

Member Advocacy Committee
C/o The Neighbourhood Group Community Services
260 Augusta Avenue, Toronto

July 22, 2023

Dear Mayor Chow,

We congratulate you on your win and look forward to working with you. Your commitment to addressing the issues of low income communities gives us hope. We encourage you to continue your support of people at the lowest end of the economic spectrum.

The Member Advocacy Committee is a group of people who take action on issues related to poverty. People in our group have lived experience of poverty, homelessness, disability, racism, substance use and more. We advocate for positive social change. We use our lived experience and knowledge gained from interactions with people in poverty and on the streets of Toronto. Our group is committed to advocacy to reduce the gap between rich and poor, and to helping build strong social programs to benefit those with the least in our society.

Our group worked hard during the mayoral by-election to outreach to people in the Corner Drop In at The Neighbourhood Group Community Services and in other parts of Kensington Market. The top issues people identified were a lack of deeply affordable housing and safe shelter space. Many people shared concerns about poor TTC service and expensive TTC fares. They also want action on climate change, which means moving forward to fund Transform TO at the city level. Funding for safe consumption was also identified. People are looking for good jobs with decent pay and action to create a safe and livable city, including your identified commitment to expand the community crisis response teams across the city.

As a group our top priorities include:

HOUSING and SHELTER

- Encampments for unhoused people downtown, especially one up the street on College Street and Bellevue. Work closely with people in encampments to find appropriate housing and ensure no encampment evictions. Thank you for identifying this urgent priority.
- City expropriation of empty buildings. Support the campaign to expropriate buildings on Sherbourne Street to turn them into deeply affordable public housing. The city and not developers must build this housing.
- Rooming houses continue to disappear. There are empty buildings that used to be rooming houses. The city should ensure that a land trust can buy these buildings and maintain these buildings as good rooming house stock.
- We urge you to act now on your commitment to build 25,000 new rental units and ensure they are deeply affordable.
- Urgently act on your commitment to strengthen supports to tenants as renovictions and other forms of eviction continue unabated.

- Work with other levels of government to obtain more funding for repairs and maintenance at TCHC buildings. Many are plagued with problems and units continue to be closed due to poor conditions.

FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

- A funding increase for drop ins is urgent. There have been cuts here at the Corner Drop in. Most drop ins lost their funding for housing help workers at a time when this service is greatly needed.
- Overdose prevention services (OPS). This service at TNG is currently funded only through donations and is unsustainable. Our peer workers do a great job with clients and we have had no overdose deaths. This service must be a priority for city funding.

NEW REVENUE STREAMS

City finances are in bad shape. Please look seriously at new revenue tools, including a commercial parking levy and bringing back the vehicle registration tax. Reconsider road tolls. Limiting vehicles in the downtown core would address climate change and help the economy.

We would like a meeting with you and understand you are a longtime friend of The Neighbourhood Group Community Services/St. Stephen's Community House where we are housed. We have lots of ideas and would welcome sitting down with you for a conversation.

Sincerely,

Helen Armstrong
 Shelley Bennett
 John Shields
 Robert CONDRON
 Roberta Taylor

For the Member Advocacy Committee

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