

Submission to Toronto City Council



Special Budget Meeting – February 15, 2023

Item: MPB 4.1 Mayor's Proposed Budget: 2023 Operating and Capital Budgets

Mayor Tory and Councillors,

The Toronto & York Region is calling on Toronto City Council to establish a budget that reflects the values of this city's working people and our communities. As it exists now, the 2023 Toronto Budget proposed by outgoing Mayor John Tory does not meet the needs of Torontonians.

Along with many others who Council has heard from, the Toronto & York Region Labour Council identified countless gaps and questionable premises in the budget presented by staff in January. Unfortunately, the Mayor had pre-announced key elements he wanted in the budget and these were adopted. Since then, little has changed except for the offer of \$6 million to allocate to the remaining countless gaps. We continue to press for better funding of city services in partnership with our affiliates and allies.

The budget process is now incredibly short. And despite hundreds of residents and community groups speaking up and rallying for more, this Council is only being allowed to decide on the allocation of \$6 million. Asking Councillors to propose what to do with this, which represents a miniscule 0.04% of the overall budget, would be funny if it wasn't so sad. As one journalist put it: "John Tory, not content to just be a Strong Mayor, is now the Six Million Dollar Man."

Each year's budget is a vision document, and an implementation plan. The budget choices our city government makes each year are not only a reflection of the context of our city; they actively shape our context for years to come. The 2023 Toronto budget was always going to be about making tough choices. Unfortunately, in the budget that Mayor Tory proposed we are getting the wrong side of these tough choices.

The net result is we pay more, but we get less. Less service, less safety.

In an open letter, the presidents of ATU Local 113 and CUPE Local 4948 argue that the budget needs to "Make Toronto safer for everyone with service that meets demand." Responding to the rising incidence of violence in public spaces including the TTC and libraries, they point directly at the lack of public spaces, housing, and services available to many people, which in turn directs desperate people into spaces not intended to be their homes, their living rooms, their washrooms. These leaders said, "It's no surprise that altercations between community members are increasing in public spaces. Our systems are strained and the public is strained."

TTC service is set for a nine percent reduction. That's 457 transit operator jobs, a rush-hour crush, and off-peak delays that will push riders away from public transit in a time when ridership levels must be recovered, leaving even fewer staff than before within these public spaces. As ATU Local 113 President Marvin Alfred said at a public safety town hall, the first person on the scene after several violent incidents on the TTC recently was a frontline TTC worker, comforting the injured, protecting them, bringing order to chaos. These frontline workers have been thrust in to fill the city's housing and social service gaps. It is unfair to workers, and unfair to residents.

It's unsafe, by design. With further staff cuts, it will be even more likely that they won't be there to respond at all.

Across Toronto's public service, there are now fewer workers to deliver programs, maintain infrastructure, and serve residents. This budget is being balanced on the backs of city jobs. In total, over 4,000 staff jobs are still unfilled. A ten percent vacancy means a ten percent cut in service, maintenance, and program work.

We call for an end to planned job "gapping" as a strategy intended to save money. The city should bring staff vacancies down from the current ten percent and the targeted five-to-eight percent, down to the three percent during David Miller's time as mayor.

We're also concerned about creeping privatization and "alternative financing" schemes that are already damaging Toronto's commitment to being a good employer.

On the community side, the workers who provide much-needed services through non-profits are also facing cutbacks. No provision is made in this budget for cost of living adjustments to the funding for community organizations the city partially supports.

With these concerns in mind, we continue to support the priority calls identified by the public and many councillors throughout this budget process:

- Use more **revenue tools**, particularly tools that focus on the ability of the wealthy to pay, such as a commercial parking levy
- Fund the **TTC and other public services** so they return to providing first-rate services
- **Address housing and homelessness**, fund **24/7 warming centres**, and commit to build for the long term
- Spend **\$48.3 million on services** people need rather than on more police
- Fund community programs and **CPIP** adequately, including cost of living increases
- Fund **crisis response pilot projects**
- Fund Toronto's **climate action** plan
- **End gapping** and ensure that staffing levels are maintained so that city workers can do the jobs they were hired for

We want working people and their families to continue to live, work, and play, right here. We need a better budget. The better we take care of Toronto—its hard infrastructure, its services, and ultimately, its people—the better it will take care of us.

We recognize there will be hard choices this year: not everything above can be achieved in the 2023 budget. But we want to see better balance in the decisions that are made for 2023 and a commitment to moving further in the direction of a better Toronto for the future.

While this is the Mayor's budget, we will also hold Councillors to account for the decisions made regarding this budget and for its outcomes.

Thank you,

Andria Babbington
President
Toronto & York Region Labour Council