

From: [Social Planning Toronto](#)
To: [councilmeeting](#)
Subject: AGENDA # MPB4.1 2023 Operating and Capital Budgets
Date: February 15, 2023 11:03:53 AM



Please find the attached communication regarding AGENDA # MPB4.1 2023 Operating and Capital Budgets:

We, 51 organizations and 304 workers, working across multiple sectors and neighbourhoods in Toronto, urge you to listen to the tens of thousands of Toronto residents, doctors, community groups, and advocates who are calling for a better city for all and a better budget that will get us there.

So many people are feeling a sense of desperation as they try to live out their lives in this city with dignity. So many have urged you to address the multiple and urgent crises facing us — homelessness, unaffordable housing, food insecurity and poverty, violence in all its forms, opioid poisoning, and a climate emergency. And so many have pleaded with you to prioritize those most impacted by the pandemic and inequitable systems, whose lives are at risk right now. Torontonians are feeling like you are not listening.

What we see is a budget that prioritizes policing and security over the services, supports and good jobs that we know increase community safety, health, and wellbeing. It's not too late to make better choices to build the city we desperately need.

Many of our community partners have been ringing the alarm bells on this year's budget. We join them in their calls for [increased funding for supports for unhoused individuals](#); [the creation of new affordable housing](#); [renter protections](#); [expansion of community crisis response pilot projects](#); [increased funding for and access to public transit](#) (including a [stop to TTC cuts](#)).

As community-based organizations, advocates, and workers, we also call on you to support funding for urgent community needs in this year's budget:

1. Increase investments in urgently needed community services.

2. Take immediate action to prevent homeless deaths and invest in measures to reduce homelessness
3. Take critical action to prevent and address poverty, inequality, and systemic injustice

1. Increase investments in urgently needed community services

Frontline agencies delivering community services, including those supported by the Community Partnership Investment Program (CPIP), are the City's best resource for providing local solutions to critical challenges — increasing safety and well-being, preventing violence, keeping people housed, addressing poverty, increasing social cohesion, and enabling access to critical services and vaccines throughout the pandemic. CPIP funding supports organizations to deliver services that connect communities and make our neighbourhoods safer and more livable by supporting newcomers, youth, seniors, families, low-income individuals, racialized communities, and underhoused residents. In a time of crisis, we need to boost the resources of local community agencies, and the supports they provide, not diminish them.

The budget freeze for nonprofits is especially detrimental to a sector that has stepped up in the pandemic, but is dealing with increased service demands while also struggling with staff burnout, inflationary costs, and funding envelopes that aren't enough to pay living wages to many of its workers.

We call for:

- **An inflationary increase of 6.6%** for all community agencies that receive funding from the City of Toronto, including through CPIP, Toronto Arts Council, Shelter Support and Housing Administration, and others;
- **An overall increase to CPIP funding** to address the chronic underfunding of community services and expand support for Indigenous-led and Black-mandated organizations and resident leadership initiatives;
- **An increase in funding for community groups focused on violence prevention and alternative, community-based solutions to address violence**, including expanding the community crisis response pilots; and
- **An increase in funding for harm reduction programs**, including support for the outreach overdose team and mobile supervised consumption service.

2. Take immediate action to prevent homeless deaths and invest in measures to reduce homelessness

Hundreds of residents and organizations from across sectors including community organizations, faith leaders and health care professionals, are [deeply concerned](#) about the failure of this budget to respond to our most immediate and urgent crisis — the homelessness crisis. Our shelter system is over capacity and shelter workers must turn people away every night in the winter, while homeless deaths continue to increase at an alarming rate. This past week, Toronto City Council voted against opening warming centres 24/7 that would allow unhoused people a safe, warm place to stay through the winter, despite the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) reminding the City of this basic responsibility.

We must take significant steps to prevent further homelessness, protect renters, increase grants and RGI subsidies for low-income residents, and build upon initiatives that can rapidly create new affordable housing options.

We call for:

- **24/7 indoor warming locations open until April 2023**, including warming centres provided by the City of Toronto and by community organizations and faith-based groups, that would provide low-barrier, walk-in access to people in need of a safe place to spend the night;
- **Increased funding for [Toronto's 50+ drop-in centres](#)** — operated by community organizations that are the backbone of the homelessness support and service sector;
- Protections for renters and prevention of homelessness by **significantly increasing funds for the successful Eviction Prevention in the Community (EPIC) and Rent Bank grants** to adequately match the level of need in communities (in 2023, EPIC will only help 1,200 households and the Rent Bank will only help 2,400); and
- **Increased Rent-Geared-to-Income subsidies** to make a significant reduction to the [more-than 81,000 households](#) that are on the social housing waiting list, with an average wait time from [8 to 15 years](#). The draft budget proposes less than a 1% increase to its RGI subsidy program over the 2022 target.

