

ANNUAL 20 REPORT 22



Ombudsman
Toronto

Ombudsman Toronto acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and that this land is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

At Ombudsman Toronto, we have the responsibility to uphold and ensure fairness in the city's local government and we understand that this must be done with a respectful and culturally responsive approach. We commit to ongoing learning, engagement, and relationship-building.



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Message from the Ombudsman





2022 was a difficult year for many people in Toronto, as it was for the public service.

Collectively, we are still seeing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including job loss, increased food insecurity, and rising costs, to name a few. These challenges have exacerbated the housing crisis, with homelessness and housing precarity on the rise. One consequence of this new reality has been a growing need for a municipal government that the public can count on.

Throughout it all, my team has continued to help the public deal with the lasting impacts of the pandemic and guide the City of Toronto on how to continue delivering services fairly and equitably. I look forward to sharing some of that work with you throughout this annual report.

Putting People First

Last year, I reminded the City of its responsibility to show the public empathy and care — and that responsibility remains true to this day. But even more so, the City needs to put the people it serves first. Through all our work in 2022, I saw a common theme: whether it was through unclear communication, inaccessible services, or inconsistent decision making, the City was not always putting the people it serves first. While I commend the City and its staff for its hard work serving people in Toronto, the contents of this annual report show that there is still more work to be done.

Responding to More Complaints than Ever Before

In 2022, the number of complaints to my office increased by 28.5%. This increase is the largest number of complaints received by our office in any given year. Despite this increase, I am pleased to say that my team worked diligently to hold the City

accountable to the public with efficiency, resolving 90% of people's complaints within 30 days.

Many of these complaints resulted in improvements to the City's policies and processes, which will have a lasting positive impact on all people in Toronto. You will find information on some of those positive changes throughout this report, including one such instance where my office helped a member of the public rightfully receive a \$13,000 refund from the City.

Addressing Systemic Challenges

My office also worked to address systemic challenges at the City through larger investigative work in 2022. During our *Investigation into the City's Clearing of Encampments in 2021*, we came across urgent fairness issues which I believed the City needed to address immediately. I released an interim report in July 2022 outlining those findings, along with eight recommendations to ensure the City's response to encampments is fair, transparent, and treats people with respect and dignity. I have since released the final report in that investigation, bringing the total recommendations made to 31. I will continue to monitor the City's actions until I am satisfied that my recommendations have been successfully implemented.

Taking on New Oversight

Our landmark oversight agreement with the Toronto Police Service (TPS) and the Toronto Police Services Board (TPSB) was approved, officially giving Ombudsman Toronto the authority to investigate the fairness of their policies, procedures, and practices. I look forward to working constructively with individuals, community organizations, the TPS, and the TPSB to improve policing in Toronto.

Listening and Learning from People in Toronto

Just as the City needs to put the people it serves first, so too does my office, and this was a large focus of our efforts in 2022. Throughout the year, we worked to build and strengthen relationships with members of the public, community organizations, and City staff. I was lucky to have the opportunity to make meaningful connections with many individuals throughout Toronto, and to learn more about some of the issues they are facing. To all those who met with me, I extend to you my sincerest gratitude for the time and knowledge you shared with me. But I know that this is just the beginning – true engagement involves continuous conversation, listening, and learning, and I look forward to many more conversations in the years to come.

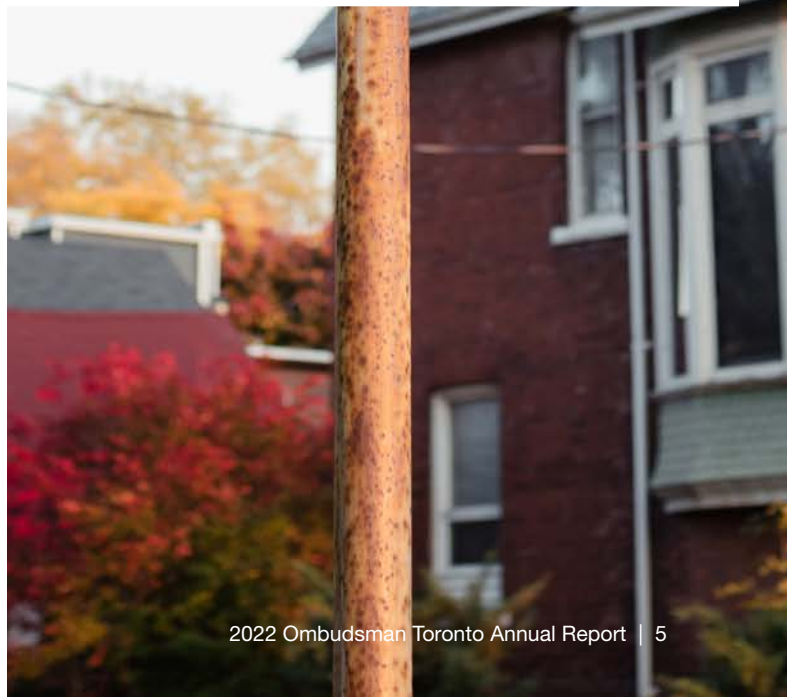
Looking Ahead

This is just a small selection of the work that we did at Ombudsman Toronto in 2022. I speak on behalf of my whole team when I say how proud we are of the work you will read about throughout this report. As Ombudsman Toronto looks to the year ahead, we will continue to be a champion for fairness at the City, and will remain committed to holding it accountable to the people it serves.

Sincerely,



Kwame Addo
Ombudsman



How We Help

“I would like to extend my appreciation for your intervention into my matter. I was able to secure a referral from Central intake, and I moved in with my three children currently staying together at a shelter, finally reunited as a family.”

Member of the Public



Our Process: What Happens Once You've Made a Complaint to Ombudsman Toronto?

1. Initial Contact

We will listen to your concerns and ask questions to understand your complaint, whether it falls within our scope, and if you have already gone through the City's complaints process.

If no, we may refer you back to the City or to the right place to bring your complaint.

If yes, we will ask for consent to contact the City to learn more.

“Thank you so much for quickly responding and providing me with an actionable next step.”

Member of the Public

2. Reviewing Your Complaint

We will contact the City to ask questions and gather more information.

We will analyze the information we've gathered and make findings.

If we find the City has acted unfairly, we may make suggestions to improve how the City serves people. If no further action is needed, we will update you on our findings and then close the case.

If we find the issue is more complex, we may open a formal investigation.

