impacts, and by advocating strongly with provincial and federal governments for additional funding support and revenue powers.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Michael Polanyi, Climate Campaigner  
Toronto Environmental Alliance