

An Open Call to Toronto City Council: Declare a Climate Emergency and Commit to Accelerated Action

1. RECOGNIZE THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

We, concerned organizations, call on Toronto Mayor John Tory and Toronto City Council to formally declare a climate emergency. Furthermore, we call on you to commit to, and rapidly implement, clear and specific actions to reduce emissions in the near-term and protect residents—especially those most at risk—from climate-related harms while making critical investments to maximize the health, environmental, social, and economic benefits of a transition to a zero-carbon city.

In 2017, Toronto City Council unanimously adopted TransformTO, a plan to reduce carbon emissions and strengthen resilience to climate shocks in a way that improves health, equity, and prosperity. The 2019 TransformTO status report update recognizes that Toronto’s 2050 target “diverges from the accepted level of necessary ambition.”

Climate change affects us all. In recent years, Toronto has experienced climate-related floods and storms that have impacted thousands of residents and caused over a billion dollars in damages¹. Climate-related warming and extreme heat are increasing heat-related illnesses and diseases among children, adults and seniors².

Moreover, there are some peoples and communities that disproportionately experience climate impacts. Indigenous Peoples and other groups—racialized communities, people with low incomes, migrants, refugees, people with Disabilities/Disabled people, and those with chronic health conditions—are often impacted the most since their experiences are shaped by multiple factors such as housing situation, income level, health status, gender, age, language barriers, and social marginalization and discrimination³. Furthermore, these groups have often been neglected and under-served by government-led climate policies and initiatives.

There is growing public demand for stronger government action on climate change, as evidenced by the youth-led climate strikes in Toronto around the world this month. Certainly, the vast majority of Toronto residents want action: a 2018 survey found that 91 per cent of residents believe climate change threatens our health and well-being, and that everyone needs to take steps to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions⁴.

Since 2017, almost 1,000 local, regional and national governments have declared climate emergencies including 449 councils and governing bodies in Canada⁵. It is time for Canada’s largest city to show climate leadership and join them.

Recommendation 1.1: The City of Toronto should formally declare a climate emergency that demonstrates City Council’s urgent commitment to addressing the crisis. This must take the form of specific actions as described in the recommendations that follow.

2. STRENGTHEN CLIMATE TARGETS AND REPORTING

Recommendation 2.1: The City of Toronto should commit to, and annually report on, clear interim targets and actions to reduce emissions in the building and transit sectors to achieve its 2030 target and reduce emissions by at least 65%.

Recommendation 2.2: The City of Toronto should commit to achieving net zero emissions no later than 2040.

Recommendation 2.3: The City of Toronto should assess and establish strategies to reduce consumption-based emissions. The full lifecycle emissions of goods and services, including building materials, manufactured products, food, shipping and personal travel, which are consumed by Toronto residents, need to be accounted for and reduced.

3. ADEQUATELY FUND CLIMATE ACTION

Recommendation 3.1: The City of Toronto should establish a dedicated climate fund to ensure that City climate action is adequately and sustainably resourced. The fund should be established through the use of revenue sources and fair financing mechanisms that minimize the impacts on vulnerable or equity-seeking groups.

Recommendation 3.2: The City should apply a climate lens to the City's budget process and all of Council's decision-making, including major procurement and infrastructure decisions.

Recommendation 3.3: The City of Toronto should show leadership as a green investment city by starting to decarbonize its investments in 2020.

4. BUILD EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN CLIMATE ACTION

Recommendation 4.1: The City should apply an equity lens to all climate-related decision-making and support greater inclusion and involvement of equity-seeking groups and communities disproportionately impacted by climate change⁶.

Recommendation 4.2: The City of Toronto must uphold its commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)⁷ by consulting and cooperating in good faith with Indigenous communities and leaders on the development and implementation of TransformTO strategies on an ongoing basis to integrate Indigenous knowledge, priorities, rights, and governance systems⁸.

Recommendation 4.3: The City of Toronto should collaborate with youth, including youth from equity-seeking groups, to co-develop a strategy to facilitate youth participation in the development and implementation of TransformTO strategies.