3. Investigation

An investigation team will begin gathering and analyzing all necessary evidence.

Once the investigation is complete, we will let you, the City, and any other complainants know.

We will then publish a report with our findings and any recommendations we have for the City.

We will monitor the City's actions until we are satisfied that our recommendations have been successfully applied.

Key Facts about Ombudsman Toronto

At Ombudsman Toronto, we strive to ensure that our work is accessible, clear, and easy to understand.

As an independent office that operates within Toronto's City government, we know that it is our responsibility to make sure that everyone who requires our services knows who we are and how to access them. Here are some key facts about Ombudsman Toronto and how we can help.

'Ombudsman' Explained

What does the word 'Ombudsman' mean?

The word 'Ombudsman' is a gender-neutral Swedish word that means 'representative of the people.' The concept of an Ombudsman is well-established, dating back to the 19th century. There are many Ombudsman offices, both in Canada and around the world. They help to create a balance between the government or organization and the public.

What is an Ombudsman?

An Ombudsman investigates complaints from members of the public about their government.

About Ombudsman Toronto

What does Ombudsman Toronto do?

Ombudsman Toronto holds the City of Toronto administration accountable to the people it serves. We do this by investigating complaints about the City from members of the public after they have exhausted all other ways to make a complaint, and by proactively looking into larger concerns or trends without a complaint. We also work to prevent complaints before they arise by helping the public understand what they should expect from their local government and what to do if they don't receive it, and by guiding the City on how to deliver fair services. If we find unfairness, we will provide the City with recommendations on how it can improve its service to the public.

What is administrative fairness?

Administrative fairness is a legal term. It is the lens through which we review all complaints that come to our office. It means that all people have a right to a fair process, a fair outcome, and fair treatment when dealing with their local government. For example, they should receive clear information, an opportunity to be heard, and accessible services in a reasonable time. If a member of the public feels they have not been treated fairly by the City, they should contact Ombudsman Toronto to make a complaint.

Our Independence

Isn't Ombudsman Toronto part of the City government? Why do you say you're independent?

We work independently and at arm's length from the City. We are a part of the City of Toronto's Accountability Framework, alongside the Offices of the Integrity Commissioner, Auditor General, and Lobbyist Registrar.

Our work is confidential and the Ombudsman has full control over our investigations, staffing, and office procedures.

Who does the Ombudsman report to?

The Ombudsman reports to City Council as a whole.

Our Process

How do you decide what to look into?

We look into issues that we hear about when members of the public contact our office with a complaint. We also monitor trends that appear in the news, through City Council decisions, in the complaints we receive, and through conversations we have, and can launch an investigation if we identify an issue that points to potential unfairness at the City of Toronto.

How can Ombudsman Toronto help me?

We help resolve individual complaints from members of the public who feel they have been treated unfairly or received unfair service from the City of Toronto. We also find solutions to broader, systemic issues at the City by recommending clear and practical ways that the City can improve its services in the future.

Who can make a complaint?

Any member of the public who interacts with the City administration and is personally affected can make a complaint to Ombudsman Toronto. You do not have to be a Toronto resident.

How can I make a complaint?

You can make a complaint via email, voicemail, letter mail, or through our online complaints form. All complaints made to Ombudsman Toronto are confidential. We will not contact the City without your express consent.

Can I help someone I know with their complaint?

Yes. As long as we have written consent, we are happy to accept referrals and receive complaints from individuals on behalf of someone else if they require assistance. We often work with family members, lawyers, or case workers who are helping someone bring their complaint to our office.

How long does it take to look into a complaint?

Each individual complaint we receive is unique, so there is no set timeframe for how long it will take to resolve an issue. However, we know many people who contact us have been dealing with their complaint for quite some time, so we do our best to get a resolution as quickly as possible — 90% of the complaints we receive are resolved within 30 days.

What happens if I'm not happy with Ombudsman Toronto's decision about my complaint?

The Ombudsman's decisions are final and are not reviewable by any other body, except decisions about whether your complaint falls within our jurisdiction, which can be reviewed by the courts.

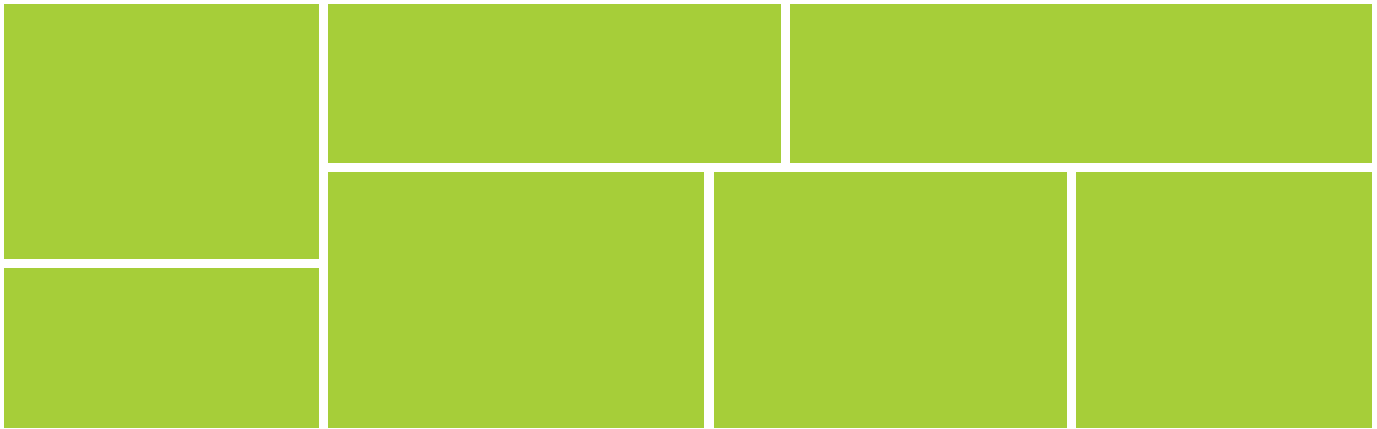
A Look at Our Numbers in 2022

“Six months ago, I spoke with you and as a result, I was able to get the City to improve the food service at this shelter location ... Immediately the food improved at this location 100% and we’ve been eating well for the last six months and I have to thank you for that, on behalf of everybody who’s living here.”

