

#MakingCentsTO

The Aftermath: COVID Recovery

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Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: – joined by some incredible guests and I can't wait to get going to introduce you to them. But before I do, I think it's important for us, as we always do, open up all our formal business at the City of Toronto with a land acknowledgement. So, I'd like to take just a minute or two to speak to that matter.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the indigenous peoples of all the lands that we are gathered on today. And also, to recognize that, although we are meeting on a virtual platform, I'd like us to also recognize that the land belongs to every single one of those indigenous communities and we are oftentimes guests and many of us are now settlers.

It's important for us to reaffirm our commitment – as we always do and we should try to do it as often as possible – our own collective responsibility in improving the relationship between ourselves and the nations. And we do this by understanding local indigenous people and we do this by also recognizing the cultures that are here. And from coast to coast to coast in Canada, we want to acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territories of all Inuit, Métis and First Nations people that call this nation home.

Together we will acknowledge the harms of the past and of the present, recognize our own individual responsibility in how we can move forward in building proper reconciliation and a spirit of collaboration. And I think that it's important for us not to necessarily speak those words, or words similar to that, in a perfunctory manner but really truly reflect on what can be done. And I know that myself as a Canadian who was not born necessarily in Canada but one I have a choice to make Canada my home, I want to be able to do that so I can leave a legacy for myself of leaving this place in a better place.

So, this is really an opportunity for us to come together largely to talk about how can city budgets work for the citizens and the residents who live in these urban centres. And Toronto of course is not just the fourth largest municipality in North America, it's also a place that we call

home. It's a place that we do some business. It's a place that we actually study. It's a place that we are building families and a place that we connect with each other as communities.

And, like all other cities, 2020 has changed just about everything. Which means that we should be turning to the city's budget process, which will be launched very shortly, with even more interest and more enthusiasm on how to make that living document work for everybody. And we know that COVID-19 has changed the world, and it continues to change. We don't necessarily know what the real outcome is yet, but the things that we've seen so far are quite stark and perhaps really disturbing.

We know that the City of Toronto is facing at this point in time – it's just the third week of November but we're heading to a fiscal cliff, about \$1.9 billion of a deficit before we reach the end of the year. We also know that the City of Toronto has to take care of a lot of folks. And that means that we have to be able to work with our other orders of government, oftentimes at the provincial and federal level, in order to deliver some supports, especially for those who are impacted.

These are some of the challenges before us right now. COVID-19 has not hit all of us equally. And there are some individuals – and I would say that it's important for us to name them – is that black, indigenous, racialized people, women have been harmed much harder because of COVID-19. All those social inequalities that we knew that existed are no longer able to be ignored. We have to address them.

And if we are going to build back better, as the Prime Minister likes to call it, then I'd like to know how can we do that. And I think that there's probably a role for each and every single one of us so we don't just rely on government – because I don't think that's the only answer – but certainly, we as active citizens must also be part of the solution making. And we have to inform government and tell them how we want this to work.

So, I have some very esteemed guests – and I'm very excited because it is the last one of our series and they have the toughest topic to tackle. The subject matter of course is our recovery. And it may be difficult right now to even think about what COVID recovery looks like, because how can we talk about recovery when we seem to be right in the middle of the pandemic still. And things are getting worse as we head into those [shorter? 00:04:50] winter months.

So, I'm going to sort of lead with their bios and I'd like them to just say hello and wave, but also recognize that their full bios can be found online. I'm not going to do any of them any justice because they're so accomplished and they've given so generously of their time and talents to us today.

I'd like to start off by saying hello to Dr. Notisha Massaquoi who is one of Canada's leading experts in developing equity-responsive organizations. She was also the former Executive Director of Women's Health in Women's Hands, an organization – the only one in North America – that actually provided specialized primary healthcare for black and racialized women.

She's a subject matter expert on the issues and areas around health equity, anti-black racism and race-based data collection. She has been an advisor to everybody. I know she's been an advisor to the Premier, she has sat on the City of Toronto's anti-black racism strategy working group, as well as doing the tough work representing community interests for systemic change at Toronto police service board. Welcome, Notisha.

Dr. Kaitlin Schwan is the Director of Research at The Shift and a Senior Researcher at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. She is an appointed Associate Professor of status only at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on homelessness prevention in particular for women and youth. Welcome again.

Ajeev Bhatia is the Manager Policy Community Connections at Centre for Connected Communities, a community development strategy organization working in communities to find creative solutions to complex urban challenges. He is also the 2018 Fellow with the Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. And if that's not enough, he's also a part-time Master of Science in Planning student at the University of Toronto. I don't know where you find the time, so welcome, Ajeev.

Brian Kelsey is a Winnipeg-based consultant in urban public policy, a veteran of Toronto city politics. He's previously served as a budget advisor – so good to have you here – for the Winnipeg Mayor, and was a senior political advisor at Queen's Park. And he has worked at the Toronto Region Board of Trades, Vice President of Policy from 2018 and 2020. So, welcome Brian.

