

January 26, 2021

Councillor Gary Crawford, Chair
Members of the Budget Committee
2nd floor, Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Councillor Gary Crawford and Members of the Budget Committee,

Re: Feedback from Social Planning Toronto's 'People's Budget Platform 2021'

For more than a decade [Social Planning Toronto](https://socialplanningtoronto.org) has actively engaged in the City of Toronto's budget process. In addition to our research and analysis, we have worked closely with underrepresented communities to ensure their feedback is considered in budget decisions.

This year, in light of the pandemic and the move toward virtual engagement, we introduced the [People's Budget Platform](#). We hosted two virtual sessions on January 20 & 22 to allow Toronto residents to share their ideas and hopes for the 2021 City Budget through video or audio presentations.

Fifty participants joined us online and we heard from 18 residents from across 12 wards. Presenters living in neighbourhoods often underserved and underrepresented in policy and program decisions shared passionate views and vital insights on pressing community needs that should be addressed by the City Budget.

In this letter, we share with you important feedback from communities whose voices are often not heard by City Council, which we received through our People's Budget Platform.

In summary, the 2021 City Budget should prioritize:

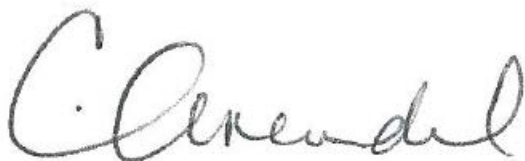
- Supporting residents disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including racialized people, seniors, women, children, youth, people with disabilities, newcomers, refugees, and immigrants.
- Making the city more accessible and livable for those who have been struggling even before the pandemic by providing safe and well-maintained affordable housing and public transit.
- Reallocating the Toronto police budget.
- Enhancing resident leadership in local communities.
- Supporting long-term care homes.
- Helping small businesses and helping workers access good jobs.

The key asks from each presenter are summarized below and are organized by ward. We also encourage you to watch or listen to their submissions on the [People's Budget Platform](#) (or on [YouTube](#)).

The decisions you make in the 2021 City Budget will have a profound impact on residents across Toronto, but especially those in vulnerable and underserved communities who are carrying the burden of the pandemic.

On behalf of the People's Budget Platform of Toronto, we thank you for your consideration and we strongly hope that you will make decisions in this year's City Budget to make Toronto a fair, equitable, and prosperous city for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Arundel'.

Caryl Arundel
Interim Executive Director
Social Planning Toronto

CC: Budget Committee
Mayor Tory

BUDGET ASKS FROM PRESENTERS AT SOCIAL PLANNING TORONTO'S 'PEOPLE'S BUDGET PLATFORM 2021'

1. SAROJA K., WARD 1

Key budget ask: Improve maintenance of condo and apartment buildings.

- The City should prioritize pest control in low-income areas.

Video presentation (1:54 min): https://youtu.be/PYii_S5nWK8

2. LUCY DRUMONDE, WARD 3

Key budget asks: Support affordable and accessible housing and make the Fair Transit Pass more flexible.

- There is a lack of accommodation in housing, especially when it comes to specific accommodations someone needs.
- Housing needs to be affordable based on income.
- Fair fare pass has been successful but the City needs to expand it so more people can access it.

Video presentation (2:15 min): <https://youtu.be/kD3Dg1pHrTE>

3. DEBRA ROSS, WARD 5

Key budget ask: Support for descendants of enslaved Africans.

- The City needs to invest in people who are descendants of enslaved Africans.
- The City should de-emphasize focus on programs and services for this community and put attention on infrastructure development for this community (e.g. health care facilities, businesses, arts & cultural centres, etc. for and led by descendants of enslaved Africans).
- Our local government needs to encourage conversations about the unique histories of descendants of enslaved Africans and their relationships with Canada.

Video presentation (3:22 min): https://youtu.be/_OhK3pCrFjc

4. IBRAHIM OBALOLA, WARD 6

Key budget asks: Support for healthcare system (long-term care) and small businesses and local jobs; be creative about municipal revenues.

- More investment in the healthcare system – especially the long-term care system.
- Allocate more funding for small businesses, employment services, training.
- Save more money for future emergencies and crises.
- Be creative about revenue generation and how to raise more money to fund our services.

Video presentation (1:32 min): <https://youtu.be/FVLIQkVE248>

5. ANNA-KAY BROWN, WARD 7

Key budget asks: Support for renters and provision of affordable housing; reallocate Toronto police budget.

- The City should fund communities that really need it. Many communities are dealing with pandemic-related problems, such as the housing crisis. However, these communities have been dealing with these challenges since even before the pandemic.
- This budget shows no real commitment from the City.
- The City needs to tackle evictions. What are we doing to help renters? How can we help folks to stay in their homes?
 - We need affordable and equitable housing.
 - We need rent control and rent freezing.

6. ANONYMOUS, WARD 9

Key budget ask: Reallocate Toronto police budget and support street-involved people.

- The City of Toronto's current budget proposal is disappointing, especially when it comes to the budget for the Toronto police, which is still quite enormous.
 - The current Toronto police budget goes against what many people across Toronto have asked for, which is to roll back the over-inflated police budget.
- The City claiming that 'not raising the Toronto police budget *is* a cut' is insulting to residents.
 - This shows City Council's lack of interest in addressing systemic racism and other community needs, such as our housing crisis and the opioid epidemic.
 - City Council should reassess their values and morals.
- There is an increasing need to support street-involved people; the services currently provided are grotesquely underfunded.

