

Mayor Tory's Remarks at the First City Council Meeting on November 23, 2022

Good afternoon.

I am deeply grateful for the faith and trust the people have put in me to lead our city for four more years.

I stand here today thanks to the mandate I have received from voters across our city and I am committed to serving them and building up their city each and every day of this new term.

I know all councillors share that commitment and I want to recognize and congratulate every member of council on their election.

I know this is a special day for every councillor but it is particularly meaningful for the nine new councillors – including seven members elected for the first time.

It is a significant, even courageous decision just to seek public office and both a gratifying and challenging experience to be successful and I look forward to working constructively with all members.

As we begin this new term, I am hugely hopeful about the future of our city but there are challenges in front of this council which we must take on together.

Housing, homelessness, community safety, and climate change are all issues which will continue to challenge us this term.

All of these issues require the efforts and the ideas of each and every one of us.

And it is this "all hands on deck" imperative that has me absolutely committed to working with every member of City Council who is willing to work with me to get things done for the people of Toronto.

Serving as Mayor of this city continues to be the honour of a lifetime. I love our city and I love working for the people of Toronto - that's why I ran for re-election in the first place.

And having gratefully received such a strong city-wide mandate to move forward, that is exactly what I will be seeking to do - to get things done.

I know from talking to Deputy Mayor Jennifer McKelvie and so many councillors over the last few weeks that you are equally determined to get to work.

In the last eight years, we have made so much progress on getting transit and housing built, and growing our economy.

Voters across the city have told us they want to see that progress continue, including cooperation and partnership with the other governments.

They do not wish to see us return to the days of conflict and inaction which led us to a transit deficit and a housing crisis.

So this term, I will be focused on delivering on that mandate for residents in every part of our city – in Scarborough, in the downtown, in North York and in Etobicoke.

We are going to get housing built, much more housing and much more affordable and supportive housing.

We are going to get the \$28 billion transit plan built - the Scarborough Subway, the Ontario Line, the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension, the Yonge North Extension, and, I am determined to make sure that the Eglinton East and Waterfront Transit Lines move forward, as well as planning for Sheppard and the Humber College airport connection.

We are going to do everything we can to keep our city affordable for the residents who live here and for those who want to live here.

We are going to do everything we can to keep our city safe and to support our police as they continue to modernize, build trust, and keep us safe.

Building on our pandemic experience, we will support all the community organizations who work to help the people who need it the most.

We are going to make sure city hall is focused on the nuts-and-bolts services that people rely on every single day.

We can do better and we will do better.

We are going to do everything we can as a city government to make sure Toronto's economy comes back stronger than ever.

This is vital and must happen in a way that includes every part of the city.

We are going to do all we can as a municipal government – working with the provincial and federal governments – to address mental health and substance issues.

This is an area where we are collectively falling way short.

The isolation and lack of support for people experiencing mental illness or substance use issues is evident when you walk down the street or ride public transit.

And that is not even considering those who are suffering or in many cases, dying, alone.

Losing 500 people to drug overdoses is as tragic as it is unacceptable – it is not a moral or legal issue, it is a health care issue and while I stand here today and pledge all possible action by the city, the core efforts, initiatives and funding must come from the other governments, principally the province.

We are going to make sure our city remains united – a place that rejects hatred, strife and divisiveness.

This is absolutely fundamental to our way of life.

My eyes are very open to the seemingly continuous tragedy that does flow from discrimination and disrespect.

Respect for each other and our differences is at the core of why people from around the world want to come to Toronto and we want to keep it that way.

Right now, we are facing serious fiscal challenges.

Despite the fact we have maintained our credit ratings throughout the pandemic due to what the rating agencies cite as our prudent fiscal management, the seriousness of our city's financial situation cannot be understated.

And it comes at a time when residents and businesses are themselves grappling with inflation and increased costs – I heard that loudly and clearly in the election, namely that the city government must not make affordability worse right now by imposing big tax increases people simply can't afford.

I am continuing to advocate to the federal and provincial governments to deliver on their promised support for our City's 2022 COVID shortfall.

The required support arises entirely out of the extraordinary financial impacts of the pandemic on things like transit, revenues and shelter costs.

Both Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Premier Doug Ford committed to providing this 2022 pandemic related support during their respective elections.

Those commitments were clear, they were sensible and they were fair in light of the size and complexity of our city.

We are dealing with an \$815 million COVID-19 hangover in our 2022 budget – this isn't something we can tax our way out of nor can we cut our way out of it.

It represents the 2022 cost of the excellent job this city did, working with the people of Toronto and with the other governments to achieve world-leading results on saving lives and protecting residents.

We need that immediate financial support for the good of our city and its economy – to protect capital projects and all of the jobs they support.

I am encouraged by the fact the province has publicly committed to providing funding if the government of Canada comes to the table.

I have been continuing to advocate relentlessly to our Deputy Prime Minister and national Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland because this COVID funding is fair and necessary for our complete recovery.

I am patient and persistent because I have learned how these partnerships work.

I hope my track record can allow people to support me as I go about this work.

Whether it be the city government or your own household, we all will have to face economic and financial challenges in the coming months.

Beyond the immediate 2022 budget issue arising out of the pandemic, the city itself is looking at a more than \$1 billion budget crunch for 2023.

We will have to navigate the budget in the months ahead but I raise it here today so we all know the work ahead that will be needed to make sure we both protect frontline services and keep a disciplined eye on affordability as I mentioned earlier.

