



April 23, 2020

Mayor John Tory and City Council
Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1P5

Re: TEA recommendations to the Mayor's Economic Support and Recovery Task Force

Dear Mayor, Deputy Mayors and City Councillors,

We thank you for your dedication and hard work in leading the City's response to the COVID-19 crisis and your focus on striving to meet the health and basic needs of residents.

We understand that many of you - as members of the Mayor's Task Force on Economic Recovery - are now thinking about the path towards economic recovery, and are consulting with representatives from a range of sectors.

We are writing to urge you to adopt a green and just recovery plan for Toronto that:

- aligns with, and advances, the City's climate change action commitments
- builds resilience against all possible future shocks (including extreme weather)
- prioritizes the protection of vulnerable residents and workers; and
- maximizes public benefits of investments (economic, health, equity and environmental).

We ask that you include four key commitments in your economic recovery plan.

1) Align recovery with Toronto's climate and equity commitments

We urge the Mayor's Task Force to make it clear to the public that the City remains committed to its TransformTO emission reduction targets, and that Toronto's economic recovery will align with and forward action to achieve these targets. City leaders should also make clear that this green economic recovery will align with core principles outlined in TransformTO and other City strategies, by advancing affordability, social equity, poverty reduction and public health. Making this public commitment will align Toronto with municipal leaders around the world who are committing to a green and sustainable recovery (for example, the [Global Mayor's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force](#)).

Recommendation: Commit to apply a climate lens to recovery proposals (as outlined in the City's Climate Emergency Declaration) to ensure that investments and policies advance the transition to an equitable, zero-carbon city.

2) Prioritize low-carbon infrastructure & local jobs

TransformTO includes goals to rapidly build and retrofit physical infrastructure (residential and IC&I buildings, renewable energy systems, waste management, and transit and low-carbon transportation) to reduce GHGs and protect against extreme weather shocks. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need for better and safer housing and living conditions, especially for homeless and underhoused, low-income and senior populations. Housing construction and retrofits, and public transit, are labour intensive sectors with potential for significant local job creation. There are existing City retrofit and affordable housing construction programs (e.g. Green Will, HI-RIS, HELP, TCH retrofits) and job pathway and apprenticeship initiatives (e.g. Toronto's Community Benefits Framework), which should rapidly be brought to scale.

Recommendation: Include a city-wide, scaled up low-carbon single-family and multi-residential building retrofit campaign to preserve existing housing stock, create jobs, reduce operating costs, improve indoor health, and increase resilience. This can be done through a combination of loans, incentives, and regulations in partnership with other levels of government.

Recommendation: Advocate for continued and expanded federal and provincial investment in public transit and low-carbon transportation capital projects and operating costs, and rapidly advance quick, low-cost wins such as fast-tracking bike network expansion and implementation of bus-priority lanes.

3) Support equitable, low-carbon, resilient neighbourhoods

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the food, income, housing and health inequity and vulnerability experienced by people in Toronto neighbourhoods. Toronto communities have also shown great strength and resilience by organizing to support their neighbours. Community hubs and agencies have played a key role in coordinating ground-level responses to COVID19, despite a lack of dedicated resources to do so. Community hubs are also emerging as leaders in supporting climate action, through local food projects, waste reduction initiatives, ecological restoration projects and much more. TransformTO speaks of the importance of Grassroots Actions Teams as key drivers of climate mitigation and resilience in our city.

Recommendation: Prioritize supporting and building neighbourhood mutual aid and community action as a key component of the recovery and resilience strategy. The Task Force should partner with and support Community Hubs to play a lead role in building strong, economically vibrant, sustainable and resilient neighbourhoods. Local food sovereignty and security initiatives should play a key part in these partnerships, as community food projects have been proven to be effective in improving civic engagement, health, sustainability and local businesses.



Recommendation: Develop emergency preparedness plans that anticipate the possibility of extreme weather events (e.g. flood, heat wave) that could take place in the spring and summer seasons while we are still responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4) Ensure transparency and public participation in the recovery process

While we recognize that the City is still operating in emergency mode, which has temporarily altered decision-making procedures, it's important to start meaningful public discourse on future decision-making. Residents of Toronto have stepped up (as community members, workers and business owners) to support their neighbours and communities during the COVID-19 crisis. They have demonstrated a strong interest in participating in the City's response to and recovery from COVID-19. Our city's recovery will depend on broad and deep community participation.

Recommendation: Ensure transparent and consistent public reporting, as well as multiple opportunities for public consultation and engagement during the design and delivery of the Recovery Plan. This will ensure that the plan reflects the diversity of needs and interests of Toronto residents , and that there is widespread buy-in for its implementation.

In conclusion, we recognize the extreme financial and operational challenges that the City is facing right now. We are heartened by signs that the Task Force is considering how to use this crisis to creatively tackle the problem of chronic underfunding of City services, which has left many residents so vulnerable to the impacts of this pandemic.

We are pleased to see City leaders calling on other levels of government for new, sustainable and equitable approaches to funding Toronto and other cities, which would allow municipalities to better meet the needs of residents. We urge the Task Force to explore financing mechanisms and support from other levels of government, and mobilize the public to support these efforts.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. We at TEA stand ready to work with you to achieve a just and green economic recovery for all of Toronto.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emmay Mah".

Emmay Mah, Executive Director
Toronto Environmental Alliance