

The Case for Social and Community Infrastructure Investment: Toronto's Quiet Crisis

By Peter Clutterbuck

Research Associate, Centre for Urban and Community Studies
former Executive Director of the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto

Prepared for the Toronto People's Summit and submitted to the Toronto City Summit, June 2002

1. An overlooked crisis

The future of cities has become a major political debate in Canada. The focus is largely on the crisis in urban physical infrastructure, such as public transit, affordable housing, or roads and sewers. Cities are demanding expanded municipal powers and new revenue sources to meet pressing needs and increased responsibilities that cannot be sustained by property taxes alone.

One essential component of urban infrastructure has been neglected in this debate. Except for the issue of homelessness and affordable housing, there is little discussion of the social and community infrastructure of cities, such as public health, recreation, children's services, libraries, and the large network of City-funded non-profit agencies that provide community services.

Social and community infrastructure affects the lives of Toronto's residents in thousands of different ways every day. For example:

- community child care and family resource programs offer learning opportunities for children as well as support for working parents;
- language training and settlement programs help newcomers;
- recreation activities for youth contribute to the health and social well-being of participants;

- local health units provide important infant care instruction and guidance for new mothers;
- seniors' homes run by the City offer a comfortable retirement for the elderly;
- community programs reduce social isolation and provide essential health, education and social supports to individuals and families.

Social and community infrastructure is less conspicuous than physical infrastructure and is thus at a disadvantage in the debate on the future of our cities.

2. The funding question

"Big ticket" items may be addressed through joint funding programs, transfers from senior governments, or new tax sources, but where is the provision for ensuring strong social and community infrastructure? A debate on our civic future that fails to strengthen the City's social and community infrastructure will be incomplete and inadequate.

We must ask the following questions:

- Will new municipal financing arrangements provide strong social and community infrastructure in the City?
- Will senior governments recognize their responsibilities for supporting the City's social and community infrastructure in areas such as child care or public health)?

- Will senior government contributions to transit funding allow for the re-allocation of property tax to restore and enhance social and community infrastructure, or will the relief on the City's budget be absorbed as cost savings or converted into property tax reductions?

Unlike the TTC's capital budget requirements, no single dollar figure has been advanced as the target to ensure strong, stable, and high-quality social and community services. The City's social and community infrastructure is a web of citywide and locally delivered services and supports provided either directly by the city or in partnership with other public or non-profit community agencies, and therefore it is hard to estimate costs.

3. The struggle for stability

During the downloading of the 1990s, and especially since amalgamation, the social sector has struggled to hold its own during the annual city budget cycle in Toronto. City Council has favoured maintenance of "hard" services and protection services, like police and firefighting, along with a zero or minimal property tax increase. This approach has created an unrelenting pressure to find savings in the City's social and community service budget areas.

Not only are social services and standards eroding, but there is little opportunity for planning enhancements or expansions in social supports. Protection and preservation of what remains is the order of the day in the annual budget cycle. Any enhancement or expansion is usually proposed on a very limited basis. Social and community development are not City Council priorities.

4. What is required to restore stability?

It is time City Councillors paid attention to the state of the City's social and community infrastructure. It is time to establish some benchmarks for recovery from a decade of cutbacks and losses and to create a baseline

for future planning and development of the City's social and community capacity.

Tables 1 and 2 provide a very preliminary perspective on the minimal requirements for restoring stability to selected areas of social and community infrastructure in Toronto. The figures are neither definitive nor exhaustive, but indicate what might be required just to restore the social and community capacity of the City for future growth and social development.

These tables focus on the following six sectors:

Children's Services

These services include childcare, family resource programs, and social and recreational supports to children and families. This is the one area of City service in which a planning and development orientation has been maintained because of the official designation of a Children's Advocate and the establishment of a Children's and Youth Advisory Committee with both City Councillor and community membership.

Parks and Recreation

Parks and Recreation is especially important in a large City where many people depend on both recreational space and programming in lieu of access to cottages or commercial social-recreational opportunities.

Research shows that structured recreational programming provides tremendous social, health, and learning benefits to participants.

Public Health

Public health comes to public attention when regulatory issues such as restaurant ratings or smoking by-laws are debated. Less well-known are the important programs directed at vulnerable populations such as single parent and low-income families, youth, seniors, newcomers, and others.