Last but not least, you will recognize her as a noted commentator but Brittany Andrew-Amofah is also a public policy professional. She resides in the city of Toronto. She is currently the Senior Policy and Research Analyst at the Broadbent Institute. This is where she helps set the strategic and policy direction of that organization. She is grounded in justice and anti-racism work, and she brings that subject matter expertise to her policy and analysis. And she is of course informed by personal lived experience, community and political experience.

Wow! This is our panellists. Welcome all of you. I've painted a bit of a, I'd like to say a hopeful picture, but we're not there yet; but I painted a bit of a grim picture, because we are literally in the middle of the pandemic. And this is a pandemic that has never been seen before in the history of my lifetime but I think all of you. And how we actually build back better, how we dig ourselves out of the fiscal challenges we have before us, will require each and every single one of us to get deeply involved.

So, let's talk about where we are today. Can I just invite one of you – and I'm going to start with Notisha. Notisha, can I just invite you to speak to some of the social inequalities and inequities that you've seen around the health impacts of the pandemic to this day? What are you seeing to this day? And what might need to change in order for us to get to the other side?

Dr. Notisha Massaquoi: Absolutely. Thank you so much, Councillor, for the invitation and the opportunity. You know, one of the big things that we have to acknowledge is that a pandemic will show you all of your cracks in society. So, everything that we're seeing now is only being exaggerated. Or, I always say, a pandemic will show you the cracks and then blow them up into very large chasms.

What we're looking at are the makeup of our city in terms of socioeconomic inequalities, particularly when it comes to issues of race. And when you have socioeconomic inequalities coupled with racism, and in particular the area that I look at which is anti-black racism, what you start seeing are all of the health disparities or disproportionalities showing up in the form of 22% of all COVID cases for the Toronto lie with black communities. Then you start looking at where the COVID is disproportionately disbursed across the city; it will be in the lower-income neighbourhoods.

But then you look at inabilities of some communities to actually protect themselves in a pandemic. So, we look at situations where racialized communities and women in particular are the ones that are most exposed in terms of the type of employment that they have, access to protective equipment, what are the protections that are put in place in workplaces to ensure that we're able to protect people.

And then we look at the policies and strategies that the city has put in place. And when you use a blanket strategy to address a pandemic, the only people that have benefited are your white majority who make up 48% of the city but only 17% of the COVID cases. And so, you understand that that one-size-fits-all strategy is not working.

We also see things such as, in pandemics – and it's not like we haven't been here before, particularly as racialized communities. If we look at the HIV pandemic, everything that we learned in that pandemic we can say is absolutely happening again in this situation that we're in with COVID. In pandemics, what tends to happen is that the criminal justice system is enacted before the health system, before social supports are put in.

And we saw that very early with COVID in terms of the over policing of racialized communities in terms of, you know, young people on basketball courts not being able to play and taking down those nets. And the police being involved in ticketing and fining people who have the least ability to actually engage in the strategies that are put in place to protect us with no other supports being put in place to help those communities. And we saw this with HIV in terms of criminalizing people who were infected with HIV in terms of the transmission of HIV. Instead of putting health strategies and measures in place, the criminal justice system is also enacted first.

Finally, and I can go on and on and on, but if we take a look at the collection of race-based data, why – in a situation where we knew that racialized communities were going to be over represented, and indigenous communities even more disproportionately impacted by COVID – did it take so long for us to start collecting race-based data? It should have happened at the beginning of this pandemic. And therefore, you're leaving these communities at a disadvantage when there was no need.

We already knew what we were going to find. We asked. We begged. We pleaded. And you end up with a situation where the most marginalized community members are the ones who have to advocate for their lives, literally. And we need a city that's going to respond better to all of its citizens, and to put resources where the most marginalized people will have access to better outcomes.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Notisha, thank you. And I see that Kaitlin was nodding largely in support of what you were saying. Kaitlin, Notisha has cited that perhaps we've created a one-size-fits-all solution, and that may not be the best way to go about building either an emergency response or even recovery. Can you share some thoughts on your perspective, especially someone who's actually been doing international research? And quite timely on a subject matter that everybody is now talking about which is the housing crisis.

Dr. Kaitlin Schwan: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I want to echo so much of what Notisha said and the ways in which it's showing up in the housing system across Canada. So, certainly the primary policy directive from countries around the world when COVID hit was to stay home. Ultimately, there's 1.8 billion people around the globe who are lacking adequate housing, 1.5 who are experiencing homelessness who could not stay home. You know this public health directive should have meant an immediate end to homelessness. And in the Toronto context, it's really very clearly showed the extent to which both housing itself and the emergency response system to homelessness is so profoundly over tapped.

You know before COVID hit I'd be going to homeless shelters and seeing folks who are sleeping on stairs, who are sleeping in alleyways near the shelter because they were at 100% capacity. As we've seen physical distancing measures be put in place in the emergency shelter system, the capacity, you know, even as the City of Toronto has been housing hundreds and thousands of folks out of the emergency care system and out of folks living in encampments or living rough, our system cannot keep up with demand. And that's just kind of the visible homelessness piece.

We know that there's so many groups – specifically women, girls, gender-diverse folks – who are experiencing hidden forms of homelessness; trans folks for whom it is very dangerous to be on the streets. So, the severity and scale of this issue with respect to housing is so profound, and I really think, from a human-rights perspective, homelessness and its

scale in Toronto right now is at the centre of a human-rights project and the need to engage with this intersectionally.

