



January 23, 2023

BU3.1 - 2023 Capital and Operating Budgets

Dear City of Toronto Budget Committee members:

BACKGROUND

The Good Jobs for All (GJFA) Coalition is an alliance of community, labour, social justice, youth and environmental organizations in the Toronto region. It was formed in 2008 to start a focused dialogue on how to improve living and working conditions in Canada's largest urban centre. For 15 years, the coalition has worked to develop strategies that affirm the values of a truly just society – healthy communities, a sustainable economy, climate justice, strong public services, equity, and decent work for all.

Our submission addresses budget issues affecting communities and workers. We note that workers live in communities, they aren't separate from them. Workers are affected by what happens city-wide, not simply by decisions about their jobs.

We begin by noting that the budget process is different this year because of strong mayor powers imposed by the provincial government. You are currently reviewing a staff budget, but the Mayor will provide his budget on February 1st. That budget may or may not be similar to the staff budget. Accordingly, our comments are at a more general level and they could also provide input to the Mayor's budget.

OVERVIEW OF SUBMISSION

The proposed 2023 budget doesn't work for Toronto. As you have heard throughout the short budget process so far, it will result in second-rate public transit, a bigger housing and homelessness crisis, over-policing especially among marginalized communities with no apparent effect on crime reduction, neglecting much-needed mental health crisis pilot projects, cuts to community programs, neglecting the city's climate plans, and more job cuts, among other effects.

The overarching question is, what kind of City do we want to live and work in: A liveable city for all? Or continuing to create a polarized city where some do very well, and many others are experiencing crises? Social cohesion or social abandonment?

LESS SERVICE = LESS SAFETY

In Toronto, we have recently witnessed multiple examples, sometimes tragic, of the truth that less service means less safety. Let us connect the dots.

Toronto's failure to provide safe and warm spaces for unhoused people is putting undue pressures on other public spaces that are not set up for it. This includes the TTC and libraries, our streets, civic buildings and parks. Everyone has a right to be in public spaces but the use of these spaces by people in crisis is not the solution to growing shelter pressures. The situation is exacerbated by a shortage of other support services, from mental health services to community programs and beyond.

The cracks are becoming fissures. Torontonians are becoming fearful. Less service means less safety.

AT RISK

Many Torontonians are in crisis or about to be because of the precarity of their housing circumstances. With steeply rising rents, increases in the cost of living, rent controls undermined, and evictions commonplace, people are at risk of losing their homes. Without decent housing, how can Toronto workers have decent lives?

Workers need jobs, they need housing, and they need services. While the solutions to some of these issues are in part the responsibility of other levels of government, it is the responsibility of the city to provide leadership and not simply pass the buck.

GOOD JOBS

You have the choice to fund good jobs which provide good services.

Earlier we made the point that less service means less safely. Why is there less service available in Toronto?

As an employer, the City of Toronto currently has a ten percent job vacancy rate. That means 4,000 jobs are unfilled. Workers provide services and without them there are service gaps.

The City's current vacancy target is five to eight percent. Even this level of "gapping" looks like it is intended to reduce expenditures. These savings are on the backs of workers and communities.

Proposed cuts to the TTC services would also result in losses of nearly 500 jobs.

This is the time to grow good jobs rather than plateau or reduce them. Unionized, permanent, full time jobs with benefits provide a good example for other employers and raise expectations for other workers.

In the non-profit sector, there are staffing gaps and staff who are burning out. No cost of living funds are provided in the budget, nor recognition of the overworked service providers.

These types of jobs support city strategies and priorities such as the anti-poverty strategy and Transform TO. They should be supported.

WHAT ELSE IS IN THE BUDGET

You have heard from many people who are critical of this budget which will require us to pay more for less. You are dealing with a “balanced budget” built on a house of cards.

You have heard from many organizations and individuals urging you to give the TTC additional funds rather than cut services, to spend the proposed \$48.3million increase for police elsewhere including on mental health pilots, to fund the Reconciliation Action Plan and Gender Equity Strategy, among other calls. Many pointed out the need to invest in services, in people, and in our crumbling infrastructure.

HOW DO WE PAY

Obviously, we need to get support from the provincial and federal governments.

But the City can also show leadership by using revenue tools at your disposal, particularly those that are more progressive in nature.

The commercial parking levy has gained enormous support during this budget process, and the specific rates can be finetuned to minimize economic impacts while bringing in much needed revenue.

Consideration can continue to be given to a luxury tax for homes at the higher end of the value spectrum.

Consideration can be given to how to fund services that help people avoid interaction with the police in the first place, including diverting some or all of the proposed \$48.3 million increase to police budgets.

Thank you to the Budget Committee for your work on this budget under very difficult time, economic and legislative constraints.



Carolyn Egan

Co-Chair, GJFA Coalition