



TORONTO 2016 AND BEYOND

In 2014 Torontonians were made to believe that in John Tory's election we were making a compromise, a reasonable middle of the road politician who respected good governance and progressive values. It is no longer clear that is the direction Toronto is headed.

Less government interference in corporate profiteering

We know changing technology is going to make a significant impact on our lives, as we expect new efficiencies to provide new ways of living, and we have to welcome those new ways that make life easier for everyone but the real question is how do we transition responsibly with the highest priority being the protection of working people?

Recently, we witnessed the Mayor undermine the taxi cab industry through the licensing of Uber and 'ride sharing' programs. Companies like Uber disguise themselves as 'technology solutions' but in reality are doing the same function as taxi cab brokers like Beck but without any of the regulations and safeguards. For years, the City regulated the industry to ensure protections for the customer and the driver such as – minimum fare rates, security alarm lights on the back of the car, bi-annual mechanical checks at City facilities and many other protections to ensure that taking a cab was both safe, affordable and maintained a decent level of income for the drivers, brokers and the plate owners.

Last month at City Council the resolution that passed did two things, it gutted all those protections by creating a much lower floor of regulations (to allow Uber to operate) and it agreed to pay out the millionaire plate owners. The only ones who lost were the cab drivers, who will have their incomes greatly diminished, and the public who have lost much of the good regulations that ensured their protections and safety.

Selling off our public assets

Mayor Tory has repeatedly talked about expanding transit infrastructure, but is reluctant to talk about sustainable sources that provide long term funding and a commitment to long term infrastructure development. Instead in the recently released report he has asked City staff to explore monetizing assets – the most likely targets being Toronto Hydro and the Toronto Parking Authority.

Both Hydro and the Parking Authority are revenue sources to the City of Toronto, and selling them would provide one time short term bursts of funding but will also create significant revenue holes for every single future budget. This approach is incredible short sighted, one that looks solely at fulfilling a bad campaign promise rather than weighing the long term health of the City.

Taking us to the Financial Cliff

The City of Toronto is heading towards a financial cliff because the expected expenditures for the 2017 budget are much higher than the projected revenues. The City Councillors know it, the City Manager has said it repeatedly and the Mayor knows very well that we need more revenues for the City to function with purpose. Some of the right wing Councillors continually press for 'greater efficiencies' to cut costs, but the City has cut into the bone repeatedly. Over the last 6 years programs have been trimmed to the point of exhaustion.

The City has barely survived over the last many years with low property taxes, by tightening its belt, letting infrastructure rot and no new investments in any transit infrastructure. The tax burdens have shifted from property taxes to user fees, such as higher fees for programs and continually rising TTC fares – both of which disproportionate affect the poor.

We need new revenue

There is a major gap in funding, and the City needs to bring something to the table that can not only fill the gap but create room for growth of programs and services the City provides. The drive to privatize assets, providing one time funding, is short sighted thinking and will only widen the future gap as the profits from Toronto Hydro or the Parking authority would end up in corporate hands.

There are several options we need to be thinking about when looking forward on how we pay for new transit, TCHC, sustainable programming and all the vital work our City workers provide.

- 1) We re-affirm our commitment to keeping public assets in the public hands to strongly oppose any privatization of Toronto Hydro, Toronto Parking Authority or Toronto Community Housing Corporation
- 2) We ask both the Federal and the Provincial governments to step up their investments in TCHC, public transit operations, and new infrastructure built to the highest green standards.
- 3) We ask the City to implement a new commercial parking levy that will provide the City with tens of millions in income.
- 4) We ask the City to ensure any new revenues tools implemented take into consideration the effect on the marginalized and the poor.

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