Member of the Public

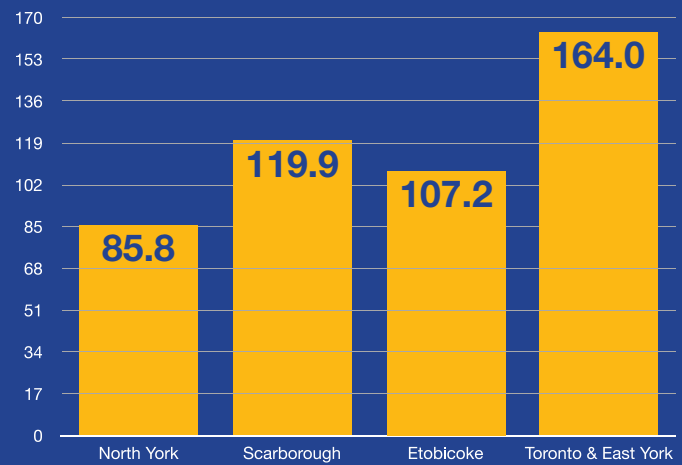






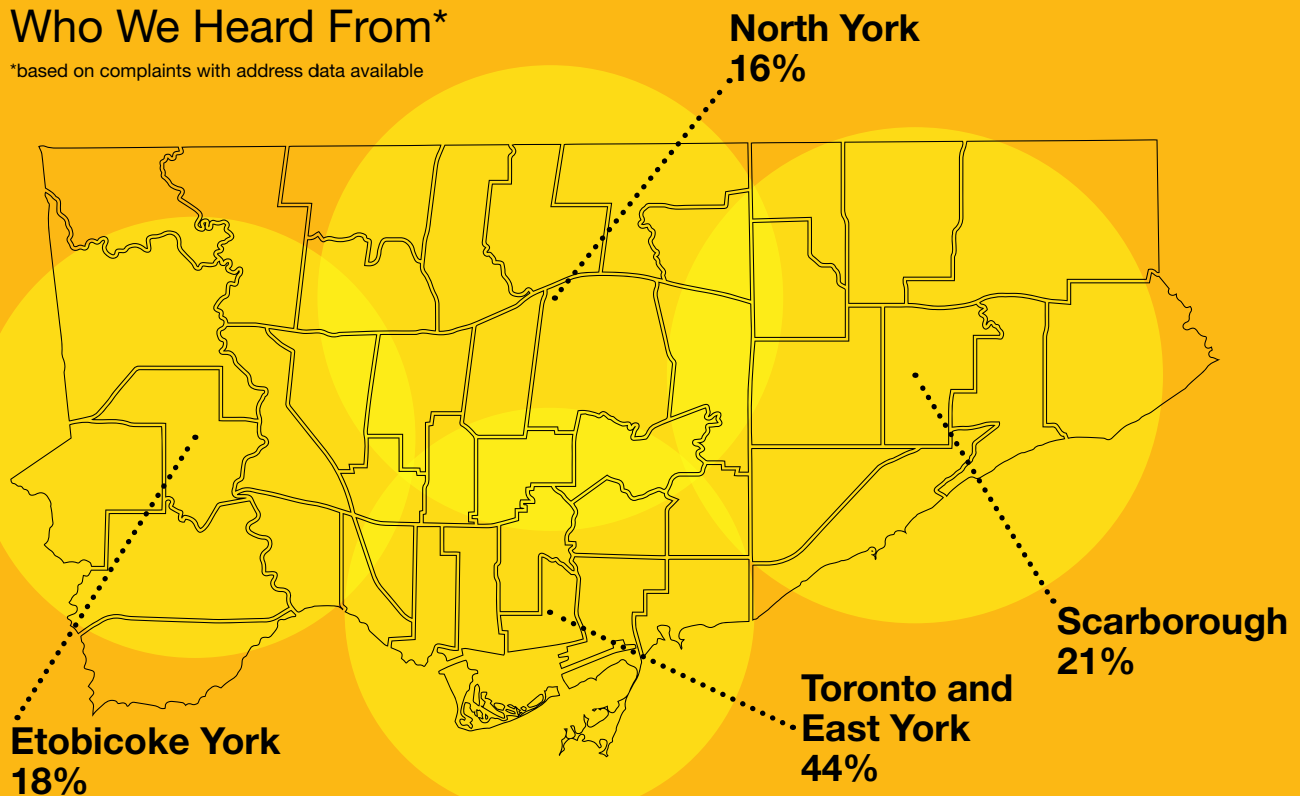
Complaints per 100,000 People*

*Estimation based on complaints where address data was available



Who We Heard From*

*based on complaints with address data available



Increase in Complaints Over Time

28%
increase

Over the past year (2021 to 2022)

69%
increase

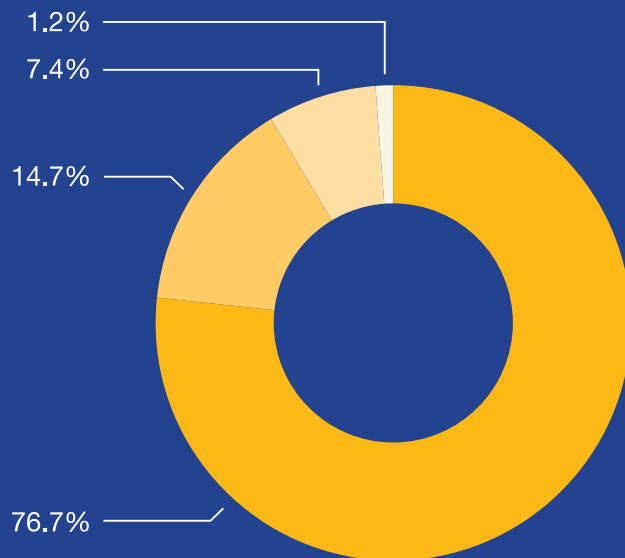
Over the past 5 years (2018 to 2022)

151%
increase

Over the past 10 years (2012 to 2022)

What We Found: Fairness Problems

In 2022, we identified administrative fairness problems in close to half of the complaints we looked into, with some cases involving multiple instances of unfairness. Here is a breakdown of the most frequent types of issues we found.



