

Report on the meeting with Councillor Christin Carmichael Greb , March 3, 2015, 2:00 p.m.

Voices members in attendance:

Paul Audley, St. Clement's Anglican Church

Ann Barrett, Eglinton St. George's United Church

Beth Baskin, Toronto Southeast Presbytery, United Church of Canada

Bruce Cameron, St. Timothy's Anglican Church

David Clemens, Eglinton St. George's United Church

Heather McPherson, Fairlawn Avenue United Church

John Ryerson, Fairlawn Avenue United Church

Kathryn Salisbury, Fairlawn Avenue United Church

Brian Wilker-Frey, Pastor, St. Ansgar Lutheran Church

Also present: Victoria Colussi, Administrative Assistant to the Councillor

Meeting agenda:

- 1. Introductions**
- 2. Our observations about poverty in the city and in ward 16**
- 3. Discussion of ways of reducing, and, ideally, eliminating poverty**
- 4. Discussion of the city's poverty reduction plan under development**
- 5. How can we help?**

After introductions, Kathy Salisbury presented some opening comments and information . (see appendix below)

The APT (Alliance For A Poverty Free Toronto) report "Hidden Epidemic" had not been seen by the councillor. It was recommended to her, and she was also given a copy of the Houselink report on financial issues.

<http://www.houselink.on.ca/wp-content/uploads//2015/01/Welcome-to-the-Financial-Mainstream.pdf>

At the close of the meeting we gave the councillor our "leave behind" summary of who we are, our concerns, and our requests for action. (see appendix below)

Appendix A: Agenda and opening remarks

Introduce myself and thank Councillor Greb for meeting with us.

1. Introductions

- a. Go around the table
- b. Explain who Voices is and that we are a growing network of faith communities concerned with the increasing poverty in our city.

2. Today's agenda:

- a. Why we are here and our observations of poverty in the city and ward 16
- b. Discussion about how we can reduce (ideally eliminate) poverty

- c. Hear the councillor's thoughts about how the city can reduce poverty and discuss the City's poverty reduction strategy
- d. How can we help you?

3. Our observations about poverty in the city and in ward 16

- a. Last week the United Way released a study on growing income inequality in Canada and cites that Toronto has the highest rate of increase in income inequality of all Canadian cities
- b. Ward 16: 10% of household incomes are \$20,000 or less. 41% of incomes are over \$125,000. (2010 census data). 40% rent, 60% own. Of those who rent, 41% spend more than 30% of their household income on shelter. (Canada Mortgage and Housing definition of affordability).
- c. None of us around this table lives in poverty, but that doesn't stop us from being concerned for our fellow citizens who do. Many of us have made friends who folks who live in low-income neighbourhoods through the work that we do with our churches. We are involved in food programs, food banks, drop-in support programs, rooming house visits etc. By hearing the stories of those who live in poverty it is impossible for us to turn our backs. We strongly believe that each one of us deserves to live with dignity.
- d. Traditionally, churches have been involved in what we would call downstream activities – that is charity – helping those in immediate need with such things as food, clothing and shelter. But the need continues to get bigger and bigger and we believe that the real solution lies in addressing the root causes of poverty. More and more, faith communities are engaging in upstream activities – that is working with government and business to address the root causes of poverty and press for social policy that levels the playing field as much as possible for all citizens to realize their potential. That's why we're here today.

4. Discussion of ways of reducing, and, ideally, eliminating poverty

- a. As we know, the city is currently engaged in a consultation process to identify poverty issues and possible solutions. You will be learning much from this, but we would like to take a few moments today to emphasize some key points:
 - i. Everything that Council discusses, do so through a poverty lens. Before passing any by-laws always ask, how will this impact those living in poverty? Will it help them? Will it make their situation worse?
 - ii. Affordable housing strategies such as inclusionary zoning, harmonize zoning bylaws to legalize rooming houses city-wide
 - iii. Employment and Income
 - 1. Include a Community Benefits Agreement as part of all new city infrastructure projects to ensure employment opportunities for racialized youth and adults.
 - 2. Increase city's fair wage benchmark for contracts and tenders to a living wage level.