The City's public health department sets critical health standards, monitors community practice, and provides both central and direct field support for com-

Budget wars

The social sector has struggled to hold its own during the annual city budget cycle in Toronto. City Council has favoured maintenance of "hard" services and protection services, like police and firefighting, along with a zero or minimal property tax increase.

Not only are social services and standards eroding, but there is little opportunity for planning enhancements or expansions in social supports. Protection and preservation of what remains is the order of the day in the annual budget.

munity health protection, health hazard elimination, and health risk prevention.

Public Libraries

Public libraries constitute one of the most important community institutions in the information age. Yet libraries are often taken for granted, and defended only when residents notice cutbacks in hours of operation, the unavailability of current publications, or poor upkeep and maintenance of facilities.

Along with community centres, parks, and local schools, libraries are part of a network of public spaces and community meeting places that are increasingly at risk for lack of resources.

Environmental Protection

Environmental protection highlights the important connection between the physical and social environments of urban life. While affordable public transit systems that increase rider usage and reduce automobile traffic have obvious environmental and energy benefits, many other City programs also contribute to clean air, water, and the development and use of green space.

In an extensive series of focus groups conducted for the City's Social Development Strategy in late 2000, the quality of the physical environment was one of the most frequently mentioned defining characteristics of a "supportive community."

Public Shelters

The need for public shelters is an indicator of Canada's failure to provide adequate levels of affordable housing. The resource needs of this service area would diminish in the long run if enough housing was created that is truly accessible to low-income families and individuals. However, in the short run, more public shelter beds and more decent shelter living conditions are desperately needed.

5. Building Community Capacity

Another three areas relate to the City's role in building community capacity by providing support to a wide network of community-based non-profit organizations.

Community Grants

The City provides funding to more than 900 programs and projects run by community-based, non-profit agencies across the City. A strong base of about 500 such agencies constitutes a vital network of both service provision and volunteer engagement. Participants in the Social Development Strategy focus groups in 2001 identified the stability and security of the community voluntary sector as a critically important condition for strong and supportive communities in Toronto.

Settlement Services

Given Toronto's growing diversity, the future vitality, social well-being, and economic health of the city will be determined to a large degree by efforts to counter the negative impacts of government downloading and restructuring on immigrant settlement. All levels of government must commit to improving the coordination, planning, and effectiveness of the settlement process, and work collaboratively with all stakeholders.

Civic Participation

Community capacity-building is more than just a matter of providing services and programs. Sustaining Toronto's status as a liveable city requires collective citizen action through neighbourhood associations and grassroots coalitions. Nurturing

such groups is part of building "community capacity," which the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration of the United Nations summit on social development defined as strengthening "the capacities and opportunities of all people, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable, to enhance their own economic and social

The importance of civic participation

Sustaining Toronto's status as a liveable city requires collective citizen action through neighbourhood associations and grassroots coalitions.

Nurturing such groups is part of building "community capacity," defined in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration of the United Nations summit on social development.

"["Community capacity" refers to] the capacities and opportunities of all people, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable, to enhance their own economic and social development, to establish and maintain organizations representing their interests and to be involved in the planning and implementation of government policies and programs by which they will be directly affected."

development, to establish and maintain organizations representing their interests and to be involved in the planning and implementation of government policies and programs by which they will be directly affected.”

6. The bottom line

Operating requirements

Table 1 shows that more than \$110 million of additional operating funding are needed to bring some degree of stability to selected areas of the City’s social infrastructure. The explanatory notes identify the costs of restoration and recovery for important services and programs and of essential improvements such as eliminating staff shortages.

Restoring and stabilizing municipal services and community capacity would provide the basis for planning, developing and costing out needs in all areas of health and social support. Planning for the long-term operational costs of strong social and community infrastructure should become as regular a practice as financial planning for public transit, roads, sewers, and other physical infrastructure.

If the City succeeds in establishing new financing arrangements with senior governments for assistance with physical infrastructure, the City will retain responsibility to provide for social and community infrastructure from its own resources. Clearly, if senior governments remove pressure on the City’s capital budget, the City could redirect property taxes previously committed to the capital budget (more than \$145 million in each of the last two years) to the operating needs of the City’s social and community capacity.