3. Take critical action to prevent and address poverty, inequality, and systemic injustice

Every level of government has a role to play in reducing poverty and addressing inequality and injustice. Toronto City Council took a significant step forward in 2016 when it approved the poverty reduction strategy. We have also seen other important

equity strategies and priorities brought forward such as the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Strategy (CABR), Newcomer Strategy, Youth Equity Strategy, and this year we expect to see the City's first Gender Equity Strategy. These strategies all require resources to ensure successful outcomes.

Last year, the City introduced its first Reconciliation Action Plan. This is an important step on the path to reconciliation, but without funding and appropriate staffing, Toronto will fall behind on its commitments.

We call for:

- **Increased investments in the Poverty Reduction Strategy**, including fully funding and implementing the Fair Pass program;
- **Full funding and implementation of critical equity strategies**, including CABR, newcomer, youth, seniors and other equity initiatives;
- **Increased resources for the Gender Equity Office** to finalize the City's first Gender Equity Strategy and implementation plan; and
- Full funding and appropriate staffing to **fully implement the City's Reconciliation Action Plan.**

We know that the City of Toronto is limited in its financial resources, and so we are pleased to see that there is an openness to create a sustainable long-term financial plan that will increase the options for revenue generation. While we await staff reports and consider the longer-term options, we urge you to maximize existing revenue tools in the short-term, including **an increase to the Municipal Land Transfer Tax rates for luxury homes** and **increasing the Vacant Homes Tax to 5%** as the City of Vancouver has done.

Finally, we echo our calls from 2022 for a more transparent and democratic budget process. This year's budget process involved the shortest timelines we have seen in recent years, making it challenging for the public to provide informed input for the City Council's budget decisions. Given what is at stake, it is crucial for residents to meaningfully engage in the budget process.

We call for the Mayor and City Council to:

- **Determine budget needs before setting the tax-supported budget;**
- **Align budget documents with plans, strategies, and commitments for transparency;**
- **Implement a renewed and improved equity-responsive budgeting process,**

strengthen the inclusion of community voices to inform equity analyses and budget decisions, and apply a strong intersectional gender equity approach;

- **Meaningfully assess the impacts of budget decisions on Indigenous communities and groups across all divisions;** and
- **Allow residents and communities to shape the budget from the planning stage to the final vote at Council,** including those most impacted by inequitable systems and policies and those that work with them.

We can do better. We all need and deserve better. Lives are at stake. We are counting on you. Please listen to communities and make better choices that will work for all of us.

Signed,

Organizations:

1. Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services
2. Agincourt Community Services Association
3. Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services
4. BGC East Scarborough (formally: Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough)
5. Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre
6. Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
7. Centre for Immigrant and Community Services
8. Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter
9. College-Montrose Children's Place
10. Council of Agencies Serving South Asians
11. Daily Bread Food Bank
12. Davenport Perth Neighbourhood & Community Health Centre
13. Elspeth Heyworth Centre for Women
14. Engaged Communities
15. Etobicoke Services for Seniors
16. Family Service Toronto
17. Findhelp | 211 Central
18. Fontbonne Ministries
19. For Youth Initiative
20. Good Jobs For All Coalition

21. Homeless Connect Toronto
22. Homes First Society
23. Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre
24. John Howard Society of Toronto
25. LAMP Community Health Centre
26. Native Child and Family Services of Toronto
27. North Etobicoke Resident Council (NERC)
28. North York Harvest Food Bank
29. North York Women's Centre
30. Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC)
31. Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre
32. Plasticfree Toronto
33. Progress Toronto
34. Ralph Thornton Community Centre
35. Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities
36. Settlement Assistance and Family Support Services
37. Social Planning Toronto
38. South Asian Women's Rights Organization
39. St. Felix Centre
40. Strides Toronto
41. Sunshine Centres for Seniors
42. TNG Community Services
43. Toronto & York Region Labour Council
44. Toronto Community Benefits Network
45. Toronto Drop in Network
46. Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
47. TTCriders
48. Unison Health and Community Services
49. Volunteer Toronto
50. West Neighbourhood House
51. YouthLink

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