- iv. Affordable transit that might include such things as lower fares for youth, seniors and low-income adults.
- v. Work with the province and federal governments on such things as transit and housing
- vi. Affordable childcare
- vii. Consider all revenue tools available to you, including various forms of taxation

5. **Your thoughts, and where you stand vis a vis the city's poverty reduction strategy?**

6. **How can we help?**

7. **Thank you**

Appendix B: the "Leave Behind"



**VOICES FOR A
JUST SOCIETY**

People of Faith
Working for Change

Councillor Christin Carmichael Greb, thanks for meeting with members of Voices for a Just Society www.voicesforajustsociety.ca David Clemens dbclemens@sympatico.ca will continue to be our contact with your office and we would be happy to be involved in further conversations with you.

We appreciate the time you gave us for conversation today and offer this document as a reminder of the topics we discussed and opportunities for further action. We particularly look forward to hearing you articulate your personal aspirations for our marvelous city.

What you and City Council need to do:

1. Look at everything through a poverty lens. How would your support or opposition to a particular action or direction lift people out of poverty? The system places people in poverty and systemic changes will enable everyone to have adequate income and personal dignity.

2. Attend Faith in the City – April 30th at City Hall – more details soon.

3. At a more specific level you and your colleagues can take actions in the areas of :
 - Employment and Income
 - 1) Include a Community Benefits Agreement as part of all new city infrastructure projects to ensure employment opportunities for racialized youth and adults.
 - 2) Increase city’s fair wage benchmark for contracts and tenders to a living wage level.
 - Affordable housing
 - 1) Build *some* new affordable housing units each year
 - 2) Harmonize zoning by-laws to legalize rooming houses city-wide
 - Affordable transit
 - 1) Find ways to make transit fares more accessible which might include freezing transit fares for adults and reducing fares for youth, seniors and low-income adults.

4. Vote for the City of Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy

5. Seriously look at revenue tools - Form a blue ribbon panel to review current municipal taxation policy (and potential new revenue tools) from a social equity perspective and make recommendations for fair and adequate new municipal tax policy.

6. Engage in dialogue with other levels of government – we will support you and your colleagues in doing this:
 - Work with provincial and federal governments to eliminate building repair backlog within 10 years.

 - Advocate for the province to reinstate funding for 50% of transit operating subsidy.

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Why are we engaged?

Our faith calls us to care for each other and to work systemically to change the systems that keep people poor and demoralized. In recent history faith communities have been the care givers through meal programs, stop-

gap shelters etc. However it was the faith communities that were instrumental in the original establishment of many of our social systems and safety net. Therefore as persons of faith we are morally opposed to seeing our neighbours live in substandard conditions and we are working with them and others for fundamental change.

What we are doing:

- Promoting consultations for the City of Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy and the completion of the online survey. Working with Alliance for a Poverty Free Toronto and others to improve the quality of life for fellow citizens.
- Supporting revenue tools by continuing to raise the conversation with our peers and taking part in any city led initiatives.
- Anything else that would help you to create a poverty-free Toronto including visibly supporting actions you take.

In the past we have:

- Promoted the first phase of Poverty Reduction Strategy Days of Dialogue and online survey
- Actively participated in the city led *Closing the Housing Gap* Campaign
<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=282b52cc66061410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>
- Attended both previous Faith in the City events
- Worked with a variety of faith communities and others on issues of jobs, income, housing, etc..

Present today are members of

- St. Ansgar Lutheran Church
- St. Clement's Anglican Church
- Eglinton St. George's United Church
- Fairlawn Avenue United Church
- St. Timothy's Anglican Church
- *The Social Justice Project* of Toronto Southeast Presbytery, United Church of Canada

Voices for a Just Society includes constituents from a number of other faith communities and is part of a growing number of faith communities who are working together to raise the income and dignity level of fellow residents of Ontario. We partner with a variety of organizations including ISARC: Faith Communities in Action Against Poverty www.isarc.ca , Multifaith Alliance to End Homelessness www.mfateh.ca , and Alliance for a Poverty Free Toronto <http://www.povertyfreeto.org/>

March 3, 2015