Recommendation 4.4: The City of Toronto should work with Disabled communities and activists on the development and implementation of TransformTO strategies that integrate their knowledge, priorities, rights and needs.

Recommendation 4.5: The City of Toronto should develop and accelerate a full-scale building

retrofit strategy that puts low-income tenants and equity-seeking groups first. This should include prioritizing financial incentives in high-need communities, promoting inclusive workforce development in the sector and committing to retrofits without displacement.

Recommendation 4.6: To increase the speed, frequency and reliability of public transit service (and thereby ridership), the City should act immediately to expand the number of transit priority zones and expand Toronto's Express Bus Network into an integrated city-wide BRT Network.

Recommendation 4.7: The City of Toronto should develop resilience strategies with and for equity-seeking groups and communities vulnerable to climate impacts. These strategies should measurably increase emergency preparedness for extreme weather conditions such as power outages, flooding, and extreme heat.

Recommendation 4.8: The City of Toronto should develop and publicly report on how TransformTO climate action strategies and policies contribute to all other City strategies, including those that promote equity and inclusion⁹.

5. ENSURE A JUST ECONOMIC TRANSITION

Recommendation 5.1: The City of Toronto should engage job-seekers, workers, unions, relevant sectors, and social service agencies in the creation of a low-carbon jobs strategy that supports a decent work agenda, career pathways for equity-seeking groups, and the expansion of green industry sectors across Toronto.

Recommendation 5.2: The City of Toronto should partner with workers, unions, and businesses to identify risks and develop initiatives that 'climate-proof' Toronto industries and sectors vulnerable to the impacts of climate change or the transition to a low-carbon economy¹⁰.

Recommendation 5.3: The City of Toronto should phase-out subsidies and contracts for high-emitting companies and implement green procurement practices that incentivize low-carbon businesses.

6. ESTABLISH STRUCTURES FOR MEANINGFUL RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

Recommendation 6.1: The City should develop a plan to invest in and support the capacity of local groups, including youth, to facilitate broad-based and deep engagement in climate action across Toronto's diverse underserved neighbourhoods.

Recommendation 6.2: The City should establish participatory resident structures for policy areas (for example: housing, transportation and waste reduction) which are key to achieving TransformTO's targets and goals. The membership of these structures should reflect the city's diverse communities and have a mandate to ensure that low-carbon strategies uphold TransformTO's guiding principles and generate tangible benefits for communities¹¹.

ENDORSED BY

ACORN	GreenEast
Blue Green Canada	Greenpeace
Carbon Conversations TO	JustEarth
Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA)	LEAP UofT
Centre for Social Innovation	Millennial Womxn in Policy
Citizens' Climate Lobby (Toronto)	MobilizeTO
Climate Challenge Canada	Noor Cultural Centre
Climate Change Toronto	Ontario Clean Air Alliance
ClimateFast	Park People
Climate Justice Toronto	People's Climate Movement (GTA)
Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CAS-SA)	Progress Toronto
Council of Canadians (Toronto)	Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
Community Resilience to Extreme Weather CREW)	Social Planning Toronto
Drawdown Toronto	StopPlastics
David Suzuki Foundation	The Green Majority
Ecologos/Water Docs	Toronto & York Region Labour Council
Environmental Defence	Toronto Community Benefits Network
Evergreen	Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA)
Faith in the City	Toronto350.org
For Our Grandchildren	Transition Toronto
Good Jobs For All	TTC Riders
Green 13	Urban Alliance on Race Relations
Green Neighbours 21	WHEN: Women's Healthy Environments Network
Green Wave West	







BACKGROUND: RECOMMENDATIONS #2-6

2. STRENGTHEN CLIMATE TARGETS AND REPORTING

Toronto has a strong 2030 target for emission reductions (65% below 1990 levels). However, to meet this target, the City needs to significantly step up its efforts.

Given that buildings make up over 50% of emissions, and transportation almost 40%, the City needs to develop bold, short-term targets and action strategies in these two sectors for TransformTO's next implementation period (2021-2023) with clear annual benchmarks for progress.