Video presentation (4:17 min): <https://youtu.be/MKaeAIHNx9s>

7. JOHN RAE, WARD 13

Key budget ask: Support for people with disabilities.

- Apply a disability lens – any new program, policy, bylaw must be scrutinized re: impact on disability community.
- Housing – notion of full accessibility needs to be included in affordable housing; 100% of all new housing units need to meet universal accessibility standards.
- Ban e-scooters from streets – new bylaw will require enforcement which costs money.
- Employment – in 2019, City council began a discussion to cover needed accommodation costs. This creates a barrier. Council should create a special fund for employers who are accommodating people with disabilities.
- Representation – Disability community is not represented where decisions are being made. Mentor and encourage people with disabilities to engage in civic matters. Persons with disabilities make up 22% of the population but are not represented adequately.

Video presentation (5:00 min): <https://youtu.be/wVXpluJATfY>

8. KIM ADLARD, WARD 13

Key budget asks: Apply a disability equity lens for pandemic recovery; support for affordable housing and disability community.

- People in Toronto are still recovering from the Mike Harris days and COVID-19 has magnified the crisis condition.
- The City needs to apply a disability equity lens, especially for COVID-19 relief planning.
- We need deeply affordable and accessible housing.
- The City must be a true ally to the disability community by pushing for more equitable and sufficient funding for disability support programs, such as ODSP.
 - The City did a good job in stopping the Province from changing the definition of 'disability', which would have created more problems for persons with disabilities.
 - The City must do more to push for provincial government supports for people with disabilities, especially those struggling in poverty.

Video presentation (4:28 min): <https://youtu.be/fmfusLFd-fY>

9. RINA SEN GUPTA, WARD 13

Key budget asks: Support for seniors and gender equity.

- The City of Toronto should support seniors and nonprofits that help seniors.
 - Help is needed for nonprofits to provide culturally appropriate services to seniors, especially immigrant women and senior women.
 - Our local government must provide special pandemic relief for nonprofits serving seniors.
- Seniors who experience social isolation and mental health concerns need support from the City.
- City staff who work with seniors should be trained to identify signs of abuse, especially amongst women and seniors.
- The City should focus on gender-equity strategies and provide support for community safety networks.

Video presentation (4:23 min): <https://youtu.be/2pqj5k1DhkA>

10. SAFIA PARVEEN, WARD 15

Key budget asks: Support for affordable housing and maintenance of rental buildings; expand Toronto Public Health's free dental program to people ages 18-64; act on the recommendations of the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild report.

- Rents are increasing too much and residents are being forced to eat less to afford their rent.
- Buildings are not being properly maintained.
- Fully fund targets set out in the Housing TO Action Plan – including additional funding to address the housing crisis, which can't be ignored.
- Expand dental care programs offered by Toronto Public health – make it free for ages 18 to 64, especially newcomers and refugees.
- Address impact of COVID-19 on low-income people.
- Act on TORR report – job creation and culturally sensitive employment services.
- Newcomer employment services and strategies.

- Plan for future emergencies by setting funding aside for future emergencies.

Video presentation (3:45 min): <https://youtu.be/7zX2jOEvdKk>

11. SHAKHLO SHARIPOVA, WARD 15

Key budget ask: Support for grassroots organizations and community-based supports.

- The City should allocate money for community-based projects and supports, grassroots leaders, and grassroots organizations.

Video presentation (3:22 min): https://youtu.be/rzNZ062V_AE

12. RIFFAT FATIMA, WARD 16

Key budget asks: Address domestic violence, drug addiction, food insecurity, and gun violence.

- The City should fund:
 - Recreation centres, especially for youth to keep them engaged in positive activities.
 - Grants for communities to help people build their skills and create home-based businesses (e.g., how can we help people who enjoy sewing, cooking, or painting to make money from home and build their household income, especially during the pandemic?).
 - Parks and recreation facilities to make them accessible for everyone.
 - Hygiene and safety of public spaces and Toronto Community Housing buildings.

Video presentation (4:54 min): <https://youtu.be/CCvYN7yT1eU>

13. VIJAYALAKSHMI (VIJI) PALANIAPPAN, WARD 16

Key budget ask: Restore the Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020 program and invest in resident engagement and local leadership.

- The TSNS Strategy is needed to increase civic engagement for residents in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, and strengthen ties between resident-led groups, community organizations and the City. resident engagement and local leadership in neighbourhood improvement areas.

Video presentation (2:10 min): <https://youtu.be/6nFYvUe37Oc>

14. BARSHA GHOSH, WARD 17

Key budget asks: Support for seniors in hospice and long-term care; funding for Toronto Seniors Strategy.

- The City should focus on the elderly, especially those in hospice or long-term care, and bring some normalcy back into their lives.
- The City must help seniors who are isolated; for example, by providing more opportunities for online activities, like multicultural bingo.
- We need culturally specific long-term care homes.
- The City should provide more funding to implement the Toronto Seniors Strategy and to support City-run long-term care homes.

Video presentation (5:00 min): <https://youtu.be/4VN8XCR815c>

15. LORETTA FISHER, WARD 25

Key budget asks: Better support for workers, especially during the pandemic, and legislate 10 paid sick days.

- Legislate paid sick days – workers should be entitled to 10 paid sick days and even more for pandemics like COVID-19.
- Advocate to the provincial government to be accountable to workers.
- Protections are especially needed for temporary and contract workers.

Video presentation (5:00 min): <https://youtu.be/Whv13q13l0k>