Capital requirements

Table 2 summarizes the capital needs of selected areas of social and community infrastructure. For child care, there is a precedent for provincial sharing of the cost of new facilities. Before 1995, the province covered 100% of these capital costs. Eliminating the current waiting list of 17,000 for subsidized child care would

require the construction of 242 new centres at a cost of about \$930,000 each over seven years.

Similarly, a ten-year \$112-million program to expand shelter beds would be cost-shared evenly with the province. Better still, an aggressive affordable housing program would lower the need for emergency shelter.

There is no similar recent precedent for cost-sharing with senior governments for community recreation centres and public libraries. City Councillors must make the case for senior government contributions to these facilities as part of any physical infrastructure assistance in direct funding or tax revenue. It is not acceptable that of five community recreation centres scheduled for construction, only one will start in 2002 (the remaining four have been deferred until 2006).

Finally, planning and financing for the creation of public space for municipal services should also take into consideration the community sector’s needs, as has been well-documented in a recent survey done jointly by the City and the United Way of Greater Toronto.

7. Time for a new approach

City Council and civic leaders must recognize social and community infrastructure as a priority that is as important to the quality of life in Toronto as physical infrastructure.

Resources to develop the City’s social capacities should be included in the current debate on the future of the City and new financing arrangements with senior governments. Discussions or negotiations with the federal and provincial governments that result in direct transfers, cost-sharing programs, or municipal access to new tax revenues should take into consideration the social infrastructure needs of cities.

In the absence of any new arrangements for the City’s social responsibilities, the City must commit its own resources to restoring and stabilizing acceptable standards of support in the service areas addressed in this document. Property tax revenue released from capital budget commitments by senior government funding for physical infrastructure could be used to support the social needs of Toronto’s residents.

Rethinking the meaning of “infrastructure”

City Council and civic leaders must recognize social and community infrastructure as a priority that is as important to the quality of life in Toronto as physical infrastructure. Resources to develop the City’s social capacities should be included in the current debate on the future of the City and new financing arrangements with senior governments.

TABLE 1

Summary of Current Operating Needs to Stabilize Selected Areas of the City's Social and Community Infrastructure

Service Areas	Total (\$M)	Prov'/I Fed. Share (\$M)*	City Share (\$M)	Commentary
Children's Services	\$ 49.0	39.1	9.9	About \$29 M would be one-time upgrades such as pay equity, playground equipment replacement, and upgrades. Another \$20 M would begin reducing the waiting list for subsidized child care to maintain current service levels. Eliminating the 17,000 subsidized childcare waiting list by 2010 would cost \$105 M, about \$16 M net to the City.
Parks & Recreation	26.2		26.2	This amount includes eliminating \$19.6 M in program user fees, implementing \$4.8 M in planned program expansions, and restoring \$1.8 M in cuts to children's programs.
Public Health	15.3	6.1	9.2	This amount is made up of more than \$11M in program cuts since 1998 plus \$4.1 M to eliminate staff shortages.
Public Libraries	5.6		5.6	\$2.1 M would adjust for needs in the resource collection budget; \$3.4 M would eliminate current staff shortages; another \$152 K would allow expansion of youth programs.
Environmental Protection	5.2	2.6	2.6	The amount would restore cuts to programs for healthy air and water, composting and recycling, planning and development for sustainable energy use and education programs.
Public Shelters	3.4	2.2	1.2	A City staff report projects this as the annual additional cost to expand shelter system by 2,473 beds over ten years. The full additional annual operating cost would be \$34 M in ten years (\$12.0 M net increase to the City).
Community Sector Capacity				
Program Grants	5.9		5.9	As an addition to the base community grants budget, \$5.9 M is a very conservative estimate of the requirement for achieving some measure of "program equity" across the City.
Stable core funding	TBD**			The \$5.9 M would not address the stable core funding needs of the agency network in order to continue partnering effectively with the City.
Community space	TBD			Planning is also needed to ensure accessible and affordable space for community programs and activities.
Settlement Services	TBD	100%		The City must take the lead in coordinating policy planning to support settlement with federal funding.
Civic Participation	TBD		100%	The City must cost out the expense of promoting ongoing active participation of communities in policy development process – and support this with clear supports for access and equity to ensure all community voices are involved.
TOTALS	\$ 110.6	50.0	60.6	

*There are good arguments for one or both senior governments to cost-share or provide other means such as tax revenue and for the City to use its own property tax base for other services.