■ Communication

(e.g., delays in getting back to people, poor complaint handling): 76.7%

■ Policies and Procedures

(e.g., not having good written procedures, not making policies publicly accessible): 14.7%

■ Decisions

(e.g., failing to provide sufficient reasons for a decision, making an unreasonable or unfair decision): 7.4%

■ Investigations and Enforcement

(e.g., failing to give proper notice): 1.2%

What We Heard About Most: Frequent Complaint Topics*

*in alphabetical order

Municipal Licensing & Standards

- Property Standards
- Noise
- RentSafeTO: Apartment Building Standards

Shelter, Support & Housing Administration

- Maintenance and Client Experience: Shelters/Respite
- Shelter/Respite Intake
- System-wide Policies and Plans

Toronto Community Housing Corporation

- Maintenance Issues
- Neighbour Issues
- Transfers

Toronto Employment & Social Services

- Ontario Works: Mandatory Benefits
- Ontario Works: Worker or Location Issues
- Ontario Works & ODSP Discretionary Benefits

Transportation Services

- Winter Maintenance (e.g., snow removal)
- Summer Maintenance (e.g., potholes)
- Traffic Management

Our Impact

“I think what the public needs to know is the standard we are trying to hold ourselves to, which is the systemic reviews that the Ombudsman does. That’s how we decide some of our most important improvements.”

City Councillor





Public Reports and Announcements in 2022

An Investigation into the City's Process for Clearing Encampments in 2021: Interim Report

The Issue

In the spring and summer of 2021, the City of Toronto cleared people who had been living in encampments in Trinity Bellwoods Park, Alexandra Park, and Lamport Stadium Park.

This angered many members of the public, community groups, advocates, and outreach organizations who were concerned about the impact the City's clearings were having on encampment residents. As City staff and members of the Toronto Police Service cleared out protestors and encampment residents, people and media posted pictures online, including images of encampment residents next to their destroyed tents and scattered belongings. There were also pictures of the clashes between encampment supporters and authorities.

Significant public interest and concern developed about the way the City was responding to encampments. The impact of these events echoes to this day, and public concern about the City's response to encampments remains strong.

Our Investigation: The Interim Report

In September 2021, we launched an investigation into the City's clearing of encampments. We did so in response to the significant public concern raised about the City's clearing of encampments at Trinity Bellwoods Park, Alexandra Park, and Lamport Stadium Park, and because the City's actions had a direct and immediate impact on vulnerable Torontonians.

Given how important this issue is, and the fact that the City continued clearing encampments, we released an interim report with early recommendations, and expressed that the City should act on them immediately.

The interim report focused on how the City coordinated its response to encampments and encampment clearings — if the coordination itself is not fair, nothing that follows can be.



What We Did

As a part of this investigation, our office:

- Conducted 50 interviews over the course of 100 hours.
- Reviewed more than 11,000 documents from the City of Toronto.
- Received 54 complaints and submissions from members of the public.
- Spoke with 43 people who have lived in encampments or who have been unhoused, and visited encampments and drop-in centres throughout Toronto.

What We Found

The interim report outlined a number of initial fairness problems that we identified, including that:

- The City's protocol that should guide its encampment response is outdated and not consistently followed by staff. The City is aware that it's outdated, but has no detailed plan to guide its updating, which raises a concern about inconsistency and lack of transparency.
- The City has not defined the mandate of its Encampment Office, the office that appears to be tasked with coordinating the City's response to

encampments. Further, the Encampment Office is under-resourced, impairing the City's ability to take a larger, systemic view of its encampments response.

Our Recommendations

In response to these findings, we made eight early recommendations which we said the City should implement as soon as possible, including:

- Developing a detailed plan outlining how and when it will update its protocol, as well as committing adequate resources to ensure the update's timely completion.
- Holding consultations with the public, including people with lived experience in encampments, and incorporating their feedback into the protocol's update.
- Clearly outlining the Encampment Office's role and mandate, sharing this information publicly, and ensuring it has enough resources to effectively carry out its duties.

Our final report, released in March 2023, included further information on how the City planned, engaged stakeholders, and communicated with the public about the clearings. We made an additional 23 recommendations to improve the process in the future.



A New Oversight Agreement with Toronto Police

What Happened

In December 2022, we reached an agreement with the Toronto Police Service (TPS) and the Toronto Police Services Board (TPSB) for our office to oversee the fairness of TPS and TPSB's policies, practices, and procedures.

Why it Matters

This is a positive and important step for people in Toronto and demonstrates Ombudsman Toronto, TPS, and TPSB's mutual commitment to accountability. As a result of this new agreement:

- People in Toronto have independent, local oversight of TPS and TPSB.
- Our recommendations will lead to systemic improvements and fairer policing in Toronto.

What We Can Do

With this new oversight, we will investigate the impact of TPS and TPSB's policies, practices, and procedures on the lives of people in Toronto.

We will:

- Take a systemic approach.
- Identify any unfairness and recommend ways that TPS and TPSB can improve the fairness of their services.
- Monitor the status of our recommendations to make sure they are successfully completed by TPS and TPSB.
- Have full independence, discretion, and control over what we investigate.

What We Can't Do

When Toronto City Council directed this new oversight, they were clear that it should not duplicate the work of existing oversight agencies or offices. This means that we will not be:

- Taking complaints from members of the public, TPS personnel, or anyone else.*
- Investigating individual police conduct.
- Looking into employment or labour relations issues.

What Happens Next

We will announce the topic of our first investigation soon.

**If we do receive complaints about TPS or TPSB, we will refer the person to the right place to make a complaint.*

Update on the City of Toronto's Communication and Enforcement of COVID-19 Rules in City Parks in Spring 2020 (2021 Report)

What We Recommended

We made 14 recommendations to the City on how to improve service and ensure timely and accurate communication to the public, as well as creating equitable policies and training programs for by-law enforcement officers.

What Has Been Implemented

The City has completed or nearly completed many of our recommendations. These include the review of all Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS) enforcement policies, the creation of a process for staff to make anonymous reports of operational concerns, and the development of a division-wide anti-racism strategy.

What We Continue to Follow

The City, however, has further work to do on a number of recommendations, and we continue to follow up with MLS and Strategic Communications to ensure that they are implemented. These include our recommendations that MLS should:

- Explore adopting a race-based data collection strategy to help identify inequalities in its enforcement activities.
- Consult with communities impacted by systemic racism, discrimination, and vulnerability.

- With the help of Legal Services and the Social Development, Finance & Administration Division (SDFA), create a policy and training materials on the fair and equitable exercise of judgment and discretion by by-law enforcement officers in exercising their authority.
- Publish and widely share its policy on the fair and equitable exercise of judgment and discretion by by-law enforcement officers, including with community agencies serving vulnerable populations.

