

Councillor Gary Crawford
Members of the Budget Committee
2nd floor, Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5J 2N2

January 25, 2022

A SUMMARY OF BUDGET DEMANDS FROM PRESENTERS AT SOCIAL PLANNING TORONTO'S "CITY BUDGET 2022 COMMUNITY DIALOGUE"

Dear Councillor Gary Crawford and Members of the Budget Committee,

For more than a decade Social Planning Toronto has actively engaged in the City of Toronto's budget process. In addition to our research, analysis, and engagement with community partners, we have worked closely with underrepresented communities to ensure their feedback is considered in budget decisions.

Last year we introduced the People's Budget Platform — two virtual sessions to invite Toronto residents to share their ideas and hopes for the 2021 City Budget through video or audio presentations. This year, in a similar spirit, we hosted a **"City Budget Community Dialogue"** on January 20, an open virtual platform for residents to share their key demands and recommendations related to the 2022 City budget.

Fifty-four participants joined us online, and we heard from 15 residents across multiple wards. Presenters living in neighbourhoods often underserved and underrepresented in policy and program decisions shared their key budget demands and requests on pressing community needs that should be addressed by the City budget.

As part of this initiative, we polled participants (as a multiple choice question) to ask them to identify their top budget priorities, and asked them to share their key budget demands (as an open-ended question). We also invited participants to email us afterwards to share any thoughts or proposals related to the City's budget.

In this letter, we share with you important feedback from community leaders and residents that we received through our **"City Budget Community Dialogue."**

The key asks from each presenter are summarized below and are organized by ward. We also encourage you to watch or listen to their submissions on our website:

socialplanningtoronto.org/city_budget_advocacy

The decisions you make in the 2021 City budget will have a profound impact on residents across Toronto, but especially those in vulnerable and underserved communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

On behalf of the Community Dialogue participants, we thank you for your consideration and we strongly hope that you will make decisions in this year's City budget to make Toronto an equitable city for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jin Huh", with a small mark to the right.

Jin Huh
Executive Director
Social Planning Toronto
CC: Budget Committee
Mayor Tory

SAM TECLE, JANE FINCH ACTION AGAINST POVERTY (JFAAP)

Key budget ask: Defund the police, beginning with 10–20%

- Policing does not operate the same for different folks in different neighbourhoods
- Data show that police presence does not represent safety for Black, Indigenous, and racialized folks
- Toronto needs to move toward a society free of criminalizing poverty; budget reallocation from policing into community will work towards a better Toronto
- Many communities in Toronto already operate from a platform of no intended police intervention due to the safety risks that police officers pose to residents
- Police officers are not social workers; we cannot ask them to effectively intervene with folks experiencing poverty and mental health issues, especially as Black and racialized people are 20 times more likely to be killed at the hands of police

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=1387s&pp=sAQB

ANNA LIPMANN, STAND UP FOR RACIAL JUSTICE (SURJ)

Key budget ask: Defund the Toronto Police Services by 50%

- More than a budget issue; Toronto needs to work towards a city that is safe for everyone
- Criminalization of poverty and mental illness does not address the issues
- The ballooned police budget can be put to better use by meeting basic living needs of those on the margins
- Food security, infrastructure for mental health, and housing supports for youth should be priority

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=1582s&pp=sAQB

MINAKSHI DAS, WARD 7

Key budget asks: Pandemic-related benefits, rent freeze, full-time employment opportunities for immigrants and newcomers, and defunding the police

- Budget to focus on the Poverty Reduction Strategy, prioritizing community financing, food security, and poverty reduction
- Benefits should be directed to school communities to help combat issues pertaining to hunger, mental health, and violence
- High rents are causing the increase in levels of homelessness, as folks are unable to maintain payments
- Full-time employment opportunities need to be created in order to fight off the compounding effects that the pandemic is having on the experience of being a newcomer

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=2206s&pp=sAQB

BRANDON MACHADO, WARD 5

Key budget asks: Pause the increase on property tax, fund maintenance for TTC buses, and re-open youth programs

- Increase on property taxes should be held off until 2023, as an increase during the pandemic may force some homeowners out of their homes
- TTC buses need to be prepared for extreme weather conditions by, for example, equipping the TTC bus fleet with winter tires
- Closure of youth programs throughout the pandemic is contributing to an increase in youth gun violence

Note: This participant did not want their video included

TINA CONLON, WARDS 13 & 9

Key budget ask: Budget allocation and action on pilot programming for non-police led responses to individuals in crisis

- City Council identified and unanimously agreed on June 29/30, 2020, to fund four pilot programs that were aimed at non-police led intervention on crisis calls. The promise to fund these programs has not been kept; meanwhile the police budget has increased.
- The City needs to uphold its promise and fund these pilots

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=2430s&pp=sAQB

ANNA-KAY BROWN, WARD 7

Key budget ask: Reallocate police funds

- Policing does not solve community issues, poverty, and economic crises; policing is a reactive, rather than a proactive tool
- Funding needs to be reallocated into long-term community programs aimed at reducing the impact of these issues
- A long-term approach is required for new programming rather than, for instance, a program with guaranteed funding for 2 or 3 years
- Rather than use of police force, stable housing is required to combat issues of poverty, mental health, and homelessness

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=2544s&pp=sAQB

MALIXAY MCKENZIE, WARD 6

Key budget ask: Pause on increase in property tax

- Downtown organizations will find it difficult to meet the intended increase in property tax

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=2808s&pp=sAQB

ABBIE DORIS, WARD 11

Key budget asks: Continue increase in funding towards affordable child care, increased funding for transit and housing