Initiatives that reduce emissions, such as massively scaled-up support and promotion of deep retrofits for single-unit, multi-residential, and commercial, industrial and institutional buildings (ICI), can deliver social and economic opportunities for equity-seeking communities. Quick-win improvements to transit (to shift people out of cars), such as expanded pilot-testing of dedicated transit lanes on key arterials, can also generate multiple benefits.

Toronto currently has no target date for reaching zero emissions. Rather, it is committed to an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050. Since that target was adopted, there is a growing recognition of the need for more rapid achievement of zero emissions. Since then, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a report indicating that the next 10 years constitute a critical window for making deep emissions reductions to limit global temperatures increases and prevent widespread human harm and economic loss¹². The 2019 TransformTO status report update recognizes that Toronto's 2050 target "diverges from the accepted level of necessary ambition."¹³

We know that industrialized cities need to reach net zero before 2050 to keep global temperature rise below 1.5C; a number of cities and countries have set goals of net zero between 2025 and 2040.¹⁴

Finally, as city staff have recognized, current reporting of emissions in Toronto only includes production-based emissions. Our emissions data does not include consumption based emissions - that is, emissions from products, materials and services made or consumed outside of Toronto. Research shows that the majority of emissions in cities are consumption-based. To its credit, the city has indicated that it will consider these emissions going forward.¹⁵

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Recommendation 2.3: The City of Toronto should assess and establish strategies to reduce consumption-based emissions. The full lifecycle emissions of goods and services, including building materials, manufactured products, food, shipping and personal travel, which are consumed by Toronto residents, need to be accounted for and reduced.

3. ADEQUATELY FUND CLIMATE ACTION

There is a growing recognition that the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon and equitable city that can bring significant economic, health and social benefits to Toronto neighbourhoods. However, realizing benefits such as including good jobs, cleaner air and improved housing requires upfront investment.

TransformTO includes a commitment to develop new partnerships, tools and mechanisms to fund climate action. The City has leveraged investment in climate action and community benefits through funding from all levels of government, private investors (green bonds) and has explored new funding tools such as road pricing. It is also exploring the costs of climate inaction and the feasibility of recouping climate costs from major greenhouse gas-emitting companies that have knowingly contributed to the climate crisis.

Residents will ultimately bear the financial costs of inadequate action on climate change. According to a 2013 Toronto Staff Report, one deluge alone that year caused over \$850 million in insurance claims.¹⁶ The average cost for basement repairs following a flood in Canada is now \$43,000 according to the Insurance Bureau of Canada.¹⁷ Few of us can afford that. Worse yet, even greater magnitude storms are on the horizon according to 'Toronto's Future Weather and Climate Driver Study'.

In addition to leveraging new resources to accelerate climate action, the City should ensure that existing spending is furthering climate mitigation and resiliency. Implementing a climate lens on infrastructure spending, as the Federal government did in 2018, is an important step forward in this regard.

Recommendation 3.1: The City of Toronto should establish a dedicated climate fund to ensure that City climate action is adequately and sustainably resourced. The fund should be established through the use of revenue sources and fair financing mechanisms that minimize the impacts on vulnerable or equity-seeking groups.

Recommendation 3.2: The City should apply a climate lens to the City's budget process and all of Council's decision-making, including major procurement and infrastructure decisions.

Recommendation 3.3: The City of Toronto should show leadership as a green investment city by starting to decarbonize its investments in 2020.

4. BUILD EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN CLIMATE ACTION

Toronto's climate plan and resilience strategy recognize that extreme climate change and carbon pollution hurt equity-seeking groups the most. A key principle of TransformTO is that climate programs and policies should address this fact and maximize the public benefit to those who are made most vulnerable to climate change.

It's time to put TransformTO's guiding principles¹⁸ into practice. We urge the city to support greater involvement of disproportionately-impacted populations and neighbourhoods, including Indigenous people, newcomers, people living with low incomes, tenants, seniors, youth and children, racialized communities, people with Disabilities / Disabled people.

