

# Toronto's 2024 Budget

## Deputation to Toronto Budget Committee



23 January 2023

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council represents more than 220,000 working people across this region from over 150 unions and locals, in every sector of the economy. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the impact of the proposed budget on working people in Toronto.

We would also like to thank Mayor Chow for her return to a more democratic budget process, which started in November, allowing for broader community involvement. From our perspective, this reflects the broader changes we see taking shape at City Hall, and a return to a city which weighs the needs of working people, not simply those of the wealthy and corporations.

The budget sets the stage for a turn away from austerity in the City, a much-needed reorientation after more than a decade of cuts. Previous right-wing Mayors and Councils prioritized low property taxes above all else, leading to widespread deterioration in the city.

In this staff-proposed budget, none of the city-wide services that Torontonians count on saw cuts to their budgets, which would have necessitated service reductions. In fact, in this budget many of the city's most vital services, like the TTC will see service improvements. Importantly for workers and their families riding the TTC, these service improvements will not bring any fare increases with them.

In all, the city is looking at \$150 Million-plus in enhancements to programs, with investments in: Wheel-trans and the TTC, libraries, long term care, winter warming centres, shelter beds, Toronto Community Housing, environmental action, and funding for a city-wide crisis response plan, to name a few. While service levels are still not where the working people of Toronto need them to be, being able to not just slow their decline, but improve them after more than a decade of austerity, is a victory in and of itself. These services are good for people, and also typically support a good jobs environment.

This is not to say that this budget comes without a price tag. Property taxes will be increased by the largest amount in over a decade, alongside a small increase in fees. While Toronto will still have below-average-rates, particularly compared to other Ontario cities, it will be an adjustment for working people accustomed to low-level increases instituted under previous austerity-focused Mayors. As a result, the average household will see their property tax increase by about \$30 a month for City operations. For some, there is some anxiety, but for most this is merely the cost of a Tim's coffee every day.

Interestingly, City staff have recommended an increase in the Police budget. Please review this budget line carefully, as there is a misperception that the opposite is true.

There are some other areas that this Labour Council believes should receive additional funding this year, perhaps in place of the Police budget increase. These include: transit operations and expediting the Scarborough busway, more paramedics, more resources for the Fair Wage Policy Office; fairer wages for workers in non-profit shelters, and more resources for the city's RentSafeTO for Tenants program. In future years, we hope to see even more invested in the anti-poverty strategy, Transform TO, the Anti-Black Racism strategy, and movement towards a living wage environment.

While the 2024 budget on its own is not a panacea, it represents an important step toward a Toronto that working people have been yearning for. This budget builds on the revised long-term financial plan, where we already saw some victories like moving towards implementation of the much-needed fairer revenue-raiser, the Commercial Parking Levy. The three-year path toward financial stability sketched out in the budget also includes the negotiations of a new much-needed funding arrangement with the Province and the Federal government. Importantly, in doing so, it reflects the desires of working people: prioritizing problems they feel need the most urgent attention, like transit and housing.

These changes reflect what working people have been asking for. Last year, Labour Council polled City residents, and overwhelmingly we found that working people know the value of City services and the positive impacts they make on people's lives, and they know they are worth the cost to get them.

Ultimately, the proposed 2024 budget does the first thing we need to do when we find ourselves in a hole: stop digging. Stop cutting taxes and giving hand-outs to corporations; stop cutting city services, decimating working people's quality of life and opening the door to privatization; stop turning Toronto into a playground for the rich, while working people are shoved out.

As we move beyond 2024, beyond stopping the slow decline, we will all need to continue the fight for a City which reflects the needs of workers, our families, and our communities. More of those who can afford to do so, or have the revenue tools at their disposal (e.g., federal and provincial governments) must be pushed to pay their fair share.

Our Labour Council will continue to support Toronto City Council when it makes working people a priority for the city.

Thank you for your work to make the 2024 budget the best it can be.

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**On Behalf of Toronto & York Region Labour Council**

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