- Increased flexibility in how per diems can be spent in order to keep child care programs from closing
- The child care sector largely supports funding increases in transit and housing initiatives, as families and the child care workforce — which is highly racialized and feminized — depend on these

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=2972s&pp=sAQB

DIANE DYSON, WARD 14

Key budget ask: immediately reverse the delay in the TTC Fair Pass program

- Reason given for the delay was the pandemic, but government services are most needed during these times
- 1 out of 5 Torontonians would qualify for this program, highlighting the importance of completing its implementation

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=3279s&pp=sAQB

JOY CONNELLY, WARD 14

Key budget ask: Focus on eviction prevention

- Homelessness is extremely costly for both individuals and the city
- Focus needs to tilt toward eviction prevention, as it is easier and more cost effective for the city as well as the individuals involved

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=3342s&pp=sAQB

DEQA NUR, 22 DIVISION

Key budget asks: Eviction prevention, community engagement for Toronto Police Services

- Continued evictions throughout the pandemic highlight a disconnect in how we are using our housing budget
 - This includes cases of seniors and folks with mental health issues
 - What else can be done to ensure housing funding is allocated appropriately?
- There is a lack of funding for community engagement initiatives for Toronto Police while police budgets have increased overall
 - Funding needs to be allocated in order to facilitate community engagement and issues pertaining to police dealing with folks with mental health issues within communities

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=3564s&pp=sAQB

AMELIA ROSE KHAN, WARD 3

Key budget ask: Increase funding to help meet Net Zero Strategy

- City requires increased funding and information in order to meet Net Zero Strategy
- Issue cannot be pushed down the road; this issue can be addressed with increased efficacy within this budget

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=3860s&pp=sAQB

JANET MAHER, WARD 8

Key budget ask: Increased funding to assist seniors and long-term care facilities

- Leadership from the City of Toronto needed to assist Toronto Senior's Forum with funding requests to federal and provincial governments
- Revitalizing seniors programs in community centres, libraries, recreation centres, etc.
 - Empty community rooms/rooms in nonprofit organizations is a serious problem
 - Past programs included fitness for seniors, fall prevention, snow shovelling, programs aimed at socializing; these programs need revitalization through funding for infrastructure and programming
- Continued and increased funding for Butterfly Model, emotion-centred care and aging-in-place programs

Video link: youtube.com/watch?v=Yb76PcJOGEA&t=4037s&pp=sAQB

SHAH MOHIUDDIN

Key budget asks: Increased NIA budget, education for residents to enact zero waste, and food security

- Increased Neighbourhood Improvement Area (NIA) grants.
- Climate change action budget to educate residents to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to make zero waste management
- Food security budget to feed residents and save them from the food pandemic

Note: This participant did not want their video included

JOHN RAE, WARD 13

Key budget asks: Accessible housing and transportation, outreach for the disability community, continue ban on e-scooters

- Increase funding for accessible housing and transportation
- Expand outreach to the disability community in the planning process for any new initiative
- Continue bans on e-scooters and autonomous vehicles, as enforcing new bylaws on these topics would cost money the City cannot afford

Note: This participant did not want their video included

NAVA KARU, WARD 1

Key budget asks: Funding for seniors' programming, re-allocate police funding to curb gun violence

- Due to the pandemic, many seniors are living in isolation; funding is needed to revitalize seniors' programs, as was the case in years past
- Gun violence in this ward continues to be an issue and increased police presence has done nothing to curb it; funds need to be allocated toward education and job training for unemployed and out-of-school youth

Note: This participant did not want their video included

RIFFAT FATIMA, WARD 16

Key budget asks: A comprehensive plan to address issues in Flemington Park, mental health supports for those most adversely affected by the pandemic, and address gun violence in the neighbourhood

- The Flemington Park neighbourhood lacks the following facilities which need to be provided:
 - Mental health program resources
 - Recreation centres for the community, including youth isolation centres for homeless youth
 - Parental resources
 - Daycare centres for the help of working class, especially women; enough to meet the requirements of all the residents of area to be served (may be constructed and equipped with facilities gradually)
 - Enough residential buildings for the number of people living in the area, and 24-hour access to free TTC
 - Residential buildings for seniors (preference to the seniors of the area) and free 24-hour TTC access
 - Shelters for the homeless; currently there is no such facility in the area, so may be constructed on priority
 - Community kitchens, to be handled/used by Food Handling Certificate holders of the area
- An increase in gun violence in the area is compounding the already deleterious effects the pandemic is having on residents and needs to be addressed

Note: This participant did not want their video included

SPT ONLINE SURVEY (open-ended)

A number of residents submitted budget requests to SPT through an online survey. Affordable housing featured among the topics most represented within these responses, as did the re-allocation of police funding into social services and poverty reduction. Other requests made through this platform were:

- Defund bylaw enforcement officers, especially the Adult Service Team who are targeting the holistic centre, body rub parlours, and strip clubs (majority of workers are Asian women)
- Affordable housing for the working class and the poor
- Affordable transit and child care
- Affordable gas prices, and mental and physical health resources
- Community funding to support pandemic-related benefits and poverty reduction
- Reduced TTC fares
- Re-allocation of police budget towards social services
- Defund the police by at least 50% and redistribute the funding toward the salaries and services required to take care of our community: housing and rental support, food security, shelters, seniors support, and after-school programs for children
- Long-term solutions for affordable housing and addressing the climate emergency
- Funding for street festivals, with a specific intention to pay performers
- The City of Toronto needs to consider how money laundering is taking over our housing and new condo developments and in doing so, is making it exceedingly difficult for new home buyers, millennials, and recent graduates — not to mention those living below the poverty line — to be able to afford housing

POLL RESULTS: RESIDENTS' TOP PRIORITIES FOR THE 2022 BUDGET

