

## **SCAN! TORONTO BUDGET SUBMISSION**

### **Who we are. Where we stand.**

Seniors for Climate Action Now (SCAN!) (<https://seniorsforclimateactionnow.org/>) is a grassroots volunteer organization of Canadian seniors compelled to urgent climate action, with a social justice focus. SCAN! Toronto is the local SCAN! group.

The values that we share - the promotion of a livable, safe and enjoyable city for all of us and for generations to come - ought to be the foundation of a budget, with the financial support for these values and the revenues obtained to match this support.

SCAN! supports the proposed city budget and property tax increase and we urge our councillors to do the same. While it can be difficult for seniors on fixed incomes to absorb new taxes, we know that for our own sake and the sake of our grandchildren, the City has to tackle the problems that have already been kicked too far down the road.

This budget makes a start in a challenging financial situation brought about by years of insufficient city revenues from taxes and senior levels of government

The budget appropriately deals with the challenging financial situation not by cutting needed programs and forgoing needed maintenance of public works, but by increasing property taxes given the lack of other revenue tools which the City is unable to access.

We support the voter priorities of affordable housing and improved transit. Both can contribute to reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHGs) and mitigating further climate crises.

We work with other climate action groups in the city, contributing our important point-of view, and our acquired wisdom as seniors. We support the submissions of the Toronto Environmental Alliance.

### **The problem**

Generally, it is not understood that the climate crisis is already affecting us all, although for those who are well housed, it may be less perceptible. More extreme climate events are coming; and we need to mitigate and adapt to be ready for them.

Climate mitigation and adaptation must be well funded, not just for the benefit of the city as a whole but especially to protect those most vulnerable to dangers from the climate emergency - unhoused people, people living in poverty and people with disabilities.

Seniors are a large and growing proportion of people living with disabilities, and senior women in particular, are a large proportion of low-income people in our city. Indigenous and racialized people are over-represented in communities of people living in poverty. This is an issue of social justice, equity and living up to our Truth and Reconciliation responsibilities.

People living in poverty and people with disabilities who are housed are less likely to have the resources they need to cope with extreme heat, flooding, loss of power, wildfire smoke; and are less able to travel significant distances to get to heating and warming centres. This is clearly more difficult for unhoused people.

It may seem counterintuitive, but homeowners are well served by the property tax increase as it pertains to climate adaptation. Extreme weather events, especially flooding, can very seriously reduce the value of their home as well as increasing their property insurance cost, if such insurance remains available to them. Paying for City services to prevent extreme climate damage is the most logical and economical route.

### **The solutions – adaptation helps keep us safe**

Research into increased police numbers and safety is clear: more police do not make us safer. However, looking at safety through a climate lens, again research demonstrates that preparing for the known consequences of climate heating will keep us safe. Allocating increased funding to the Toronto Community Crisis Service is a better use of funding. The police budget ought to have been frozen. More money should fund accessible adaptation across the city to benefit those most in need of the assistance including those who are the least mobile.

There are some good adaptation projects in the budget: basement flooding protection and watershed improvements are two examples. However, more can be done to assist in adaptation:

- support for more community hubs in schools and community centres in numerous locations throughout the city to help in case of flooding, blackouts, extreme heat and other climate-related situations
- making planned adaptation measures low-carbon sooner; the capital budget notes 63 projects representing \$625.54 million in capital spending in 2024 are climate resilience projects and fossil fuel reliant projects such as diesel backup power generators for fossil fuel reliant projects. Additional funds for adaptation would allow some of these projects to be fossil-fuel free.

### **Climate mitigation**

We are not on track to halve emissions by 2030. As described in the climate budget notes we are **closer to** a “business as planned” track rather than a “net zero” track. This should be taken as a call to action. We need to speed it up, as getting to one half of the emissions is the easier goal than reaching net zero. The planned reductions from the 2024 measures would reduce emissions by 74,000 tonnes out of total emissions from Toronto of 14.8 megatonnes; that amounts to 0.5% which is simply not enough.

### **Buildings:**

Almost 90% of Toronto’s GHG emissions are from buildings and transportation.

The Environment and Climate budget notes indicate:

“If implemented beginning in the latter half of this decade, the Building Emission Performance Standards could lead to a significant reduction in buildings sector emissions, with the ultimate scale of reductions depending on whether Ontario develops a zero-emissions electricity grid in the 2030s. The 2024 Staff Prepared Operating Budget for Environment & Climate Division contains \$0.9 million for continued development of EPS and an implementation plan for consideration by City Council later in 2024.”

This green building plan is excellent, and indeed, as described, a potential game-changer. We have three comments:

- A zero emissions electricity-grid, however, depends on contributions from all levels of government, with the senior levels of government contributing more. The City should make greater contributions to the zero emissions electricity grid through further renewable energy support.
- The earlier the Building Emission Performance Standards are implemented, the greater the prospect of some significant reduction in emissions by 2030. Council should expedite this process.
- Some technical assistance to high GHG emitters in the public realm, such as schools, would be desirable.

The City ought to promote its green building of affordable housing projects with an advertising and marketing budget to inspire others to follow the city’s lead. New city affordable housing projects will have geothermal heating (most often) or other fossil fuel-free source. A potential side benefit: riggers and rigs from Alberta’s tar sands would be coming to Toronto to drill here to support a livable city for all now and in the future. SCAN! is supportive of good jobs being created through the transition from fossil fuels. This should soon be mandated for all new buildings.

### **Transportation**

The new capital investments in transit and provincial support for transit operating costs in the budget are a positive initiative. Using the additional monies to support express buses on Sheppard, Finch and Steeles and investing in the necessary road infrastructure is one good way to reduce emissions. Poor and working poor people/priority communities in the northwest and northeast parts of the city will benefit from greater access. The Scarborough busway is another high priority deserving the City’s support.

The decision to freeze transit fares is also a step forward. For people who rely on transit as their sole realistic transportation option, it can make a significant difference. For people with a choice, it can help them choose the lower carbon option more often.

Greater support for active transportation, walking and cycling, is a low-cost way to reduce emissions. Significant federal money is available for these programs and the City could and should dedicate significant monies to alternatives to gas-powered vehicles, including policies to support priority maintenance.

**2024 Carbon Budgeting**

The climate briefing note indicates that the carbon budgeting process will continue in the spring of 2024 with the Transform TO Progress report.

With good progress being made on the City's finances, we are hopeful to see greater progress on the city's carbon output and adaptation by funding and implementing fully the Transform TO report.

In future years, carbon budgeting should take place synchronously with financial budgeting with data collected towards the end of the year.

**Closing**

SCAN! Toronto is pleased that so many of our allied organizations as well as individual residents have taken up the call to keep climate adaptation and mitigation on the budget table. We seniors are not only speaking on our behalf, but on behalf of future generations.

Thank you for taking this deputation into consideration.