**TBD = to be determined

TABLE 2

**Summary of Capital Needs in Selected Areas of Social Infrastructure,
7 to 10 years (facility repair and construction)**

Service Areas	Total (\$M)	Prov'/Fed. Share (\$M)	City Share (\$M)	Commentary
Children's Services	\$ 224.0	179.2	44.8	Based on eliminating the subsidized childcare waiting list over a seven-year period at 2,000 a year for an annual capital cost of \$32 M, resulting in 242 new facilities at an estimated \$930,00 each.
Public Shelter Beds	124.0	62.0	62.0	Based on expansion of facility capacity by 2,500 beds over ten years at an annual capital cost of \$12.4 M (\$6.2 M net annual capital cost to the City).
Parks & Recreation	71.6	35.8	35.8	Of five proposed City recreation centres in the current capital budget, construction will start on one in 2002. The remaining four have been deferred until 2006.
Public Libraries	21.2	10.6	10.6	This amount refers to the accumulated backlog in maintaining the existing libraries in a state of good repair and does not include construction of any new libraries.
Environment	9.2		9.2	The amount is for trucks for a major composting and recycling program deferred in the capital budget.
Public Health				Information not available.
Community Program & Activity Space	TBD			Accessible, no- or low-cost community space is essential for City-grant-funded community agencies. Renting space puts pressure on their limited resources, as reported in a recent survey on use of community space.
TOTALS	\$ 450.0	287.6	162.4	

Peter Clutterbuck works in a research and program development capacity with the Social Planning Network of Ontario, a network of 25 local social planning bodies across the province. He served as Executive Director with the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto and its successor organization, the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto from 1991 to 2000. He is a member of the steering committee of the Toronto Civic Action Network, sponsor of the People's Summit on Shaping Our Civic Future, June 24, 2002. *Contact:* tel 416-653-7947; fax 416-653-4532; p.clutterbuck@sympatico.ca

Acknowledgements: This bulletin was prepared with the research assistance of Matt Cooper, from the public administration program of Carleton University, and with the editorial assistance of Rob Howarth of Toronto Neighbourhood Centres. This research was made possible by a grant from the United Way of Greater Toronto.

Previous CUCS Research Bulletins

Designing a Metropolitan Region: The Lessons and Lost Opportunities of the Toronto Experience, by L.S. Bourne, #1, July 2001.

A Tale of Two Canadas: Homeowners Getting Richer, Renters Getting Poorer, 1984 and 1999, J.D. Hulchanski, #2, August 2001.

“We’re hired by the hospital, but we work for the community” Towards More Effective Hospital Involvement in Community Action, B. Poland *et al.*, #3, October 2001.

Thinking About Urban Inclusiveness, R. Stren, #4, October 2001.

One in Five...Housing as a Factor in the Admission of Children to Care, S. Chau, A.Fitzpatrick, D. Hulchanski, B. Leslie, D. Schatia, #5, November 2001.

Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital? B. Wellman, A. Quan Haase, J. Witte, K. Hampton, #6, December 2001.

Homeless “squeegee kids”: Food insecurity and daily survival, N. Dachner and V. Tarasuk, #7, May 2002.

The Centre for Urban and Community Studies promotes and disseminates multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on urban issues. The Centre was established in 1964 as a research unit of the School of Graduate Studies. The Centre’s activities are intended to contribute to scholarship on questions relating to the social and economic well-being of people who live and work in urban areas large and small, in Canada and around the world.

CUCS Research Bulletins present a summary of the findings and analysis of the work of researchers associated with the Centre. The aim is to disseminate policy relevant findings to a broad audience. The views and interpretations offered by the author(s) do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre or the University. The contents of this Bulletin may be reprinted or distributed, including on the Internet, without permission provided it is not offered for sale, the content is not altered, and the source is properly credited.

General Editors: J.D. Hulchanski, L.S. Bourne, and E. Fong

Centre for Urban and Community Studies
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

455 Spadina Ave, 4th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2G8; tel 416 978-2072; fax 416 978-7162

urban.centre@utoronto.ca www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca

ISBN 0-7727-1415-0 © Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto 2002