For example, TransformTO strategies that focus on green building construction and retrofitting of buildings to reduce emissions and increase resilience need to be designed to prevent the displacement of residents from their homes and communities. Often green developments are marketed as luxury, which prices out the majority of residents in search of housing. A lack of continued investment in aging buildings can lead to significant disrepair and unsafe housing conditions that, if not addressed, result in the demolition of buildings at the height of a housing crisis. Redevelopments on these properties rarely house the low-income people and equity-seeking groups that have long lived there, resulting in widespread displacement of community members. While renovations or retrofits can serve to improve housing and reduce emissions, 'renovictions' are far too common in our city as is passing the costs onto tenants with above-guideline rent increases.

Furthermore, TransformTO strategies that focus on shifting to low-carbon transportation modes such as electric vehicles, public transit, cycling and walking need to anticipate and design systems that serve high-need areas and ensure equitable access to these services.¹⁹ To increase ridership on public transit, people will need fast, frequent and more reliable transit service, accessible design and affordability across the transit network, and greater prioritization of transit on busy roads.

Recommendation 4.1: The City should apply an equity lens to all climate-related decision-making and support greater inclusion and involvement of equity-seeking groups and communities disproportionately impacted by climate change.²⁰

Recommendation 4.2: The City of Toronto must uphold its commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)²¹ by consulting and cooperating in good faith with Indigenous communities and leaders on the development and implementation of TransformTO strategies on an ongoing basis to integrate Indigenous knowledge, priorities, rights, and governance systems.²²

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Recommendation 4.5: The City of Toronto should develop and accelerate a full-scale building retrofit strategy that puts low-income tenants and equity-seeking groups first. This should include prioritizing financial incentives in high-need communities, promoting inclusive workforce development in the sector and committing to retrofits without displacement.

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measurably increase emergency preparedness for extreme weather conditions such as power outages, flooding, and extreme heat.²³

Recommendation 4.8: The City of Toronto should develop and publicly report on how TransformTO climate action strategies and policies contribute to all other City strategies, including those that promote equity and inclusion.

5. ENSURE A JUST ECONOMIC TRANSITION

Transforming Toronto into a low-carbon city requires an economic transition as well. A low-carbon economy can support prosperity for all in our city, especially if we plan ahead. A just transition to a low-carbon economy needs to consider all current and future workers - not only those in energy intensive industries. Many people - especially equity-seeking groups - are currently trapped in cycles of poverty, underemployed or working unsafe, low-wage, unstable and otherwise precarious jobs. Many young people are on education and training pathways for vanishing jobs and face an uncertain job market.

While there are key industries and emerging green sectors contributing to the low-carbon transition in Toronto today, equity-seeking groups are not adequately represented in these fields of work. This needs to change: transitioning to a low-carbon economy can create new openings for good green jobs for all.

Low-carbon jobs can include many types of work already taking place in our city. For instance, many different jobs are involved in the design, construction, operation, maintenance and retrofit of green buildings, as well as in water, energy, waste and transportation system infrastructure.

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Recommendation 5.2: The City of Toronto should partner with workers, unions, and businesses to identify risks and develop initiatives that 'climate-proof'²⁴ Toronto industries and sectors vulnerable to the impacts of climate change or the transition to a low-carbon economy.

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6. ESTABLISH STRUCTURES FOR MEANINGFUL RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

TransformTO recognizes the importance of broad community engagement in order to build support and animate resident participation in climate action, build resilience to climate shocks, and ensure that desired social, economic and equity co-benefits are realized. The City's recent formation of a resident reference panel with diverse representation is a good step in this direction.

We encourage the City to meet people where they are and deploy a range of strategies to support the deep and meaningful engagement of people of different backgrounds and ages, considering who is delivering the message, language accessibility (translation), locating meetings close to where people live (e.g. community centres and highrises), and holding them at times people are available (e.g. weekends).

