

SPT Deputation to City Budget Committee  
Jan 25, 2022

Hello, my name is Jin Huh. I am the Executive Director of Social Planning Toronto.

I want to thank the City staff for all their work and the Chair, the Committee and the Mayor for this opportunity to speak to you today. And I want to thank the many residents and community groups across the city that have been deputing these past two days.

Every year, SPT works with our network of 180 budget coalition partners to engage thousands of community members and groups across the city in the City budget process.

We've heard from community members and partners about the gravity of the current situation. The sheer crisis we are living in – where crisis has become the norm – calls out for urgent action. Residents are grappling not only with the pandemic, but multiple crises including poverty, housing, shelters & homelessness, mental health, the opioid crisis, and the climate emergency; longstanding, urgent challenges remain in childcare, transit, community services, racial, colonial and gender-based violence and injustice.

Communities across our city are in the midst of a five-alarm fire. This budget does not reflect this urgent situation, nor does it create a viable pathway out of these multiple and intersecting crises.

We have heard that this is another pandemic budget. And certainly, the City is facing a difficult financial situation that requires federal and provincial interventions. But amidst this emergency, we need Council to push further and faster.

Toronto needs and deserves better. And we believe this better Toronto is achievable at a pace that matches the level of urgency and needs across the city.

**Reflecting on some of our past decisions gives us some insight into the way forward.**

A decade of austerity budgets has left the City with limited capacity to respond to the current and longstanding crises.

- Successive budgets have demonstrated the priorities of Council: to maintain low property taxes and reject other options to raise revenues, while directing divisions and agencies to constrain their budgets, with one notable exception, the police budget.

Toronto City Council could have been in a better position to respond to urgent community needs today, for example, if they had passed the 'mansion tax' on properties worth \$2 million or more or passed the vacant homes tax with a 1% instead of a 3% fee attached.

**Going forward, we have ideas about how to create the Toronto we need and deserve.**

1. **Invest in communities** at the levels needed to address the crises before us, using the full power of the revenue tools available, in addition to those we must advocate with other orders of government to attain.
2. **Accelerate the timelines on urgent initiatives.** For example:
  - a. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of planning for the Housing Commissioner, with no budget for implementation. This role is critical in combatting housing discrimination, advancing the human right to housing, and ensuring the City meets the housing obligations it has committed to. Past motions to accelerate and resource the office have been rejected.
  - b. We have seen similar delays with many City strategies and plans, including the poverty reduction strategy's fair pass program
3. **Resource urgent and effective programs,** including:
  - a. Address the homelessness crisis both in the ST and LT by immediately creating additional non-congregate shelter beds, and expanded programs in COVID recovery and overdose prevention, education and response.
  - b. Invest further in prevention initiatives, including eviction prevention programs and the RentSafeTO program.
  - c. Expand community crisis response pilots into more communities.
4. **Mobilize the power of communities**
  - a. Work with communities to advocate for greater power with the other orders of government.
5. **Improve the democratic process**
  - a. Improvements are needed to ensure the budget process is accessible, transparent, democratic and equitable, and that residents and comm groups have the time to effectively engage with the budget.
  - b. For example, communities need to work with Council to shape the budget at the beginning of budget planning, including ensuring an equity responsive budget;
    - i. budget documents need to be accessible with clear lines between budget priorities and Council endorsed commitments, plans and strategies.

The City of Toronto has demonstrated an ability to move fast to respond to a crisis. We've seen it in the work of public health to expand vaccine access across the city, working in collaboration with resident leaders, community groups, community agencies, health institutions and other partners. We need the City to move with a similar urgency on the multiple crises affecting communities.

Thank you