All of this speaks to the need for stable, predictable funding for our city, whether it comes directly from the other governments or from financing methods the city is enabled to implement.

I am committed to once again having those absolutely necessary conversations with the other two governments about how cities – major cities like Toronto – are financed and how we can chart a new path forward.

Make no mistake – for Toronto and many other cities in Canada the status quo is not working.

How and where public funds are derived and distributed in Canada and Ontario, are part of a regime developed when most Canadians lived in small towns and rural areas whereas today, 80 per cent of Canadians live in cities.

The status quo is outdated, ineffective and just plain wrong and I will be leading the charge as Mayor of Toronto – Ontario and Canada's biggest city – to find an effective, realistic way to address this.

I know we have tried before but it is time to try again.

At the same time as we face these budget challenges, the funding for our housing efforts is threatened by the initial form of the Province's new housing legislation known as Bill 23.

While we will discuss the full potential impact of this bill at our meeting tomorrow, staff predict this could have a more than \$200 million annual impact.

This is a change that will hurt our ability to get housing built and to make sure a reasonable quantity of that housing is affordable – for people who need help the most – and as a city we must push back against this legislation.

I am working night and day on this issue.

The discussions are constructive and they are happening.

Those are the three major financial challenges our city is facing right now: the COVID hangover, outdated financing of cities in the 21st century, and the threat posed by Bill 23.

I am seized with these issues because I know they threaten our ability to deliver the key services and make the capital investments residents rightly expect from their City government.

I raise these financial issues here because these are serious matters on which we must work together and they are issues on which it is crucial that council stand in united support of my efforts on our behalf.

These major challenges do not in the least bit dampen my optimism about what lies ahead.

I've never been more optimistic about the city's future.

Why? Because I saw how this city and this city government responded to the unprecedented challenge of the pandemic.

We worked together at lightning speed to help people who needed it.

We supported those hit hardest by the pandemic.

We protected frontline services that we knew people needed more than ever.

And when the vaccine arrived, Team Toronto worked to make sure we achieved world-leading vaccination rates.

We faced that challenge and so that gives me confidence we can face the challenges ahead – expected and unexpected.

What will success look like for this City Council four years from now?

I outlined this on election night but I believe it's important to share my view with all of you here today:

- More housing will be getting built, and it will be happening faster than ever before - more homes will have been opened to families and more will be on the way. The supply of affordable and supportive housing will have been significantly increased and this will contribute hugely to our efforts to eradicate chronic homelessness.
- Transit will have remained on track – more transit lines will be open with more on the way.
- Our economy will be booming - businesses will be thriving, people will be continuing to invest here, more jobs will have been created, and those jobs will be available to all Torontonians without exception.
- Toronto will have remained a destination of choice for individuals, companies and entrepreneurs from around the world, bringing their skills, energy, and investments to help us grow.
- The City will be focused on serving residents - providing the best level of basic service so people are confident they're getting good value for their tax dollars.
- Our roads will be safer for everyone. We will have a safe city.
- We will have very bold initiatives well underway in the arts, in new parks and open spaces, and we will be on track with our properly ambitious environmental goals.
- Those who have been marginalized will be able to feel a real sense of progress and hope — on jobs, on transit, on housing.

- We will have continued to come together as a city - a beacon to the world – a big diverse city where everyone feels welcome, safe, secure, and respected.

That's what I will be proud to call a solid foundation for a successful next four years and what I will work hard with City Council to deliver for residents - to get these things done.

I've been working non-stop since Election Day and I'm eager to keeping working - with this Council, with the other governments, with the people, to get things done.

There have been concerns raised about the proposed Strong Mayor process.

Let me address those now.

My leadership style and overall approach, consistently demonstrated over eight years, will not change.

I will continue to work with the council to get things done, as we have done together for two terms.

If there is one thing we can do to build confidence in us and the government we are a part of, it is to get more done together.

I believe the partnership I have had as Mayor, with the Council (and for that matter with the other governments) has been fundamental to our success.

Those partnerships secured billions of dollars for the city and all of that will continue as it must for the good of our city and its residents.

But we have a housing crisis and a situation in which we have built only a handful of transit stations over decades.

Having just contested an election as you did, an election in which I uniquely knocked on thousands of doors across the city, people told me they were giving me a mandate to get things done.

To get more housing built faster and to get transit built.

People want this work to get done and I think most people understand that to continue to do things as we have been doing them and to expect a different result is not realistic.

I have made no secret about the fact I have fought my last election as a candidate.

My fight now is not a political fight – it is a fight against time.

It is a fight for the housing and transit that people desperately need.

I am here to get as much done as possible now on the key issues of transit and housing, exactly what the people across the city sent me here to do as their Mayor.

Every action I take under the Strong Mayor legislation will be public – it will be documented for everyone to see, as I believe it should be.

At our council meeting next month, we will receive a report from our City Staff detailing this system.

In the meantime, on the subject of the so-called proactive veto, I will commit to this council that I will only utilize this measure on housing and transit matters of citywide importance.

Any such proposed use would always be preceded by a staff report.

And I will without exception try first to forge a consensus through the use of the council process.

I know our best days and Toronto's best days are ahead.

There is so much work to be done.

I know this City Council can do it and will do it in the months and years ahead.

I look forward to making real progress for all of the people we serve, for their families, and for all of those who come to our great city to build their lives here.

Now let's get to work.