



Palmerston Area Residents' Association

Serving Palmerston & Little Italy

January 26, 2021

Dear Mayor John Tory and City Councillors,

The 2021 City of Toronto budget process attempts to establish priorities in the face of an unprecedented global health crisis, which appeared during a period of significant discussions on institutional inequity, affordable housing desperation and the climate emergency. The view of the Board of the Palmerston Area Residents' Association (PARA) is that Toronto needs to strike an appropriate balance between addressing pressing needs and maintaining its commitment to other services, as well as infrastructure improvements.

Revenue and Funding

We know that the City has limited revenue streams, and we applaud the recently approved Vacant House Tax initiative. We recommend reinstating taxes removed under the previous, Ford administration, and exploring time-limited levies and property tax reform. Moreover with decreased user fee receipts and ballooning COVID-related expenses, it is time for Toronto to be bold and redefine its relationship with both the provincial and federal governments. We need to establish concrete commitments for shortfall support, permanent program funding, and a new mandate to pursue revenue sources.

Toronto's 2021 budget presentation projects a \$1.8bn shortfall. PARA is concerned that the City will not be able to retain its commitment to existing services and programs, let alone target the new priority areas that Torontonians rallied around (in the streets!) in late 2019 and 2020.

Affordable Housing

Toronto's lack of affordable housing has been a polarizing topic for years. Although rental vacancies are now creeping upwards, the cost per square foot has made little impact on the actual affordability of units. Considering the number of workers affected by pandemic layoffs across many sectors, affordability continues to be an under-addressed issue that disproportionality affects the same marginalized groups that were struggling before the pandemic.

Services for Vulnerable Citizens

Many non-profits responded to the pandemic in extraordinary ways, mobilizing people and resources to meet neighbourhood needs, picking up the slack when other means fell short. Now is not the time to resort to 'status quo' funding for City support services. We have seen first hand in Palmerston-Little Italy how senior support impacts health and independence, and

nearby parks reveal the dire straits of hundreds of people living in tents. In winter. Without basic sanitary access.

Poverty reduction programs have been pushed to the breaking point city-wide, struggling to keep up even as new families and children fall into poverty as the pandemic rages on. Mental health services are overwhelmed at a time when a record number of Torontonians are experiencing personal crises. Providing the usual funding is simply not enough- it is time to start correcting the chronic underfunding of poverty-reduction and mental health supports.

The events of 2020 have brought into stark relief the danger of perpetuating extreme disparities across our city. Providing adequate support and services is essential to giving citizens the tools for resiliency.

Climate Emergency Preparedness

Having recently released our PARA Green Plan, we are acutely aware of the commitment required from all levels of government to address our ability to weather the challenges of climate instability. The City's Neighbourhood Climate Action Champions program is just the first step in providing communities with tools to assess their needs; more funding will be required to bring about change. And as the 2021 budget calls for 33% cut to the Environment and Energy Division, we fear that one of the most pressing concerns identified by our community will yet again fall victim to underfunding.

David Miller's book, 'Solved: How the World's Great Cities are Fixing the Climate Crisis' gives a comprehensive overview of effective, proven actions to address this defining issue of our time. The City of Toronto budget should take at least some of these ideas and move them forward with investments in infrastructure and programs.

PARA calls on Toronto to make 2021 the year to address the barriers to achieving more affordable housing, bolster its community and mental health services, and recommit to actions, programs and infrastructure that will address our climate crisis.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul MacLean". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul MacLean, for the Board of the Palmerston Area Residents' Association