In addition, Strategic Communications should:

- Create an organization-wide communications policy to ensure that the City gives the public timely and accurate information about changes to people's access to City services and facilities (including City parks) in a coordinated, consistent, and accessible way.
- Develop processes to ensure that the City addresses public complaints about City communications, including communications related to enforcement, in a timely and effective way.
- Explore how the City can partner with local agencies serving Toronto's communities to communicate information about changes to the public's access to City services and facilities to the populations they serve in an effective and accessible way.

Case Stories

Every day, we hear from people who believe they have been treated unfairly by the City of Toronto. Case stories provide a window into the kinds of complaints we handle, and how we help make the City's systems and services fairer for everyone. Here is a small selection of the complaints we handled last year.

All names have been changed to protect people's privacy.
Photos are for illustrative purposes only.



Resolving Heating Issues at TCHC

What Happened

Elizabeth contacted our office with concerns about the heat in her Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) unit. TCHC staff had confirmed that the heat and thermostat were both working, but Elizabeth wanted someone to check the insulation because she said her unit was still very cold.

What We Did

We contacted TCHC staff to see what could be done. They told us that they were aware of the issue, but that Elizabeth had been denying entry to her unit whenever they tried to investigate further. We followed up with Elizabeth, letting her know that she had to allow

TCHC staff entry in order for them to determine what was causing the apartment to be so cold. Elizabeth agreed and allowed staff to enter her unit, where they confirmed that the living and dining rooms were in fact quite cold. TCHC then contracted an external company to look into the matter more thoroughly.

The Result

Thanks to our help, the issue was given the importance it deserved and was able to be properly addressed by professionals.

Why this Matters

Sometimes, even if the City has done nothing wrong, issues can arise. In those situations, it can be helpful to have a third party assist in moving the situation along smoothly. We worked with Elizabeth and TCHC to ensure that happened.

“Thanks very much. I appreciate your intervention on this incredibly frustrating wild goose chase.”

Member of the Public



Addressing Recurring Issues with a Complaints Phone Line

What Happened

We found out that Shelter, Support & Housing Administration's (SSHA) voicemail for complaints was full. That meant that anyone who called SSHA's complaints phone line to let the City know about an issue with their shelters would be unable to share that important information.

What We Did

We contacted SSHA staff to flag the issue, figure out why it happened, and ask how they would ensure it would be resolved moving forward. SSHA staff thanked us for letting them know. They told us that they were experiencing staff shortages because of COVID-19 and had to redeploy staff to other areas. As a result, the voicemail went unmonitored for longer than it normally would. Having access to a robust and accessible complaints process is a key and necessary aspect of

fair treatment. Since people were not able to leave a voicemail via SSHA's complaints phone line, we let SSHA know that this was not fair.

The Result

SSHA implemented a new schedule to ensure their complaints voicemail would be monitored and addressed more frequently, making sure people in Toronto could raise any issues they encountered with the City's shelter system.

Why this Matters

This is not the first time our office has encountered an issue with SSHA's complaints phone line. With all matters we investigate, we always follow up until we are satisfied our recommendations have been implemented, but sometimes reoccurring issues — or new related issues — arise. Because we were already monitoring SSHA's complaints line, we were able to easily identify a problem with their voicemail and ensure it was resolved as quickly as possible.



Connecting the Public with French Services

What Happened

We heard from Andre, who was upset because they said that Toronto Employment & Social Services (TESS) would not provide them service in French. Andre had questions about the Housing Stabilization Fund and Ontario Works, but wanted TESS staff to communicate with them about the matter in French.

What We Did

We spoke with TESS, who assured our office that they provide French language services. TESS also told us that Andre had been offered services in French, but had declined. After our discussion, TESS confirmed

that they would communicate with Andre in French in the future and that any further questions Andre had could be addressed directly with a French-speaking case worker.

The Result

TESS staff answered Andre's questions in French and we let Andre know that they were welcome to contact us again if they had any further issues.

Why this Matters

A fundamental aspect of equitable and fair service is that people are communicated to in the language of their choice. While TESS did in fact offer French language services, we encountered a communications breakdown between TESS and Andre, and worked to resolve the issue.

“Thanks again, *especially* for your clarity.”

Member of the Public



Making an International Referral

What Happened

We were surprised to hear from Dmitri, a Russian resident who had continuing concerns about a fire that happened in his apartment in Moscow. While his email was addressed to the Moscow Ombudsman, Dmitri had sent it to our office instead.

What We Did

Our first step was for staff to translate Dmitri's email. We then tracked down contact information for the Moscow Ombudsman's office using Cyrillic — it had

not appeared through an English search online — and shared this information with Dmitri in Russian.

The Result

Dmitri had the information he needed to send his concerns to the Moscow Ombudsman as originally intended.

Why this Matters

It can be hard to know who the right person is to contact and where you should make your complaint. When we hear from people who contact us about a company or issue that is outside of our scope, we do our best to refer them to the right place to raise their concerns.

“We appreciate the recommendations that you will bring forward and the importance of your office to hold us to account. Thank you.”

City Councillor



Responding to Inconsistent Decision-Making

What Happened

Martina, who is on disability assistance, applied to the City's Property Tax, Water & Solid Waste Relief program. She faxed in her application, but a year later, had not heard back from the City. Confused, she contacted City staff to see what had happened and found out that her application was never received. According to Martina, City staff then told her that, despite the deadline, she could submit a new application to be considered as a one-time exception. Thankful, Martina did just that, only to be denied and told by a City supervisor that there were no exceptions. Frustrated and in need of the financial assistance provided by the program, Martina contacted us for help.

What We Did

After looking into the matter further, we told the City that its communication to Martina was confusing and that she was given two completely different decisions, which was not fair. We then had the matter escalated within Revenue Services.

The Result

Shortly after contacting the City, we heard back from Martina who thanked us and let us know that she had received a call from the City confirming that her application would now be approved.

Why this Matters

All people interacting with the City have a right to clear communication, consistent decision-making, and equitable treatment that considers individual needs. We made sure Martina received both from the City.



Helping a Senior get the Housekeeping Support He Needed

What Happened

Sajid, who lives in a City-run long-term care home, was having trouble keeping up with his housekeeping duties as a result of his medical issues. He was hoping to get some help, but didn't know who to ask, so he contacted our office for help.

What We Did

We listened to Sajid's concerns and suggested he contact the City's Senior Services & Long-Term Care

division to get information about their Homemaker and Nurses Services Community Program.

