

Deputation: Toronto City budget
Oakwood Vaughan Community Organization
17 January 2023

Members of Council:

Oakwood Vaughan Community Organization (OVCO) is an incorporated not-for-profit charitable voice of residents in the Oakwood Vaughan (OV) community.

Aside from the issues common to the rest of the city affected by these budget deliberations – the climate emergency, poverty and child poverty, housing and homelessness, transit and the maintenance and expansion of services – all of which have suffered under an austerity budget due to lack of funding, there are some [issues specific to our community](#).

Before discussing the specifics, we acknowledge that the ongoing pandemic has devastated services in the city, resulting in problems in every area of service, including transit, Public Health, recreation facilities and programs and public safety. Regarding the latter, we will be including our strong opposition to the expansion of the police budget proposed by the mayor. We further acknowledge that the new strong mayor powers will inevitably colour these deliberations.

In addition, we acknowledge that three provincial bills will have serious and negative consequences for municipal governance and the ability of Toronto residents to shape decisions at City Hall:

1. Bill 3, Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022

Sadly, budget-making and all decisions about the budget are now centralized in the Mayor's office. The Budget Committee no longer makes any decisions about the budget. Your committee is now responsible only for hosting these public deputations and relaying "advice" to the Mayor on the operating and capital budgets.

2. Bill 39, Better Municipal Governance Act, 2022

[Bill 39](#), gives Mayor Tory [the power](#) to pass items deemed "provincial priorities" with only one-third of Council support, a direct attack on democracy.

3. Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022

[Bill 23](#) will cost the City [\\$200 million annually](#) in revenue, limiting the municipal government's ability to pay for new infrastructure to accommodate new residents and affordable housing projects like Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition (MURA) and the Open Door Program.

It also reduces the time that the units must remain affordable from 99 to 25 years. It shifts the determination of "affordable" to developers. And it erodes rental replacement protections, putting more tenants at risk of homelessness and threatening the city's affordable housing stock.

Given that tenants represent half of the residents in OV, this will inevitably have devastating effects.

Let me begin with local issues which find their parallel in other areas of the city.

1. OV's status

- The local economy is depressed.
- There is a lack of primary care services.
- Our youth have few recreation opportunities.
- Our youth continue to be targeted by police.

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- A large number of isolated seniors need community services.
- There is a lack of community spaces for gathering.
- We have higher than average incidences of several chronic health conditions.

2. Safety

OV has experienced its share of public violence. We wrote a position paper on community safety that expands the concept from guns and gangs to a broader view of safety, the promotion of which lies in taking the social determinants of health into consideration. Rather than expanding the police budget, we need to deal with these underlying issues. We are more than disappointed in the Mayor's use of a purported increase in crime, unsubstantiated by data, and his use of this populist strategy to capture headlines for political gain. There are no credible data that indicate more police presence leads to increased community safety.

In OV, there is a serious lack of services in OV. The 2008 report by Alvin Curling on the roots of youth violence should be the first go-to, rather than an increase in police budget. We would argue that moving police funds to mental health services, affordable housing support, and accessible community spaces to name a few, would go much farther in protecting community safety.

3. Housing

The Crosstown has already brought an increase in population, and with it an increase in housing prices. Tenants are being "renovicted" as gentrification intensifies. Data indicates that the socioeconomic group that is being displaced at the highest rate are residents (mostly tenants) of African origin, from the very community that has been home – Little Jamaica. This systemic racism trend is yet another chapter in the centuries-long process of forced displacement.

People cannot find homes. Rents have increased, due to illegal Above Guideline Increases and renovictions. For seniors, many who have lived for decades in the same apartment, and often the only place they have lived since arriving in Canada, are now worried that they will not be able to afford their place of residence. They are facing decisions of being forced to leave their supportive culturally-based local communities.

Bill 23 will not alleviate housing problems in the city and in our community. It will exacerbate them because of the loss of development charges.

The social housing wait list continues to grow. Shelters turn people away every night. Nearly 200,00 people are waiting for affordable housing in Toronto. There is a stark need for geared-to-income housing.

In 2021, a Total number of 18,096 people experienced homelessness. More than 200 unhoused people died in this city in 2021.

Most of our shelter system is operating at capacity, with some places over capacity. People are dying. Tent communities are being bulldozed. This brings us back to the police budget.

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4. Child poverty

Levels of child and family poverty remain high despite a slight decrease in 2020. About half of Toronto's wards have rates of child poverty above 15%. Food drives in OV are common.

5. Transit

Working class and working poor people require access to reliable, inexpensive or free transit to get to work and home. The proposal to increase fares flies in the face of the desire to increase ridership. The excuse is the hiring of additional staff to increase safety is not based on data. While there have been some improvements in expanding people who will get a fare break, there are still working poor who will not qualify.

6. Increase revenues for needed services

Reducing/reallocating the police budget would go a long way towards adequate funding to address precarious shelter, mental health and addiction issues, not to mention other related u=issues such as housing. The proposed property tax is still insufficient to fund housing and transit. For the past several years in budget deputations, OVCO has argued that we do not have a spending problem; we have a revenue problem. We advocated for an increase in property tax and every year saw revenue curtailed because there was no political will to do so. There are other potential revenue tools the City continues to ignore.

Sincerely,

Bill Worrell, Chair
OVCO