

Monday, November 25, 2024

Dear Chair and Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

RE: EC17.2 - A Partnered Approach to Inclusive Economic Development

As a collection of community-based organizations in Toronto, who are concerned about the increasing inequality across our city, we would like to share our feedback on EC17.2, “A Partnered Approach to Inclusive Economic Development”. First, we would like to express our gratitude to city staff and Councillor Alejandra Bravo for convening, engaging and gathering feedback from many community partners to revise the definition and principles of Inclusive Economic Development (IED). We also applaud the plan to create a framework that is developed in collaboration with community partners.

The revised definition and principles broadly address the importance for an IED framework to “meet the social and economic rights of Toronto residents”, and are further explained through the principles. However, there are some crucial areas that are not explicitly mentioned in the definition and principles. If these areas are not explicitly included, SPT and our partners are concerned this will prevent the IED framework from fulfilling its promise of economic and social inclusion. These include:

Community, public, and nonprofit ownership: When building an inclusive and democratic economy, where wealth is shared across communities, ownership matters. Prioritizing, expanding, and explicitly removing barriers to enable greater community ownership, e.g. through community land trusts and housing co-ops that own and manage affordable housing units; worker-owned co-operatives that provide care-based services; and nonprofits that own their real estate and thus can continue to provide vital community services consistently and sustainably. Black- and people of colour, newcomer, women and gender diverse-led organizations and small businesses, will also help to remedy the effects of an inequitable marketplace. These and other models, will benefit the overall economy and lead to greater social and health outcomes.

Climate resiliency and green economies: As a starting point, both the IED definition and principles should integrate environmental and sustainability concepts, since Toronto’s economy, environment, and residents’ wellbeing are intrinsically linked. IED supports an approach where economic activity is environmentally regenerative, inclusive, and helps communities thrive within a greener city. IED integrates a multi-generational view that considers how future generations will be impacted by decisions made today about our so-called “environmental resources and assets” and is grounded in a commitment to long-term stewardship. In particular, it must foster economic and employment opportunities that address the climate crisis and support the most impacted communities to prepare for climate emergencies, recognizing the disproportionate economic and social impacts that will be experienced by future generations.

Regulating Gig Work and addressing worker rights: The unchecked growth of gig work has allowed companies to rely on the vulnerability of its workers, the majority who are racialized and newer to Canada and have limited access to other employment options. These companies benefit from the lack of regulations and labour rights for gig workers, in order to keep their labour costs low. The regulation of gig work, through license capping and minimum wages for all work time would boost sector productivity and improve the lives of workers in gig jobs.

As the City addresses the rights of workers across Toronto, the goal should be for all workers to be paid a living wage. Workers who provide service, contribute to the economy, and keep our city running should be paid adequately to be able to live in the city they serve.

The Care Economy and Gender Equity: Many lessons were learned in the early days of the pandemic about how to support and better value care workers, who are mostly racialized, newcomer and women-dominated sectors, through critical workforce development initiatives. We saw during the pandemic that childcare is an economic issue as much as it is a social issue. **It is essential social infrastructure.** Investing in the care economy makes it possible for residents employed in all industries, businesses and institutions to work outside of the home, particularly women. Investments in the care economy also creates employment opportunities. If the goal is to address the social and economic rights of all residents, providing access to affordable, accessible childcare so that women and all parents are able to go to work is a necessity.

To support the success of the IED framework in addressing these areas, we recommend the following:

- Explicitly name and embed the above elements in the IED definition and framework. We see these as more critical elements to be named than specific activities such as skills training.
- Request that City staff partner with the Working Table to integrate community, public and nonprofit ownership; the City's climate lens and circular economy principles; the care economy and gender equity; and worker rights in the gig economy, into the IED framework
- Build IED reporting directly into the annual reporting on the Action Plan for Toronto's Economy (APTE). In addition, we request that staff report back within 6 months, indicating progress and how new APTE initiatives have incorporated the principles of the IED framework
- Include the TransformTO Net Zero Strategy in the list of relevant plans, strategies and programs that will apply the IED definition and principles
- Include Children's Services in the list of relevant divisions to be involved in the development of the framework, and consult with sectors, communities and experts that deliver or advocate for important social infrastructure in Toronto, such as child care, long term care, seniors services and home care, shelter services, community services and feminist organizations and experts on the care economy

- Consult with and engage vulnerable groups, including residents experiencing housing precarity, newcomers, and individuals living on low-incomes to inform and participate in the development of the IED framework, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation

While we are excited for the potential of the IED framework, we continue to be concerned that this will end up as a parallel process to the Action Plan for Toronto's Economy (APTE), rather than informing and shaping APTE actions. For the IED to succeed, it must be integrated fully with the APTE. So, as the IED is developed in collaboration with community partners over the next year, we also hope that these principles are included into the development and implementation of the APTE actions that are currently underway. We look forward to working collaboratively with the City to ensure that Toronto's economic future works for all its residents.

Sincerely,

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