



January 24, 2022

Members of the Budget Committee

Re: BU41.1 City of Toronto 2022 Capital and Operating Budgets

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council welcomes the opportunity to review and comment on the 2022 budget.

We would like to thank Toronto City Council and staff for continuing to get us through waves of COVID variants despite the leadership void at the provincial level. We also thank Council for the City's courage in passing the 2021 budget that assumed funding from federal and provincial governments so there would be no further cuts last year, and for the City's public health vision that understands, in Mahatma Gandhi's words, 'the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members'.

This year, the budget language says "the 2022 budget is a COVID-19 budget." While that is true from the perspective of still needing the federal and provincial governments to fill the shortfalls that will be left by the pandemic, we should really consider the 2022 budget to be a hybrid budget: we are still in a pandemic but the path to recovery is in front of us. And we must take the correct path, starting now.

By this, we mean the 2022 budget is still very much a status quo budget; with only minor exceptions, it holds the line on program growth that is required to meet community needs. We must stop "papering over" problems. The alternative is to start fixing the problems we see. Everyone talks about supporting our frontline workers because they are supporting us, but those workers can't do their jobs if they are under-staffed and under-resourced.

Of course we need to fill the gaps left by reduced city revenues and increased COVID-related expenditures but we also need to start the recovery, addressing all those problems that everyone understood last year were exposed by the pandemic not caused by it – systemic racism, undertreatment of mental health, overpolicing of BIPOC communities, underhousing, poverty, severe results of climate change. The 2022 budget presented on January 13 articulates this: "Recognizing that COVID -19 exacerbated historic inequities in Toronto's Indigenous, Black and equity -deserving communities must guide our decisions and actions." Our current constraints must not prevent us from doing the right thing ourselves, at the same time that we call on other levels of government to share in COVID-funding shortfalls and gaps in meeting identified needs. Let's all dream big and act powerfully.

What do we need? Racial justice, climate justice, more child care, more quality long-term care, better transit, an Indigenous lens, affordable and accessible housing, and more, not just what can fit in a hold-the-line budget.

We are in crisis. Now is the time to act. Here are some key issues and asks:

- TTC service must be fully realized. If safe, reliable service is not available, those who have other alternatives will use them, leaving poor transit service to those who have no other options.
- Fund libraries to deliver the important services they do. Library workers, like so many others, have faced austerity and cuts for 30 years, with a much reduced workforce when they are delivering far more services than before, including during the pandemic food banks, seniors contact, etc.
- No covert or overt privatization – we saw last fall that waste collection privatization west of Yonge Street cost Torontonians MORE per capita than public waste collection on the east side.
- No austerity – value work, workers, and quality service delivery
- Fund the planned expansion of the "Fair Pass" so that more people living on impossibly low incomes can pay a little less for transit

- Fund a full 100 property standards enforcement inspectors under the RentSafe program, so those who live in rental accommodations can be assured of decent housing.
- Make the rent grant program permanent until COVID is over.
- Allocate the needed funding to establish the promised Housing Commissioner
- Provide adequate support for affordable and accessible housing, and especially for those living and working in shelter systems
- Provide appropriate community supports for Torontonians
- Stop the overpolicing of Black, Indigenous and other people of colour, and community members struggling with mental health, poverty, and addictions. Reallocate funding to provide the services people need in ways that make them comfortable rather than in fear for their lives. Do not cave into calls to **increase** police funding, an increase which we remind you was passed by the TPSB in record time earlier this month.
- Fund Transform TO plans per the report that led to City approval of the plan. Transform TO's November 2021 Technical report indicates the need in 2022 alone for an additional \$1.5B in capital funding for transit and \$5B for buildings. Of course, some of this funding needs to come from other levels of government, but Toronto must point the way and lead. Saying that \$15B of capital funding has a climate component provides a very obscure picture of what is actually happening.
- Fight Ontario's malign Bill 124, which put a below-inflation cap on the wages of most city workers and others funded by city programs.
- Continue implementing and exploring revenue tools that puts more of the responsibility for having a vibrant city on those who can afford to pay. It takes money to produce a great city.
- Use climate change, equity, Indigenous and intersectional lenses across the budget and program areas.
- In 2023, plan for a longer budget consultation period. With an even more truncated process this year (January 13 to February 17), sufficient time was not provided for meaningful participation by Torontonians.

When COVID first struck, we called frontline and essential workers heroes. But today, we pay lip service, if anything, to the recognition of the vital services that City workers provide to a broad spectrum of Toronto's residents. City staff and city-funded workers demonstrate every day how they are shouldering the impact of COVID, on top of the challenges that pre-existed and were exposed by COVID. Most of us have seen the recent photo circulating on social media of homeless people clutching their bags and belongings, huddled in a TTC bus, given respite from the freezing cold by our public sector bus drivers. (In the private sector, those drivers would have been expected to get those people off their bus.) We must fight to protect quality public services, the flip side of which is jobs that are good enough to allow those workers to live and raise their families in the city where they work.

It is high time that this city recognizes these workers. We call on the Budget Committee and Toronto City Council to fund and implement a public education and communications campaign that will help Torontonians understand the importance of city-building. City building takes vision, leadership, money and the valuing of workers to deliver the goods and services we need. A campaign would talk about what workers **do**, not just what they earn; it would talk about taxes as the price we pay for having a great city livable by all; it would help Torontonians understand that a rising tide raises all boats.

This is an election year. We will be watching your votes on City Council to see if you value work, workers, delivery of quality public services, and the communities that workers live in. Can residents of Toronto count on you to take action on your commitments to them?

Thank you to members of the Budget Committee for your hard work on this complex undertaking.

Yours truly,

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