But you know, more broadly, Councillor, I think also what we're talking about is to some extent a philosophical and moral crisis really. Do we think poor people have the right to life? Do we think poor racialized folks who are living in encampments have the right to life? Under the National Housing Strategy Act which we put into legislation in July 2019, they absolutely do.

And the City of Toronto has adopted a charter based on the human right to housing. So, it's really, I think, as we think about recovery and moving out of this in the Toronto context, we need to be bringing a real attention to the ways in which a human-rights lens can support us responding to the housing crisis in addition to the health crisis, all the various crises that we're seeing right now.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Kaitlin, thank you. And I think, you know as you were speaking, I mean I recognize that you're drawing some pretty – a large body of knowledge and your work has taken you around the world. But you said Toronto is, unfortunately, an example of where the human-rights lens has perhaps failed us as we try to address the housing crisis. I just want to bring Ajeev into this conversation. Ajeev, you work in local communities. You work in communities that are oftentimes discussed as perhaps vulnerable.

And obviously, there's oftentimes at City Hall – and I've actually watched this on numerous occasions – where the decision is made by a certain group of individuals. But we are mostly housed, we are all middleclass if not upper middleclass at this point, and we don't have the same lived experience; not today. Perhaps some of us may have, but not today. How can governments and decision makers, those who are in those board rooms, be able to really hear from the community when the system and the institutions are not designed to actually solicit their response? How would you go about changing that if we gave you the opportunity to do that?

Ajeev Bhatia: You know I think, to the City's credit, you've piloted an approach that's worked really effectively once already; that's the resilient TO strategy. That's where working with folks like Imara Rolston when we were building out the consultation for the resilient TO strategy, the city was able to

contract grassroots leaders working in neighbourhood improving areas across Toronto.

Their network is called the Local Champions Network, and there's over 50 of them; economists, individuals, building their local neighbourhoods while doing a million other things. And working with 10 of them, paying them as professional consultants and engagement coordinators, they were able to go into neighbourhoods, in their neighbourhoods and areas across Toronto to solicit information from their peers, from their colleagues who are doing community building work hyper-locally, to really have conversations about what the future of the city's Resilience Strategy should look like.

And I think the framing from the Resilience Strategy went really quickly from investing in hard infrastructure to prioritizing people-oriented and equity-based strategies. And so, now three of the six strategies in the resilient TO strategy at the city are people-based and equity-centred. And so, you know, paying people who have the lived experiences and the expertise in our neighbourhoods who work hardest to be the ones engaging with community, with their peers already doing the work, is some of the best ways to be able to get the information in real time that are centred around equity but are tailored to the context specific to our neighbourhoods.

Our neighbourhoods in Toronto are so diverse and different, and we need to know how to kind of contextualize our approaches to them. Going back to the earlier point around blanket policies and approaches aren't going to work, especially in a city like Toronto.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Ajeev, you raise a really interesting point because what you've described is a decentralized model of engagement and also community empowerment in decision making. But that's not what's before us right now. If anything, I think what I'm seeing, and especially as one person who sits on the floor of Council – there's 25 councillors and one Mayor – is a greater consolidation of centralized power and centralized decision making. So, we're leaning towards the experts and not so much to community, which probably tells me that we're going to be missing a few people and not building back better with them, but rather it's perhaps a bit of a paternalistic approach if we continue to head in the same direction.

My next question is to Brittany and actually to Brian, the two of you folks. Maybe you can sort of tag team this one

together. I think that Ajeev has brought a really interesting point to the forefront and not something that has not been heard before is like how do community members get involved here and be able to sort of really help shape the policies that will ultimately, I think in this case if we're talking about the budget, that will then influence the budget.

What can the City and citizens and the residents of Toronto do differently as we take a look at this historic budget? We've never faced this type of fiscal cliff before, and I think it's pretty safe to say that no one at the City has an answer, not the Mayor, not the City Manager. What do we need to do differently, and why? Should I prompt you? Brittany, go ahead, go ahead.

Brittany Andrew-Amofah: Yeah, I guess I ...

Brian Kelsey: I'm trying to let Brittany, go ahead, yeah.

Brittany Andrew-Amofah: I think you said exactly, Krystin, or Councillor, that we have a consolidation of power happening at City Council, or in City Council. And reducing the size of Council really worsened the problem in terms of putting forward adequate policies that really address the deep-seated needs of residents across the city.

So, I would say, where we need to begin, especially with this historical budget, especially with the deficit that we're facing, and especially with the services and the sort of government interventions that need to happen over the next few months, we need to decentralize this process. And this process has to include a revamped form of community consultations or community input into policy decisions.

Now, a lot of my work over the past year has actually been dedicated towards thinking through how do we, or how do people who work at City Hall – our elected officials, our policy makers, council staff, etcetera – kind of create a new form of inclusive governance. Meaning, how do we integrate and input the voices, experiences and expertise of residents across this city? And how do we do so in a way that allows for better, sharper, I would even say necessarily policy making to happen in the city?

