

Deputation to Community Development and Recreation Committee

Presented by Kevin Wickham, Volunteer

St. Stephen's Community House

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Good morning. My name is Kevin Wickham and I volunteer at St. Stephen's Community House Drop-in. I am here today to speak on behalf of participants in St. Stephen's Community House programs; St. Stephen's is a multi-service community agency serving the Downtown West. We have had a lot of discussions about city service needs over the past month in our various program groups which include language classes, the Corner Drop-in, the Youth Arcade, and other programs.

Some of us participated in the on-line City Services Review, but for many of us it was too difficult to understand. The survey was unnecessarily long and cumbersome. There wasn't enough information about the services the city provides. Our participants also questioned why there was no opportunity in the survey to comment on services delivered by community agencies which receive city funding. Most participants had no access to computers and had little experience in filling out on-line forms.

So St. Stephen's held a series of workshops across all programs with enthusiastic participation by service users, to discuss the City Core Services Review. A staff person filled out the survey online after each group discussion, on behalf of that group.

The vast majority of people who participated said they do not want city services provided by the private sector. They are concerned profits will not go back to the city, and that private companies may cut services in the future in order to maintain their bottom line.

Most workshop participants, I've spoken with, understand that taxes will have to be raised, in order to keep city services. People also agreed that all city services and community services funded by the city are needed, and they do not want to see any further reductions in services. Some are willing to pay higher user fees, but many are living in dire poverty and cannot afford to pay more. Here are some of their current concerns:

- They were keen to see community services, like St. Stephen's, continue and expand because these services are of high quality. They want the City to continue providing grants for community services like these.
- Participants want city-run recreation services, and they want the fees to be eliminated for people with low incomes.
- They believe that the city should help pay for childcare centres and increase the number of childcare subsidies it provides to low-income parents.
- The city should expand its long-term care programs across Toronto area.
- The city's shelter system should be expanded and community-based services like the Corner Drop-in should continue to get support from the City.
- People want to see public libraries expanded and given more funding. The libraries are well used by people in our programs in all income brackets.
- People are especially concerned about TTC bus routes and fares - because they need TTC services to get to work, school, St. Stephen's and other programs that they and their families need.

Following are some quotes from our participants:

Parents said:

"We really want more affordable and free summer day camps and children's programs provided by city workers at recreation centres. We depend on these services as mothers in low-income families. We also find the library children's programs to be very important. The first six years are crucial to building healthy people. Invest in our children!"

Seniors said:

"We want well maintained parks and recreation centres with free programs, libraries, and more nursing home spaces and waiting lists should be reduced for nursing homes. We want property taxes frozen for seniors."

Youth said:

"The cuts that will happen will impact marginalized communities, drop-ins and community centres. There will be a ripple effect."

In summary, participants at St. Stephen's Community House want the Mayor and Councilors to immediately protect city services. We want you to keep in mind the needs of all City residents, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, as you make decisions about future budgetary priorities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.