The Result

With the proper contact information, Sajid was able to contact the right place to get the support he needed.

Why this Matters

Sometimes people contact our office before they have brought their concerns to the City and escalated the matter as far as they can through the City's complaints process. When that happens, we always try to refer the person to the right place to make their complaint and let them know they can come back to us if the City is unable to resolve the matter.

“I think this is one of the best pieces of work I have seen come out of the Toronto Ombudsman's office. Congratulations on a really productive and constructive contribution.”

Member of the Public



Finding a Solution to an Urgent Safety Matter

What Happened

Stella left an abusive relationship and was staying in a shelter while waiting for new housing. She contacted our office after asking Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) to be released from her current lease agreement, which she shared with her former partner. Her name needed to be removed from her former lease in order to be eligible for new housing. She had been told that she could only do so by signing an N15 form (a “Tenant’s Notice to End my Tenancy Because of Fear of Sexual or Domestic Violence and Abuse” form), which would take 28 days to process. In the meantime, Stella worried she would lose the chance to accept new housing and would face homelessness as a result.

What We Did

We contacted TCHC and stressed that this was not an issue that could wait a month to be resolved. We also contacted the Housing Secretariat to ask whether they could create a policy that would effectively waive the

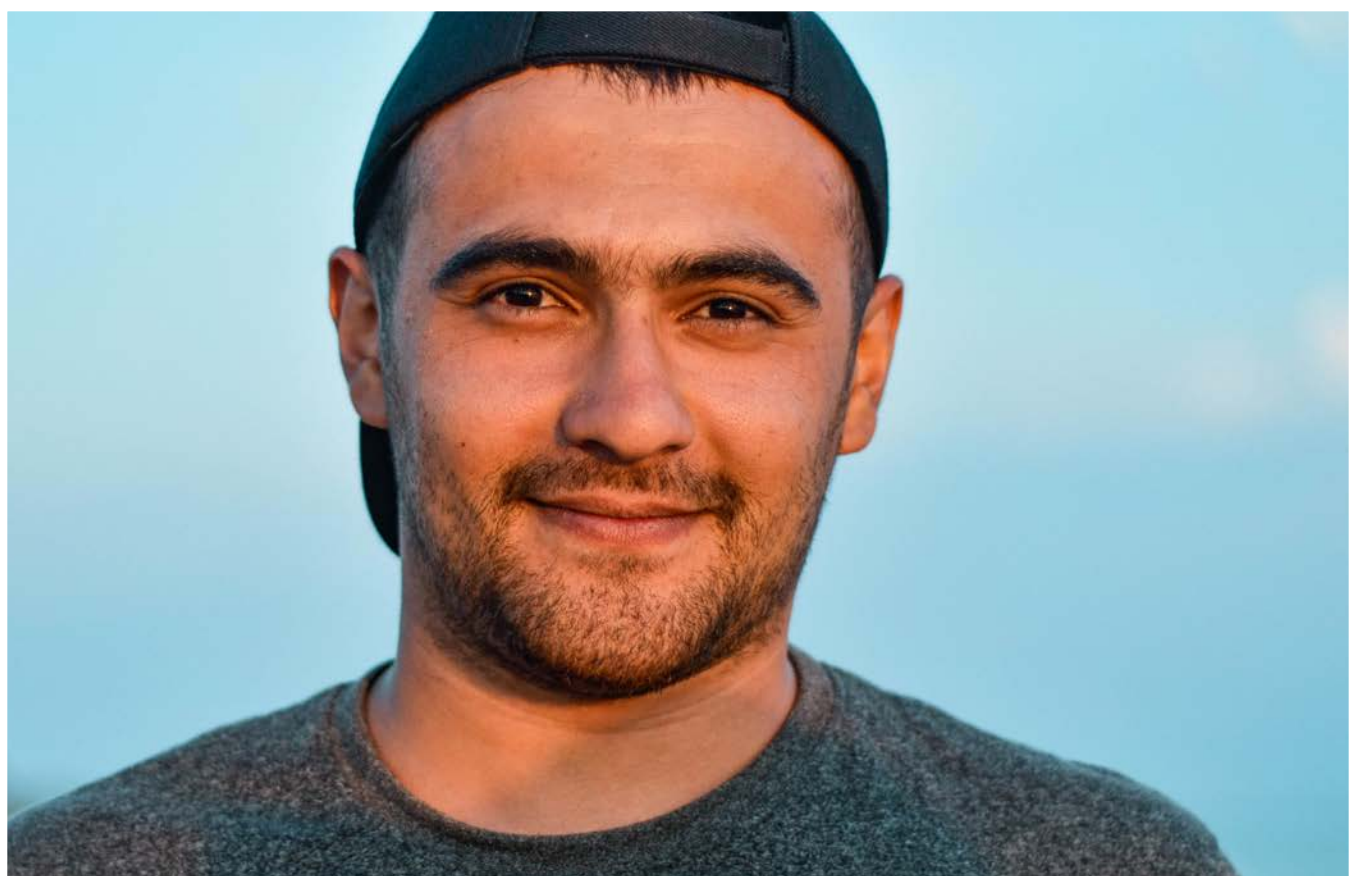
28-day notice requirement for tenants fleeing sexual or domestic violence and abuse.

The Result

TCHC agreed to back-date the N15 form, allowing Stella to find and accept a new housing offer. Furthermore, the Housing Secretariat agreed to waive the 28-day notice period in its policy, and to provide additional guidance on this issue in the City’s Rent Geared-to-Income Administration Manual, which is used by social housing providers like TCHC.

Why this Matters

People deserve to be treated fairly and equitably, with service that meets their needs. Although TCHC was following its policies, doing so risked further endangering someone’s housing — and their life. Sometimes, fairness requires that a policy be adapted to meet the needs of the individual that it concerns. In this case, an urgent safety matter was resolved by being flexible with the application of TCHC’s policies. It also led to systemic improvements, by adapting an existing policy so that the notice period could be waived for all future applications from people fleeing sexual or domestic violence and abuse.



Helping Someone Find the Right Place to Complain

What Happened

Juan had been living with their family after being forced out of their apartment due to a major flood. Their belongings were in storage, and they were having issues with reimbursement from their insurance company. Juan was trying to contact their claims adjuster but was having trouble doing so. They came to our office for help.

What We Did

We referred Juan to the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario, as well as to their insurance provider's internal Ombudsman, so that they could make a complaint.