Now, I'm going to pick up on something that Notisha had said just before me, and it is how do we ensure that we get the resources that are needed to folks that are most marginalized? And in order to do so, we have to go directly

to them. So, we need to rethink how we reach out to people. We need to rethink how we engage with folks.

Right now, if you go to the City of Toronto's website and you click their Budget 2021 Process, you're going to see the regular items there, whether that is how do you get involved, how do you do a deputation, how do you, you know, give your input into these budgetary decisions. That is not going to work. We need something completely different and we need to go towards people.

I'm even proposing a door-to-door canvas, dropping off the necessary items and information that people need in order to get them involved in this process. Because we're not going to have an adequate budget, we're not going to have a budget that remotely even addresses any of the needs of residents in the city if we don't integrate a permanent community voice model into our governance processes.

So, again, thinking through how do [unintelligible 00:25:04] more inclusive form of governance. I mean some long-term issues here is how do we even revamp our council structure. But that is obviously work that is moving into year one, year two, year three post-COVID. But immediately as we're leading up to 2021 budget, we need to integrate an inclusive governance model to help inform the budgetary process that goes beyond asking people to come to the website and think about ways that they can be included or involved.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: You raise an excellent point. And as you were speaking about going door to door, I could hear Dr. de Villa just whisper in my ear saying stay home, and I know that of course we have to reconcile the two. But really, at the core of what you're say is that we have to take it out of the hands of government perhaps and put it into communities where community members can really start to parse out what is needed.

Brittany Andrew-Amofah: Yes. Can I just ...?

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Yes, please go ahead.

Brittany Andrew-Amofah: [Unintelligible 00:26:03] say the door-to-door model. Thank you for bringing that caveat. Absolutely, we need to recognize that public health restrictions are in place. But dropping off leaflets or mailing this particular information, or tailoring information that highlights the specific identities of communities are ways that we can better engage but also connect with residents. So, again, like fostering some creativity here but I think the point of it is bringing the

information to the people rather than waiting for people to come to the information.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Pointed. Very good to have that further explained. Brian, do you want to pop in here? Because, I think, you know, Brittany sort of laid out a few important things for us to think about.

Brian Kelsey: Absolutely. And first, I was giving a thumbs up to Brittany's comment because, yeah, I think government has always been, you know, I'd say the government's no exception, also consultation in part because far too often it's inbound rather than outbound. And some of that's inevitable but, well my second thought was, yeah, of course there's going to be a public health issue here. My first thought was, absolutely, if this year more than any other year Toronto can find a way to go outbound and find opinions and find criticism and find ideas rather than waiting for those ideas to come in, then the consultation's going to be meaningful.

You know, I think the part of way – just as someone who's lived through a few budgets – to make that more meaningful rather than just giving people an opportunity to say how they feel about the situation is that ultimately, given what's going on, you've got a massive economic recession or depression, depending on what you want to call it, alongside the public health crisis that we're going through. You know I think what needs to be crystal clear when City Hall is going out to the community to get those opinions is budgeting is, in the end, about making choices, not all of which are happy choices.

And so, rather than simply taking feedback that's not going to be really pertinent to decisions that are there, the most helpful way to actually give people a chance to give feedback is to say out loud what the choices you're going to make are, and why, with all the pluses and minuses that are there. And what choices you're leaving on the table in that first round so that people are actually participating in the decision rather than participating in the process.

I can't help but – for once, that's not my baby crying in the background – I can't help but add though that, for people who want to get involved, you know we're in a really weird moment in history where our economies have been shattered. Lower-income people, you know, black and indigenous and new Canadian people are taking the brunt of it on the private sector side.

In the public sector economy, we've got a very bizarre situation where, thanks to what's known as qualitative easing, essentially printing large amounts of money, what should be a recession as bad as the Great Depression doesn't feel that way for some because the Central Bank is printing money, using that printed money to buy federal government bonds. So, the federal public service is whole. The federal programs are whole. And the federal government's spending literally hundreds of billions of dollars to keep the economy going. And it's no different, frankly, from what's happening in other economies. And the system was designed to do that, which is why it supported, to avoid a catastrophe like the Great Depression.

The problem, we're learning, is that those systems weren't designed with federalism in mind. So, while you've got a 2020 printed money economy at the federal level right now, where the federal system has actually sustained very little damage from this economic shock. Provinces are borrowing real money on markets at very cheap rates, so they've got to worry about the long-term impacts of that. But they've got room to borrow.

What Councillor Wong-Tam and other City budgeters are living through right now, because that Central Bank money isn't flowing through down to every level government evenly, is you're living through 1930. You've got to make the tough choices that Chicago and Toronto and New York had to make in the wake of the Great Depression without the same level of assistance that's there.

So, if you're going to pick up the phone to get involved in city budget in some way, more so than ever before your first phone call should be to your member of parliament to say, why isn't more aid flowing through to cities to help reduce the shock. It's literally printed money. I know Councillor Wong-Tam, one of her colleagues spoke to an MP early in the crisis, and the answer he got back about why Toronto wasn't getting aid at that moment was money doesn't grow on trees. That MP's salary was literally being paid for by money that the Central Bank was printing.

