

BUDGET DEPUTATION, JANUARY 2023

Dear Chair and Councillors,

My name is Lee Adamson. I am a long-time resident of Davenport, Ward 9. Thank you for giving me a chance to talk to you today.

I retired after 30 years as a scientist at Mount Sinai Hospital. With my clinical colleagues we worked to bring healthier babies into the world. All the while listening to the news, hearing the climate crisis go from bad to worse. I finally thought, what’s the point in delivering healthier babies, into a world on a trajectory to become unlivable.

So, I retired early and collaborated with other concerned individuals to help found Green Neighbour Network of Toronto, a network of green groups and individuals volunteering their time to help make Toronto greener, healthier, and more sustainable. It is encouraging to feel their concern, inspiring to see their actions, but frankly terrifying to see them struggling, as I am, to control their panic in the face of looming climate chaos.

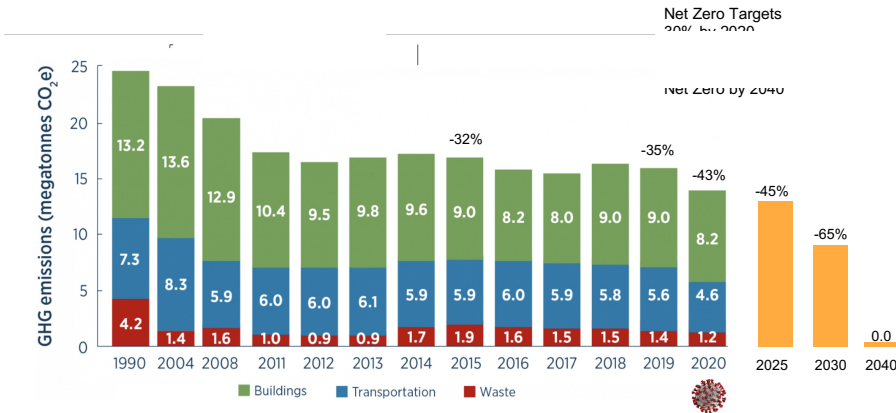
Just 2 months ago at COP27, the United Nations secretary general Antonio Guterres said “We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.”

With Canada one of the highest per capita emitters of GHGs globally, and Toronto its biggest City, we are very much part of the global problem, and we need to step up and be part of the solution.

Is Toronto on a path to emissions reductions?

Despite promising words from the Mayor and Council saying we get it, we know it is an emergency, we have plans and know what to do – Toronto’s GHGs have barely changed since the coal phase out. Toronto’s goal is to achieve a 65% drop from 1990 GHGs by 2030, just 7 years away, this is **double** the drop we have achieved over the last 10 years.

Toronto Greenhouse Gas Emissions (CoT)



Having looked at the proposed budget, especially in light of the province's commitment to increase gas-fired electricity generation, I have little hope that Toronto is on a path to reach its emissions reduction goals. I simply see nothing in the budget that would make that happen.

What would give me hope?

Increased funding for transit. The proposed budget needs to augment the use of public transit by reducing fares, increasing service, and increasing reliability through excellent maintenance. This is a recipe for increasing ridership not decreasing it as the current budget would do.

With so many condo buildings opening up, under construction, and planned, all those people mean we need more transit and better transit, not just to reach our climate goals, but so residents can get around and for Toronto to be a liveable City. And besides, there's simply not enough room on our City's roads to all these people to get around in cars.

What else would give me hope?

Increased funding for parks, trees, and greenspaces. A commitment to increase, not decrease, funding for our parks and green spaces and to enlarge our tree canopy. Trees and green space help with carbon sequestration – and also help to cool the city, increase biodiversity, and improve everyone's quality of life and mental health.

What else?

We need more funding for climate action. I am heartened by the increase in property taxes in line with inflation. That'll at least help to keep us more or less where we are, but it won't help us move forward and keep pace with the Transform TO Net Zero by 2040 plan. The City absolutely needs to get additional revenue tools in place. We need them now - and please set up a dedicated climate fund so people can easily see how the new tools are benefiting them, the City, and the planet.

Many tools have been proposed, including a 1% sales tax on non-essentials with rebates for low income people, re-instating the vehicle registration tax, and a tax on large commercial parking lots*. I'm sure you know them all better than I.

In conclusion ...

I urge you to revise the budget to increase funding for public transit, as well as supporting cycling and other transportation options, increase funding for trees and greenspaces, and to implement the revenue tools needed to do so.

** Personally I favour the commercial parking tax because it addresses many issues at once – it can raise significant amounts of funding, it could be used to de-incentivize car driving, it would encourage the owners of large lots to reduce their size - and this would alleviate stormwater damage, lessen heat islands, and release precious real estate for better purposes including such things as recreation and affordable housing.*