The Result

Juan was able to make a complaint about their insurance provider with the right oversight office.

Why this Matters

Even if someone brings forward a complaint or an issue that we cannot help with, we always make an effort to refer them to another organization that may be able to help with their concern.

“Thank you so much for getting back to me as fast as you have these couple of days and especially with helping me with who to contact next. I appreciate you and I’m grateful.”

Member of the Public



Helping to Clear the Path

What Happened

Maurice, a senior who required the use of a motorized wheelchair, was unable to board their TTC bus because snow was blocking the area where the bus would deploy its ramp. As a result, they missed several medical appointments. After calling 3-1-1 multiple times, Maurice contacted our office.

What We Did

Accessible service is a key element of fairness. In this case, not only was there a delay communicating with Maurice, who had not heard back from 3-1-1, but the delay in snow clearing impeded Maurice's mobility.

We referred Maurice directly to staff at Transportation Services who could address their concerns. Transportation Services confirmed to us that they had spoken to Maurice and cleared the snow.

The Result

Maurice was happy with the result. They were able to access transportation and safely move about their neighbourhood.

Why this Matters

Even though there was a delay, the City of Toronto was able to respond to Maurice's concerns thanks to our referral to Transportation Services. When faced with a delay, it's sometimes difficult to know where to go to escalate a complaint. Our office helped connect Maurice to the right place in order to resolve the issue.

“Thanks very much for the speedy response. I really appreciate your explanation and recommendations.”

Member of the Public



Securing Housing for a Vulnerable Senior Couple

What Happened

Farah and Thomas had been staying in a shelter but had to leave due to health concerns and had been unhoused for over a month. They were working with Shelter, Support & Housing Administration (SSHA) to find housing, and had accepted an offer for a Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) unit. Unfortunately, Thomas suffered a heart attack and was in the hospital, unable to sign the required papers. Farah was worried that she would not be able to access housing since the original agreement was in Thomas' name and that, as a result, she would have nowhere to live. Unable to speak with City staff despite multiple attempts, she came to us for help.

What We Did

We contacted SSHA, asking them to confirm that the lease agreement had been changed so that Farah could be the primary lease holder instead of Thomas.

The Result

SSHA confirmed that the lease agreement had been updated to ensure that Farah and Thomas would be able to stay in their new unit, and that Farah would not be evicted if Thomas passed away.

Why this Matters

Securing housing is often a complicated process. In this case, it was made more complicated by urgent health issues that were out of the couple's control. Even though SSHA and TCHC were working to help secure housing for Farah and Thomas, fairness required that they communicate clearly, consistently, and in a timely manner about the status of Farah and Thomas' case, and adapt their regular process to ensure Farah was on the lease.



Ensuring Clear Communication about Childcare Subsidies

What Happened

Hector and his family receive a child-care subsidy from the City. When the City-run daycare his children attend closed for two weeks in August, Hector tried to contact his caseworker in Children's Services to see what alternative childcare options were available. Unfortunately, Hector was unable to get in touch with them. He then enrolled his children in a summer camp thinking that the childcare subsidy would be transferred to the camp for the duration of the daycare closure. Instead, the City denied his request for reimbursement, as well as his subsequent appeal, saying that the summer camp was not authorized by the City, therefore did not qualify for the subsidy. He came to us for help.

What We Did

We contacted Children's Services, reviewed documents, and conducted a number of meetings with

City staff in order to understand what happened and what policies were being followed in this case. We had concerns that the City had not clearly communicated the transfer process or its reasons for denying Hector a reimbursement, and we recommended that the City reimburse Hector for the cost of the summer camp.

The Result

The City followed our recommendation to reimburse Hector, and committed to ensuring that their future communication with families is clear and transparent. Children's Services will also be reviewing its appeals process, which we will follow up on to ensure it is fair.

Why this Matters

Fairness requires clear and accessible communication — people have the right to understand how a policy affects them, as well as reasons for why a decision was made. In this case, Hector received neither of those — he was not informed of the requirements for transferring a subsidy and he received unclear communication from the City throughout his appeal process. This was not fair.



A \$13,000 Water Bill Refund

What Happened

Jing contacted our office concerned about a very high water bill they had received. They had contacted Toronto Water about their concern, but had been met with delays and had not yet been able to resolve the matter. They were understandably frustrated.

What We Did

When Jing contacted us, it had been several months since they had contacted the City. In this case, the delay in response from the City was unfair. With Jing's permission, we contacted Revenue Services, who agreed to look into the matter. This decision by the City to look into Jing's bill was made in part thanks to a previous investigation completed by our office, *Water Works: An Investigation into Water Billing, Metering and Customer Service*. In that investigation, we recommended that the City develop criteria by which it

may identify and address exceptional high water billing cases on a one-time basis. Before our investigation, there was no mechanism for the City to address situations such as this, as the by-law did not provide the City with the authority to do so.

The Result

Revenue Services confirmed that there had been an "unexplained consumption" issue during several billing cycles, and agreed to adjust Jing's water bill. Jing was refunded over \$13,000.

Why this Matters

Prompt and clear communication are important aspects of fairness, and the City should ensure that it keeps people updated on the status of their complaint or concern. If it falls outside of the City's capacity, it should help escalate their concern by providing further information or referrals if possible. By connecting Jing to a different division, we were able to help them find a resolution.



Bells Aren't Ringing

What Happened

We heard through media reports that play bells in a public playground had been removed from a City park after someone complained about the noise.

What We Did

Concerned about the fairness of the decision, which was based on one complaint, we contacted Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PF&R) to find out more. We asked PF&R if they had consulted with the community before removing the structure and whether they had an established policy or process in place to ensure complaints are investigated before any action is taken.

The Result

PF&R acknowledged that even though they have external complaints policies, they did not have a policy or guide that their staff could use in cases like this. They told us they will be creating an internal policy for handling complaints about noise in children's play structures.

Why this Matters

While an individual may have been unhappy with the sounds from the playground, others in the community were glad to have such installations in the park. Individual complaints are important to consider, but fairness requires that the City follow a policy, including consulting with the community, before making a decision — in this case, to remove an element of the playground that benefitted others in the community.



