

# ATKINSON FOUNDATION

Dear Mayor Tory and Executive Committee Members

I am pleased to write this letter to you today in support of agenda item EX 20.7, *Advancing the Community Benefits Framework* report.

For almost a decade, the Atkinson Foundation has been working alongside City staff, resident groups, community organizations and labour to champion community benefits and social procurement as transformational tools to ensure equity is at the center of local economic development and city building efforts.

Community benefits agreements (CBAs) and social procurement strategies create conditions for communities who have been historically and persistently excluded - particularly Black, Indigenous and racialized communities - to have meaningful input into public infrastructure development processes and realize material benefits from them through things like employment and training opportunities, purchasing and affordable housing. These exclusions, that have created growing income and wealth inequality, have not been accidents. They are a direct result of systems borne out of racism, colonization and white supremacy.

These tools support a larger ambition to transform the rules of economic development from a zero-sum game -- where some win and others lose, to a positive sum game where no one wins at the expense of others.

Toronto has made meaningful progress. We have real wins - more than 120 City contracts with community benefit requirements, including over 50 through the Social Procurement Program that have workforce development and supply chain diversity stipulations. The CBA associated with the Rexdale - Woodbine Casino has raised the floor for agreements in Canada, demonstrating what is possible in terms of community engagement and economic opportunities for workers and residents. Critical community infrastructure like the Toronto Community Benefits Network has also been built to ensure there is resident input into the development process.

Our partnership with the City's Social Development Finance and Administration division to create AnchorTO, has resulted in a robust network of 15 public sector institutions that collectively represent \$20 billion of operating spending annually, and cumulatively control over \$50 billion in capital assets. Members are actively collaborating to invest resources in community assets, create employment and training opportunities, and procure from community-based and diverse enterprises.

The research on community benefits combined with our experience on early stage implementation including with the Eglinton Crosstown LRT is clear - a robust policy framework is a foundational component of success, but not enough. It must be paired with sufficient resources to enable the City to drive its work forward, integrating with other aspects of the City's economic recovery efforts and to ensure accountability to community, labour and industry partners. Minimum hard targets and disaggregated data associated with local and equity hiring in construction and employment operations and meaningful community engagement processes are critical to create transformational impact for residents that will be felt for a generation.

Now more than ever, we must harness the full power of community benefits to support an ambition to renew our local economies post pandemic from the ground up. We look forward to working with the City in the implementation of the report's recommendations. Thank you for your leadership and for this opportunity to contribute to your deliberations.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colette Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Colette Murphy  
CEO, Atkinson Foundation  
January 27, 2021