So, the fastest, least-painful route is for federalism to work the way it's supposed to with money that's intended for emergency purposes and flow it down. We can start talking about what happens with the rest of the economic shock after that aid is delivered.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Brian, thank you. I think you've injected a dimension into this conversation around public banking and the role of the Bank of Canada. And in recognizing that having a strong federalist state that will be able to do some of that, in terms of the digital printing of money adding zeros to the bank statements, the province and municipal governments, unfortunately, are oftentimes beholden to what happens federally.

In the short term, without a brand-new tri-lateral agreement and arrangement, I think that we need to, of course, lobby the federal government and to bring the provincial government to the table. Because I think, Notisha, you work in healthcare, and of course Kaitlin and Ajeev, I'm sure you've seen this as well, is sometimes we get all mired in this sort of territorial wrangling of who is responsible for delivering what service and program.

And we have seen during the COVID crisis that there's a bit of finger pointing on who's in charge of testing. and how do we get adequate government supports and financial programs to not just small businesses but to people who are literally in need? And those are, for example, the new declared essential workers.

How can we make that work? I mean, so, if the federal government is being made whole, largely because they have access to the availability of printing dollars and they're buying the bonds out, how do we make this work for the province? And in particular, how do we make this work for the cities? Notisha, do you want to kick us off?

Dr. Notisha Massaquoi: Yeah, I'm going to get very microscopic with my answer. So, you know, our best effort has only gotten us this far. We have to change course. We have to come up with new innovative ways of dealing with this issue.

When we're talking about – I'm going to look at black communities specifically. More than half of all black people for the country of Canada live in one city, right? Almost 57% of all black people for the country of Canada live in one city. So, health responses that are going to impact black communities, for example, have to look at all three levels of government engaged in the geography of one city, because that's where we're located, for a whole host of reasons.

And you know, as a black person living in Toronto, my health outcomes are greatly, greatly reduced just by the fact I

live in this particular city. So, we see it with COVID; 22% representation. I can look at all chronic illnesses. We make up 75% of all new HIV infections. My geography greatly determines my health outcomes.

And it's not just that simple. It's because of socioeconomic status being reduced. It's because of the way that anti-black racism works within the context of the city in terms of where I live, what services are available to me. But the fact is that more than half of our population are residing in one province, one city, and so our responses have to be very, very tailored to various populations. So, a black-health strategy may be concentrated in terms of services in Toronto, but it has to have all three levels of government working in concert with each other.

So, I'll just use that as an example. But the territorial – and yes, I've worked in healthcare for 32 years, and navigating it to ensure that services for the most marginalized in our country is, I mean that is your work. That is where you're putting all of your effort. As opposed to developing resources and better programming, you're navigating all the bureaucracy that's in place. And it's taking away from our ability to actually provide proper, effective, culturally-appropriate healthcare.

We also have to get away from this myth of universal healthcare, right. Canada promotes itself as one of the greatest countries on earth in terms of its health system, and the ability for everyone to have access to health services because of our universal healthcare plan. This is a lie and we have to change the narrative. It is not accessible for everyone. It is not universal for everyone. Some people are going to benefit from that universality and some of us are still going to be excluded from that process.

So, we have to rethink. As I said, our best effort has only gotten us this far. It has not shown to be effective for indigenous communities, black communities and racialized communities. Therefore, I don't want to say tear up the system and start again, but we definitely have to rethink it, create new narratives that are based on reality, and actually develop programs that work, and a financial mechanism to fund those services.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Notisha, thank you. And Ajeev, I'm going to pull you back into this discussion because I think, you know, you're the one that actually told us to really pivot and start to look at

communities and work with communities at the local, local level. Given what Brian has just stated – and I think it’s a very big point that we cannot ignore – is that we don’t have all the powers within a municipality. And further to that, we certainly, you know community members at the grassroots who are sort of going about their daily business probably feel even further disconnected from the federal government than they do from the municipal government.

You know, what needs to happen in order for communities to really feel that they can have a say in this? And the reason I bring this up is because there’s so much at stake this year. And if there is going to be a pivot year, if there is going to be – I’ve been using that word [unintelligible 00:37:25] all the time, but if there is going to be a year where we turn the paradigm upside down and inside out and start to decentralize, I would imagine this would be the one. But what would be the critical piece that we need to start with here?

Ajeev Bhatia:

A lot of our approach is always about build on what already exists. And a lot of the [timing? 00:37:49] work that we’re doing across the city right now, a lot of our projects start with who has already been consulted. What are the findings of those consultations that have come before? What research has been done by academic institutions in these neighbourhoods? What community-based action research has been done in these neighbourhoods?

The neighbourhoods, particularly in neighbourhood-improvement areas, people living there are exhausted of being over studied and over researched, proposing solutions, findings and outcomes, having it kind of landing somewhere online and them never seeing any follow up or any resources financing any of the outcomes that they wanted to see anyway. We’re hearing a lot about the services that need to be grown to respond to this pandemic and all the inequities that exist and, with those, the infrastructure that’s required, from transportation to housing to healthcare.

All of those things, ideally we’ll see public infrastructure spending coming to start to meet those needs that communities have long been calling for. And I think what needs to happen for residents to feel like they’re being heard, especially grassroots leaders who are actively involved in building community, are for those folks who are connected to poverty reduction networks in their neighbourhoods who have been advocating for workforce development and getting

local people local jobs, actually making that work. What does it look like to ensure that community benefits work on the ground for people in the neighbourhoods where public infrastructure is being created?

