

ACTION PLAN FOR THE 2023 TORONTO MAYORAL BY-ELECTION

APRIL 7, 2023



This mayoral by-election is an unprecedented opportunity for labour and Torontonians to make our mark on who and how Toronto is governed, through 2026 and beyond. For decades, Labour Council has taken an organized and coordinated approach to supporting the election of progressive candidates in general and by-elections for mayoral, councillor, and trustee races across Toronto and York Region. As one of the oldest democratic, worker-led institutions not only in Toronto but Canada-wide, we are uniquely positioned.

Our track record is strong: in the 2022 general election, Labour Council backed nine successful councillors, ten successful TDSB trustees, and two successful TCDSB trustees. Between elections, working with our affiliates and community partners, we have staved off ongoing efforts to privatize public services and upload the TTC to the province, and we've won important campaigns like community benefits agreements. We achieve these wins by electing the right people and by working with councillors and, when possible, with the mayor. Further, our process has grown the collective capacity of labour to continue this good work in our workplaces and our communities.

The stakes are extremely high. The next mayor of Toronto must be willing to confront the challenges of our time—racial, social, economic, and climate injustices—with solutions that tackle these challenges from the root. The next mayor will be entrusted with unprecedented power and democratic lightning rods inherent in the new “strong-mayor” powers, as well as a too-small city council. They must be someone who has deep respect for local democracy.

We are in an affordability crisis. The next mayor must bring big ideas to build truly affordable housing, tackle homelessness, fight housing discrimination, and support last-resort measures like expanding shelter services to fit the need while also addressing the root causes of social ills. They must find a path forward to pay for the city we need—and be willing to fight for those solutions, including getting intergovernmental help to close the more than \$1.2 billion gap in the 2023 budget.

More than half the people living in Toronto are racialized. Many arrived in Toronto from somewhere else. The next Mayor must advance policies and programs that make the City work for all residents, regardless of race, religion, ethnic background, or how long they have been here.

We are also in a climate crisis. A March 2023 report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that there is a more than 50% chance that global temperature rise will reach or surpass 1.5 °C between 2021 and 2040. It is critical that Toronto continues to be committed to drastically and immediately reducing CO2 emissions—which means appropriately resourcing TransformTO efforts and working with all stakeholders, including and especially workers, to implement effective solutions.

Torontonians are clear on what they want from the city: a safe, clean, public realm; robust social and emotional mental health supports; TTC service that is frequent, reliable, and affordable; accessible parks and recreation services; and a city that enables everyone to prosper. Working people want public services, publicly delivered; we want to be safe in our communities, on our way to work, and on the job. We need a mayor who understands that this can only be achieved by funding the housing, economic, mental health, and social supports to address the root causes of crime, and who commits to reverse the pattern of over-policing historically poor, racialized, and working-class communities. And, we want our government to be a model employer and a proponent of good jobs. In short: Torontonians want value for their money, and they want a livable city for all.

We have an opportunity to elect someone who cannot only work for working people and their families, but who will work with us, as well. The next mayor must have demonstrated respect for labour and for collective bargaining. They must have a deep understanding of the harm that austerity measures have done to our city, and a plan for reversing that damage.

Finally, Toronto needs a leader who knows how to get things done in the political arena. The mayor must work across Council to build consensus around policies and big ideas. They must know how to work within the bureaucracy to get things done. They need to lobby the province and the federal government for support. And, when push comes to shove, they need to be able to stand their ground against bullies like Doug Ford.

The very unexpected nature of this by-election, just half a year after the general election, has presented a challenge for identifying and building prepared mayoral candidates. With dozens of interested politicians from across the political spectrum eyeing or planning to run, Labour Council will assess candidates who show promise as progressive, pro-labour leaders, as potentially strong campaigns emerge.

A number of factors may significantly help or hinder us in creating a progressive mayoral win:

- There is only one seat city-wide at play in this election, and it is the most powerful in the city. City-wide recognition and profile will be powerful, as will experience on Council and deep knowledge of the issues. Campaigns need to be strategic, well-funded and highly organized to create movement in a short and unscheduled election environment where there are no ward races to play a supporting role.
- As we experienced in 2018 with Bill 5, and since then with the pandemic, we cannot rule out the possibility of major disruptions.
- Progress Toronto is a key ally on municipal issues and organizing and has become an established city-wide force through 5 years of on-the-ground capacity building. However, our organizations have separate endorsement processes and factors.
- The Ford government will be closely scrutinizing the projected and final outcome of this election.

All of these factors will present opportunities and challenges for any candidate in this by-election.

STRATEGIC GOALS

- To solidify the election of a pro-worker and pro-labour candidate who shares our values and aspirations. Who will be accountable to labour, who respects collective agreements and will champion good jobs; who wants to keep services public, and who will fight for and deliver a livable city. Who recognizes the danger of the strong-mayor power and would use it responsibly. Who would take action to reverse the damage done to our city by over a dozen years of conservative mayors and decades of austerity. Who recognizes that the status quo is unacceptable and will work collectively to rebuild it.
- To strengthen the labour movement in Toronto through continued collaboration as we fight for the interests of all working people and hold Toronto City Council accountable.
- To increase labour's presence in the election process and build organizational capacity around political bargaining.

ROAD TO ACHIEVING GOALS

- Educating and activating union members to support and vote for a pro-labour candidate
- Identify and recruit strong progressive organizers who can build capacity for expanding our reach in 2026
- Identify and provide tools to skilled campaign workers from diverse communities.

GAME PLAN

- Assess what is happening in campaigns and on the ground.
- Conduct interviews with candidates seeking labour's endorsement.
- Negotiate with endorsement-seeking candidates for a deal that includes commitments to labour during the campaign and after
- Deliver a messaging campaign centered on key issues that are of interest to working people. Consider community-specific messaging and outreach.
- Work with affiliates, council allies, key political staff and individuals, and like-minded organizations such as TTCriders, Progress Toronto, Toronto Environmental Alliance, Diverse Workers Networks, and others to push forward key messages and issues.
- Develop a training program to build skills and confidence of workers to engage in this and future elections, to be delivered this spring through various means.
- Prepare candidate information and engagement tools for affiliates to share with their members based on a postal code/ward breakdown.