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1. Insurance Bureau of Canada. Newswire.ca (September 2018). Accessed at: <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/toronto-flood-causes-over-80-million-in-insured-damage-692706351.html>
2. Toronto Public Health, A Climate of Concern (2015). Accessed at: <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-81509.pdf>.
3. United Nations, “Report: Inequalities exacerbate climate impacts on poor,” media release, October 3, 2016. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/10/report-inequalities-exacerbate-climateimpacts-on-poor/> https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/97ee-DS-19-0150_TransformTO_Report_digital_final_reducedSize_June28update.pdf, (p. 8.) Also, for evidence of inequitable impacts of climate change in Toronto and North America, see <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Cities-Climate-Change-Health-Equity-WIJune-2018-fv.pdf> and http://www.climateontario.ca/doc/ORAC_Products/TPH/Climate%20Change%20Adaptation%20and%20Health%20Equity%20-%20Background%20Report.pdf.
4. https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/97ee-DS-19-0150_TransformTO_Report_digital_final_reducedSize_June28update.pdf, (p. 8)
5. <https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/climate-emergency-declarations-cover-15-million-citizens/>.
6. City of Toronto: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement: “The City strives to apply an equity lens to its activities to identify and remove barriers and to support best practices in planning, budgeting, implementation and evaluation of its programs and services.” accessed at: <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/equity-diversity-inclusion/>
7. The City is required by its adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to “consult and cooperate in good faith with Indigenous Peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior, and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them”. See UNDRIP (Article 19) at https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf and Toronto’s commitments to Indigenous Peoples at <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/indigenous-affairs-office/commitments-to-indigenous-peoples/>
8. This recommendation was informed by the “Indigenous Climate Action Summary Report” (November 2018), developed from Indigenous strategic discussions on City of Toronto climate strategies <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/8788-This-report.pdf>
9. For example, the Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, Poverty Reduction Strategy, Social Procurement Policy, Toronto Newcomer Strategy, Toronto Seniors Strategy, Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy, The City’s Eight Priority Calls to Actions from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Report, Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, Workforce Development Strategy, and the Community Benefits Framework.
10. ‘Climate proofing’ is a popular term used to describe the practice of deeply renovating or retrofitting spaces and infrastructure to achieve both climate change mitigation and adaptation outcomes. A climate proof building or community would be low-carbon or zero-emission and adapted to withstand extreme weather.
11. The eight principles in TransformTO are: advance social equity; improve affordability particularly for vulnerable populations; protect low-income residents; contribute to poverty reduction; enhance and strengthen the local economy; maintain and create good quality local jobs; improve public health; and create resilient communities and infrastructure.
12. IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: Global warming of 1.5 C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty. To maximize the likelihood of restricting global heating to 1.5 C or less, global carbon emissions need to be reduced 45% by 2030, and 100% by 2050 (from 2010 levels). Global heating of above 1.5 C would put billions of people at risk of extreme heat, power loss, water scarcity and habitat degradation.
13. https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/97ee-DS-19-0150_TransformTO_Report_digital_final_reducedSize_June28update.pdf, p. 10.
14. Copenhagen has committed to achieve net zero emissions by 2025, The Hague by 2030, and Reykjavik by 2040.
15. <https://www.c40.org/researches/consumption-based-emissions>
16. ‘City of Toronto, Impacts of July 8, 2013 Storm Event on City’s Sewer and Stormwater System. <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/pw/bgrd/backgroundfile-61363.pdf>.
17. See <https://www.insurance-canada.ca/2019/04/16/intact-climate-centre-basement-flooding/>.
18. The eight principles in TransformTO are: advance social equity; improve affordability particularly for vulnerable populations; protect low-income residents; contribute to poverty reduction; enhance and strengthen the local economy; maintain and create good quality local jobs; improve public health; and create resilient communities and infrastructure.
19. “Better Transit Now: An Alternative Ridership Growth Strategy” (July 2019) by TTCriders, <https://www.ttcriders.ca/bettertransitnow/>.
20. City of Toronto: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement: “The City strives to apply an equity lens to its activities to identify and remove barriers and to support best practices in planning, budgeting, implementation and evaluation of its programs and services.” accessed at: <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/equity-diversity-inclusion/>
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23. For example, the Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, Poverty Reduction Strategy, Social Procurement Policy, Toronto Newcomer Strategy, Toronto Seniors Strategy, Toronto Indigenous Health Strategy, The City’s Eight Priority Calls to Actions from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Report, Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, Workforce Development Strategy, and the Community Benefits Framework.
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