It's something we've been hearing time and time again from people in community. And so, you know I think people are exhausted of providing input and feedback to processes that they're not receiving any responses for. And there are really great examples and projects that City is working on to support this. One is a project that we're working on called Connected Community Workers. And it's a place-based strategy to get local people local jobs from public infrastructure projects happening in neighbourhood improvement areas in Toronto, specifically targeting BIPOC folks and people living in poverty, so local people get access to those jobs.

You know, when we're talking about reducing deficit of a city, when we're talking about these gross inequities that exist across communities of colour, we need to be talking about poverty in this city and how the neighbourhood is segregated by race and income. And you know a place-based solution to workforce development is going to provide a long-term base for tax revenue generation for the city. It's also going to respond to a lot of these class-based issues we're seeing around how BIPOC people unfortunately impacted from pandemics and other crises that are going to occur.

So it, you know to answer your question, if we want people to feel like they're more engaged, we need to start with what they've already given us. And we need to start investing in the backend infrastructure to actually make those solutions work.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Ajeev, thank you. So, not only do we need to go back out to the communities that we haven't spoken to, we need to be able to withdraw from those communities that have already spoke and listen to pick up where we left off. So, that is a critical piece of what the City needs to do.

Let's just shift the conversation a little bit because I think we need to get to a place where we now have to start to analyze the budget. And this is, everything's that's spoken today I think is critically important because it's around the process and how to enhance and make it better. But the City of

Toronto is going to be facing a \$1.9 billion deficit at the end of this year, as I've cited already.

And noted speakers here have already said, you know, we have to be clear. We have to articulate what's at risk and what do we save and how do you actually stretch that dime into a dollar. And I think it's important for us now to talk about perhaps what those municipal tools are. So, if we go out to those communities and tell them, look folks, we're going to be facing a very large deficit and there are certain services that we may have to cut, such as TTC service, such as shopper services, such as youth recreation services and, you know, where should we start.

What does that look like? And I'm going to just bring Brittany back into this conversation because Brittany, you know, the Broadbent Institute I think does some phenomenal work. But how do we ensure that we can hear groups like yours, the Civil Society Thought Leaders, help shift this government conversation and community conversation around?

Brittany Andrew-Amofah: Mm-hmm, absolutely. Well first, I do want to acknowledge that the City of Toronto obviously has its own tax-base revenue that it could use to help shift and refund services. So, I'll start there.

Policing is a really hot topic, as it has always been, particularly for black and indigenous communities and other communities of colour. Policing is the largest ticket item in our municipal budget. And there's no ifs, ands or buts that policing absolutely needs to be reduced.

Now, it's a challenging task of course. Thinking about what number or how much to reduce the police budget, and then thinking through where exactly should funds be reallocated. And then obviously, with receiving a police budget you have to go through the police union, you have to cut through salaries, and then you also have to think through staffing.

So, that is something that all municipal leaders, or municipal leaders who have a vested interest in protecting city services and ensuring that our city continues to run as is, is looking through policing and really do an in-depth analysis, and pushing and building on top of the motion that was passed by John Tory earlier this year and taking that one step further. So, I just want to come out on the record and say that is

exactly what needs to happen in order to free up municipal funds.

Now, the City of Toronto can access other tax revenues at this point in time. Now that is going to be a little bit tricky as well because some of the immediate tax revenue sources that municipalities would likely be able to draw on aren't as viable as they once were before. So for example, the hospitality tax or taxing on hotels and tourism, that is something that's not going to have a lot of revenue moving forward, at the very least for the next few months, because tourism is down.

There's obviously taxes around property taxes, which is quite controversial right now particularly because of the stress that people are facing on their finances, the uncertainty around job security, as well as office buildings in the city of Toronto on the projection or on the track to become vacant. So that is going to be reducing our tax revenues. And then lastly, there's been other revenues on the agenda, whether that's road tolls, which is again controversial but, you know, folks have been open to that in the past.

So, I would say right now, Toronto's kind of maximized, at the very least, what it can do. So, I would say a lot of work really needs to be done in terms of transferring or increasing federal and provincial transfers. That is an absolute must. But the City of Toronto needs to take leadership in order to – I would say – in order to demonstrate that they're extremely serious about addressing the deficit.

And that would be by first looking at where it can trim policing, which is an excess amount right now, and then boldly advocating for increased federal and provincial transfers. That is absolutely necessary. And then, this is where organizations like myself, or organizations that I work for – the Broadbent Institute – are fiercely advocating for a wealth tax, fiercely advocating for closing tax loopholes that will free up federal funds which can then flow down to municipalities.

So, I would say municipalities are really, or the City of Toronto specifically is really strapped right now in terms of how we can bring revenue into the city, and it's not to their fault of its own per se. However, it's really important that nothing gets cut. So, I would say any service that is on the chopping block right now just needs to be absolutely avoided at all cost. City services were already on the brink of I

would say collapse prior to COVID, and it's even scarier at this point in time that they're even more at risk at a time particularly where we need to invest in housing, transit. And we need to invest in ensuring that people have access to social services, poverty reduction programs moving forward.

