

January 16 2023

RE: BU2.1 2023 Operating Budget

Dear Mayor Tory, Budget Chair Gary Crawford, and City Councillors,

We, the members of Friends and Families for Safe Streets, are writing to you today with feedback on the proposed 2023 operating budget.

Our area of lived expertise is road violence, but first and foremost we urge you to listen to housing advocates and anti-racism advocates. Toronto is one of the richest cities in the world, yet we allow people to freeze to death on our winter streets, keeping warming centres closed despite the cold when shelters don't have room for people in need. The Toronto Police Service openly admits to an enormous problem with racism and violence, where officers are significantly more likely to use violent force or point a gun at an unarmed person who is not white. As housing advocates and anti-racism advocates will express much more eloquently than we can, the human tragedies that will unfold as the result of this proposed budget, especially the proposed \$48M increase to the police, will be disproportionately borne by the unhoused, by low-income residents, and by people who are not white, all of whom have already been disproportionately devastated by the pandemic.

Streets where people freeze to death, and where police hold down the wrong Black person and repeatedly taser them, and where you can be killed by a speeding, reckless driver while standing on a street corner waiting for a green light, are not safe streets. We ask you to make some changes to this budget to improve community safety.

1. Reallocate the \$48M proposed increase in police funding to affordable housing, community investment, and Vision Zero initiatives.

People with lower incomes are increasingly underserved because their communities have seen decades of systematic disinvestment, and people are increasingly hopeless and desperate and frustrated. Our public realm is barely functional - we have few washrooms, garbage cans overflow, roads are crumbling, already difficult-to-access recreational programs are slashed, our transit system is in shambles, and road violence rages on, resulting in an incomprehensible amount of human suffering and grief. Having more police officers who will likely follow the same violent and racist pattern of behaviour patrolling the streets does nothing to address the fundamental causes of rising social unrest and violence. We ask you to make investments to improve equity and public safety instead.

Another significant area of underinvestment is our Vision Zero road safety program, which is our area of expertise. The start of 2023 has seen more than one serious pedestrian or cyclist collision or fatality, *every day*, and we are less than 20 days into the year. This senseless, destructive violence is completely preventable, but it requires resources and bold action. \$48M would go a long way toward significantly and permanently making our city safer. The

quick-build complete infrastructure installed as part of ActiveTO (for example, University Ave) cost roughly \$125,000 per km. **\$48M could therefore build 384km of safe, complete streets.** That's about **1/3 of all 1175km of deadly arterial roads** where the highest number of innocent people are killed in crashes, in one swoop. With a cost of \$50,000 each, **960 lifesaving speed cameras** could be deployed. Assuming a cost of \$60,000 each, **800 pedestrian crossovers** could be installed on arterial roadways without adequate pedestrian crossings. Assuming a monthly rent of \$2000, \$48M could **house 2,000 people for a year.** When so many desperately needed improvements could be funded instead, it seems cruel to turn away from residents and instead increase a police budget that is already well over a billion dollars every year.

We envision a city whose mayor and city councillors strive for constant, rapid, bold improvements. We envision leaders who try new things to help all residents, instead of wasting more money on what doesn't work. We know a better city is possible, but we will never get there without leaders who have the bravery and political will to make bold changes.

2. Reverse the proposed TTC fare increase.

Any policy choice that drives people off of transit and into cars increases the public health threat of road violence. The more people driving in private cars, the more victims will be killed and maimed by those drivers, especially with so little in the way of effective progress on our Vision Zero program on our arterial roadways. On the other hand, when more people choose to use transit, that means fewer cars driven on the road, and therefore our streets become safer. Any measure that disincentivises public transit works directly against Vision Zero.

Further, Toronto's TransformTO climate program calls for free TTC fares by 2040. By increasing fares now, not only are you punishing those who can least afford it, you are directly and willfully working against TransformTO by incentivising more car trips rather than transit trips. Instead of increasing fares, why not propose a decrease and make a concrete step forward toward meeting TransformTO's climate goals?

3. Reallocate funds into Vision Zero, TransformTO, and community safety.

"Show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value." This proposed budget reflects a mayor who values the ongoing comfort of those who already live comfortable lives. It reflects a lack of value placed on the lives of people who live in grinding poverty, those without housing, those who are subjected to police violence, those who travel by active transportation, and it reflects a serious lack of understanding of the factors that contribute to public safety. It reflects a lack of urgency on building safe streets and confronting our ongoing crisis of road violence. While we appreciate that it has not been slashed, the budget for Vision Zero should be increasing, but instead this budget settles for the failing status quo yet again.

A reallocation of funds in order to improve public safety could be achieved by de-tasking police, who are the single largest item in the budget consuming almost \$1.2 billion, or over

20% of residential property taxes. It could be achieved by cancelling the Gardiner rebuild, which takes up almost half of Toronto's transportation budget and serves only to further entrench car dependence, working against both Vision Zero and TransformTO goals.

The members of Friends and Families for Safe Streets are people who have been devastated by road violence, which was enabled by not only car-centric road design and dangerous vehicle design, but a lack of political will and reluctance to invest in the Vision Zero measures that we know save lives. All of our loved ones' lives or our health could have been spared, and all of our suffering could have been prevented by elected leaders who cared. Instead, our lives were shattered. What we desperately want is for what happened to us to never happen to anyone else, ever again. We want an end to preventable death and its accompanying heart-shattering pain and grief. We want everyone to be safe on our streets. We want a city where everyone can thrive and feel a sense of belonging. We absolutely have the resources to get there. The question is whether our leaders are brave enough to make significant change.

Thank you for considering,



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