Making an Appeal Process More Transparent

What Happened

Gerald, who was building a new house on his lot in Toronto, was upset because he disagreed with the City's valuation of the property and felt the parks levy fee was much too high. When he contacted the City to raise his concerns, the City told him to pay the fee "under protest" and that the City would try to resolve his concerns after he paid. Taking the City's advice, Gerald paid the fee. However, after following up about his concerns, Gerald was told by Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM) that they could not help him and that he needed to get legal advice. What no one at the City told Gerald was that if he disagreed with the amount of the parks levy fee, he needed to make a payment under protest and then submit an appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal within 30 days of paying the fee. By the time that the City told Gerald to get legal advice, the 30-day deadline had passed. Gerald, who said he had not been told about the appeal process, contacted our office for help.

What We Did

We spoke with City staff and reviewed City documents as well as their communications with Gerald. After looking into the matter, we confirmed that the City had

not told Gerald about the appeal process, including the 30-day deadline, and that Gerald had indeed followed the City's advice, believing that the issue would be resolved internally. We found that this demonstrated poor communication and raised concerns about fairness and transparency.

The Result

We recommended that CREM pay for an independent appraisal of Gerald's property and, if the appraisal resulted in a lower valuation, refund Gerald the difference. We also recommended that CREM apologize to Gerald for their unclear communication and for failing to tell Gerald how to dispute the park levy fee. Further, we told the City that future communication to the public about the parks levy fee should include information about the dispute and appeal processes. The City agreed with our recommendations, and also agreed to share how the parks levy fee is calculated in order to increase transparency.

Why this Matters

In order for a decision to be fair, people need to have access to clear, consistent, and transparent information about how a decision was made and how to appeal the decision if they disagree. We worked to ensure the City's communication about assessment processes and dispute options are more transparent moving forward.

Making the City of Toronto a Fairer Place

We are proud to help make the City of Toronto a fairer place for all people. Here are just some of the improvements that happened in 2022, in direct response to our work:

- Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation (TSHC) was not clear about its complaints escalation process — information listed on its website was inconsistent. As a result of our work, **TSHC updated its website to provide clear and accurate information about how a member of the public can escalate a complaint** — an important aspect of fair service.
- We recommended to the **Toronto Paramedic Services** that its written communications to complainants about its Professional Standards Unit investigation reports give more information about the findings of its investigation of a complaint, how to access a copy of an investigation report, and appeal options. Toronto Paramedics Services has begun implementing our recommendations, **resulting in clearer communication and a more accountable process for the public**. We will continue to monitor the implementation of our remaining recommendations.
- As a result of our recommendations, the **City's Housing Secretariat's** website will now include **information about housing co-ops**, including what it means to be a member of a co-op, how that is different from being a tenant, and how to make complaints as a co-op member.



Working Together

“You are doing great work so that the public’s issues are dealt with appropriately and fairly, and so that the City is held to account, which is critical in a functioning democracy. All the best as you continue making our City better!”

City Staff Member





Consultations with the City

Our team provides consultations to the City of Toronto on a range of topics, helping to proactively resolve issues and promote fairness in City services. Here is a small sample of the consultations we provided in 2022:

- We helped the City's Seniors Services & Long Term Care division with its written process for handling complaints about its Homemaker and Nurses Services Community Program, a community-based initiative that provides homemaking services to people in Toronto who need help with household activities and who have limited financial resources.
- We met with a number of divisions, including Toronto Fire Services and Children's Services, to provide information on best practices in delivering fair service under a variety of challenging circumstances.
- We consulted with Transportation Services about its Traffic Agent Program, which works to reduce traffic delays and improve safety by placing Traffic Agents at key intersections during the morning and afternoon peak traffic periods.

We always welcome requests for consultations from City staff, and will continue to work proactively and constructively with the City to improve its policies, programs, and services.





Engaging with People in Toronto

A central part of our work is connecting with people in Toronto, not only to build awareness of our services, but to listen and to learn about the issues that are important to communities across the city and to build trust in our team.

In 2022, we continued our focus on expanding our outreach and engagement. We conducted 82 engagement sessions, an increase of 24% from last year and 36% over our yearly target.

We are particularly focused on reaching people from equity-deserving groups, such as Indigenous and African, Caribbean, and Black people in Toronto, as well as people who may experience higher barriers to accessing City services, including newcomers, seniors, unhoused individuals, and people living outside of the downtown core.

We know that we have a responsibility to proactively build trust with people in Toronto, especially those who often face barriers accessing City services, and that this process involves consistent, intentional, and continual work.

That work includes, but is not limited to, unlearning harmful policies and beliefs that have been normalized, listening to the experiences of people in Toronto and applying what we've been told to our work, and making our services as accessible as possible.

As an organization and as individual staff members, we value and are grateful for the trust that members of the public and communities throughout Toronto provide us, and we will continue to do our best to be deserving of that trust. To that end, we will continue to focus our engagement efforts on building trust, listening, and working together to improve the fairness of City services for everyone.





Budget

Ombudsman Toronto's operating budget allocation approved by City Council was \$2.688 million for the year ending December 31, 2022.

An external audit firm annually conducts a compliance audit of Ombudsman Toronto.

All unused funds are returned to the City Treasury.



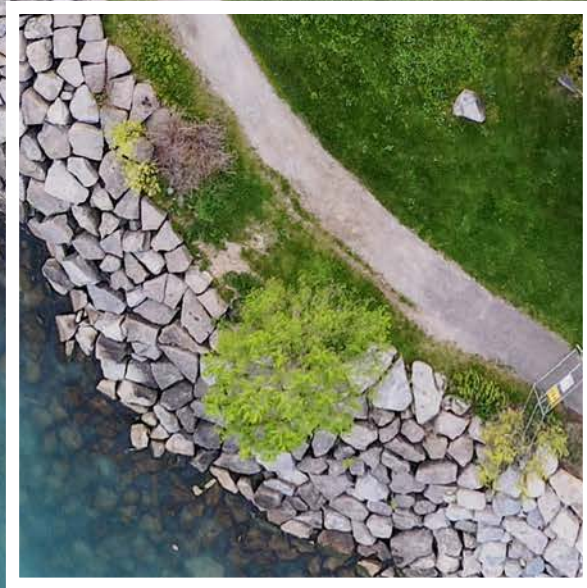
Our Team

We believe in the importance of a fair and equitable municipal government that's accountable to the people it serves, and we are proud to work each day to help make that a reality for people in Toronto.

“The knowledge that you are there to assist any concerned citizens is most reassuring. Thank you for being there for all of us.”

Member of the Public





Ombudsman
Toronto

Listening.
Investigating.
Improving City Services.

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