So, I just want kind of leave that there and then hopefully I can mention some things as you wrap up. But increasing transfers is the way to go moving forward.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Brittany, thank you. And thank you so much for giving us such a broad list of things to work from. And as I listen to you speak, I think one thing that I want to just note is that, you know, in the middle of a pandemic – and this is a historic global health pandemic – we saw some atrocities come out of the U.S. [unintelligible 00:47:09], and we've seen them in Canada.

But there was particular video of Mr. George Floyd where he literally died at the hands of a police officer. And at the end of that sort of violent and brutal interaction, people took to the streets. They did not stay home. They did not decide – they did not ... They decided that it was so important for them to be heard and to be seen to protest that that they took to the streets. But there was a bit of a lull afterwards.

So, we have the big debate at City Council around how do we repurpose the police budget and to defund and to reallocate. But then things have kind of gotten quiet. And I'm going to bring Kaitlin into this conversation. Kaitlin, you have your eyes obviously on many things that are happening in many cities around the world. But that particular event really galvanized all of us and I think that there was a moment in time where we were all talking about the same thing; can we reallocate some of those dollars from the police budget, and some people are saying, "Can you abolish the police?"

What do you think has happened since then? Because, it's critically important that we do come back to that discussion. But do you think that moment in time has passed? And if so, how do we bring it back?

Dr. Kaitlin Schwan: I mean, I think many, many things happened. And I think there's probably others who might be able to speak better to this than me. But unevenly across countries around the world and across the United States and Canada, we've seen movements rise and face enormous challenges.

I mean, I think the incredible power of Black Lives Matter and the way it's manifested in cities around the world is – I think that energy is deeply, deeply still present. And yeah, I really hesitate to think, or to say that we're no longer in that moment. I think we're absolutely, absolutely in that moment. It's about transitioning it from the kind of energy we're seeing on the street getting into the halls of power and ensuring that it is very concretely transitioned into policy and practice and legislation.

And that work is so challenging. It's very time consuming. And it requires so much movement building. And the kind of resources I think the movements on the ground need are very substantial. So, part of what sustaining the Black Lives Matter movement requires is a huge investment on the part of all of use to be ensuring that we are providing the financial, logistical, practical supports to folks who are doing that work.

And just in general, the kind of, the importance of the continued attention of this across all of the spaces we work in. Like, I work in the area of housing and homelessness. I really have felt like the Black Lives Matter movement is shifting the conversation at a mainstream level in a way it hasn't for a very long time in terms of thinking about the disproportionate representation of black racialized and indigenous folks who are experiencing housing issues, and the lack of representation of those folks at the table around policy formation with respect to housing and homelessness.

So, I still think we're very much in this moment. And I'd be very, yeah, I'd love to turn to my colleagues on this panel to comment on it as well.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Kaitlin, thank you. And I think you actually just said it so beautifully is that, although perhaps the placards may not be out in the same number with the same type of intensity in terms of street demonstration, I think you're right. I think that it's very much impossible to have any type of critical discourse around the social inequities around health without threading it into what we've already seen, which is structural racism against certain populations, and in this case with the black community.

You know, Brian, I want to pull you back into this conversation because I think you set us off a bit on the course of how do we lobby the federal government. And I would like to think it's as simple as picking up the phone and saying

hello Mr. Prime Minister, it's Councillor Wong-Tam, I wanted to share with you some thoughts. But we know that's not how it works. Like oftentimes it's the leaders of cities that speak to the leaders of the province that speak to the leaders of the territories and the Prime Minister.

And if that's how one councillor feels, imagine if you don't hold public in the office in the City of Toronto. How do the residents of Toronto get in front of this conversation around getting to their political leaders? And in particular, if it's the federal government that holds all the financial strings and powers and the province that's got to be able to help them administer the funds, how do we talk to those two governments so that we can actually get the resources we need to balance the city budget and to make the citizens of Toronto whole?

Brian Kelsey:

Well two things and that is, first, you know I'm normally the person who would say what Brittany said earlier in terms of I think the first problem has got to be, like it or not – and under these circumstances, I don't like it – that the City is going to be forced to prove its making tough choices before it's going to more federal assistance. That's just the reality of politics and the reality of the Canadian Confederation as it is.

So, you know, to speak very briefly to some of the choices that were raised there, I mean I think it's inevitable that the city is going to use some of its unique revenue powers under Section 267 of the act to [unintelligible 00:53:07] taxes that have been more or less moribund, except for the land transfer tax, for several years. And both my wish and my hope is that councillors – and I think Brittany helpfully hinted at some of this, and Ajeev as well, that we're not just in a city budget situation that's changing but we're in an economy that's rapidly changing and being disrupted.

And so, if that's going to happen, we know that part of what's weird about the semi-recovery we had before the latest lockdowns is that some industries and some economic sectors were doing very well and some were not. And so, I hope that the targets for new revenue would be ...

You know, telcoes are doing well, Internet services are doing well, online delivery services are doing well. Frontline retail is not doing well. Office towers, which are massive operations but also generate a huge amount of cash for the city, are at risk and we don't know what their future's going to look like. [Unintelligible 00:54:06]

So, I hope as the city is – to tie this back to your original question, Councillor – as the city is taking steps to prove that it's doing what it reasonably can without gutting the city to get to that point, that some thought is being put into what does the future economy of the city look like after the shock, rather than just going, you know, understandably kneejerk for the easiest targets that might look like they were easy targets two years ago but might look very different if the economy shakes out the wrong way. That to me is turning this into a long-term plan as opposed to shock.

With respect to bringing the federal government in, the starting point is as simple as engaging federal MPs with a phone call or a letter or something, or engaging organizations that you're a member of to make the connection to say, you know ... And in the past I might have been more sceptical of this for different reasons. But if you're at a community centre that's going to be shut down, or if you're a user of a community centre that's going to be shut down six months from now because the city is hacking and [flatching? 00:55:15], pointing out to the federal government that federal services are whole and they're whole for a reason and why isn't that reason being extended to cover these services as well.

That's part of what's so bizarre and, frankly, almost embarrassing about the federal and, you know, very different circumstances, provincial [postures? 00:55:34] on where municipalities are is people like you, Councillor, are being told, "Well why haven't you cut? Why haven't you saved?" literally by politicians who are not cutting and saying, "Well we need to keep our systems whole to survive this". Cities are being held to a very standard in a very unique economic situation with the resources that are flowing from the Central Bank right now.

All we're asking in very simple terms is for ordinary citizens in Toronto to ask their federal representatives to say, look, if you're spending this money to maintain your services, these city services are as valuable or more valuable to me. And saving them would, frankly, cost a fraction of the money that Ottawa's paying civil servants to stay at home right now, so take the step.

And you know, one thing just to throw in because I think it speaks to a lot of the issues that a lot of the people around this panel are working on as well. The City's going to be forced to squeeze out resources where they've never existed

before. And one place to do that, I've always encouraged cities in general and Toronto in particular to look at the resources you have, look at the tax authority you already have, because federal governments may not come through and so forth.

And one place to do that more now than ever is land, that the city is rich in land and rich in buildings, and until now has been very cautious about how to use those. When it comes to the housing issue, when it comes to emergency assistance, when it comes to even retrofit work like Ajeev was talking about earlier, literally saying, look, we should be promising to make one change to every piece of land or every building we're making before the end of the fiscal year, whether it's a retrofit, whether it's ...

The reason I'm bringing it up is, if you're looking for ways to save on the police budget or get better resources from that, police services has a hell of a lot of land and physical resources that have barely been touched despite a massive review trying to do that. Just getting better value from the police system's land portfolio would start to squeeze out 10, 15, 20 million out there that's going to be urgently needed by some other service. And you know, that's a path of least resistance target to take, but squeeze everything you've got out of the resources you've got and that's going to start to help you find a path through as well. I'll stop there.

Cllr. Krystin Wong-Tam: Brian, thank you. And thank you to all of you. I mean really, quite honestly, this has been such an enriching conversation. And certainly, I've been actually sitting here taking lots of notes, largely because I do think that this is the type of thinking and the type of sort of strategizing that needs to take place. And you know, sadly, it probably hasn't, not with the same type of focus and purpose at city Hall.

We had the TORR budget, which is the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild budget, produce a 300-page plus document that sort of outlined a whole bunch of things that City of Toronto needed to consider in order for us to think about what the recovery needs to look like, but it didn't really get to any priorities. And so, I think that the takeaway that I'm hearing today is that, not only do we need to engage with the communities that we haven't spoken to, but we need to be able to be very clear on how we articulate what's at risk, what are we potentially losing, how do we build a new relationship with both the federal and provincial government,

and also to maybe hold everybody's feet to the fire so that everyone has a say in this recovery.

And in particular, I think the point about, you know, ensuring that city services are there for people who need them, now more than ever before I think it's quite important. Because we know that the City of Toronto doesn't have the luxury of running a deficit. We by law have to balance our budget. So, this \$13.5 billion operating budget in 2020 is very much unbalanced right now, so we need to be able to quickly, very quickly be able to resolve all of that.

I just want to thank once again to these incredible panellists. You've all given up so much freely your time and energy. But also, I think you've given us some real treasures for us to really think through further, and I want to thank all of you. Quite honestly, words are not enough, but you really, I think, really helped us round out our series in a most powerful way with your big thinking, and thank you to all of you.

And to those who are watching online, please stay tuned. We are going to be launching, with the City as well, the actual formal budget process. That will be happening very shortly. We're going to be doing something very different this year, simply because we cannot gather in large ballrooms or large community centres, and everything that we'll be doing is going to be brought to you online, which means that we're going to have to deploy some technology. And we're going to be doing that in a way that has not been done at the City of Toronto before.

Our 2021 budget series is going to be built on a platform through a B.C. company called Ethelo. And we're hoping to make sure that basically everything that has been given to us in terms of strategic advice from our speakers over the past five panels, really bring that conversation to communities who haven't been engaged before.

So, thank you very much to all of you. This has been a wonderful, wonderful panel discussion. And I bid you farewell and we'll see you on the other side. Please be safe and ...

[End of recorded material 01:01:25]