



Issues of the Seniors' Mayoral Candidates Forum - October 1, 2018

What issues would have been addressed at the Forum?

Seniors had identified several critical issues for discussion:

- **The City's obligations to seniors:** Municipalities control or strongly influence many critical services needed for seniors to age safely at home and in their communities. We wanted to know their thoughts on the City's obligations to seniors and how they would ensure that these obligations are met by the City. We also wanted to know their priorities for action, if elected.
- **Affordable housing.** Toronto's crisis in affordable housing for seniors as well as people with disabilities is long-standing. Affordable housing is a priority for seniors. We wanted to know what specifically the candidates would do to address the crisis.
- **Commitment to the Toronto Seniors Strategy:** Toronto's seniors have worked long and hard on developing a Toronto Seniors Strategy. We wanted to know how the candidates will ensure that the recommendations of the Toronto Seniors Strategy are implemented in the next Council term, and how they will incorporate a "*Seniors' Lens*" into Council decision-making.
- **Accessible transportation:** Accessible transportation is also critical need across the City; it is fundamental to the City's Age Friendly status. We wanted to know specifically how the candidates would improve financial and physical accessibility to transportation services for seniors across Toronto.

What role do municipalities play in providing supports to seniors?

Too many people do not know that municipalities control or strongly influence a wide range of services needed to support seniors in our homes and communities, including:

- Affordable housing and safe and healthy neighbourhoods;
- Community support services, such as meals (Meals on Wheels™, wheels-to-meals, communal meals), sheltered or assisted housing services, adult day services, homemaking, and home maintenance;
- Public and community health, healthy ageing, and wellbeing;
- Transportation and mobility, including infrastructure, such as public transit, road design, and cross-walks and sidewalks (all safety concerns), as well as walkability of neighbourhoods and access to public spaces and facilities;
- Emergency health services (for example, ambulance services);
- Recreation and leisure, including local libraries, community recreation centres and parks, and programmes for active living and social connectedness;
- Settlement services (for recent immigrants);
- Public information and education about, for example, access to local services, safety, ageism, and elder abuse.

Funding for some of these services (for example, public health, housing, and transportation) comes from both provincial and municipal governments. In addition, some municipalities may fund some services solely from their own resources – but only if the councillors consider them to be local priorities.

What is the priority issue for seniors?

Affordable and accessible housing.

- An increasing proportion of seniors lack sufficient income to meet basic living needs. Single seniors and women are particularly vulnerable due to poverty.
- As communities redevelop and replace existing housing stocks, housing costs increase and there is a shortage of affordable and accessible units, especially rental units. Many seniors cannot afford the new housing costs and lack alternatives.
- Municipal governments control the types, number, and location of housing units built in their communities as redevelopment occurs. They have several tools to do so, including their land-use plans and by-laws, which determine how and where growth will occur, use of inclusionary by-laws to require developers to build affordable and accessible units, and enforcement of accessibility requirements.
- We encourage everyone to demand that municipal councillors address the issue of affordable and accessible housing.

What about community support services?

- Today's seniors know that residential facilities are not likely to be available to most of us until we become truly vulnerable due to ill health or physical limitations.
- In the meantime, some of us will need supportive services to help us as we age at home and in our communities. However, too often, access to community support services depends on one's postal code.
- Community support services range from intensive in-home personal care to assistance with meals, meal delivery or communal meals, medication assistance, personal hygiene, light housekeeping and home maintenance, transportation services, counselling and assistance, and adult day programmes that offer activities such as art, gentle exercise, and various social events, and respite for caregivers.
- Municipalities play a significant role in the provision of community support services.
- It is important that municipal decision makers continue to support and expand accessibility to community support services.

What about accessible, affordable transportation?

- Accessible transportation is crucial for minimizing social isolation, maintaining connections with the community, increasing access to health promotion and social programmes, and improving access to medical services.
- However, it continues to be a significant challenge for an increasing number of older adults, especially those who lack access to private cars; need to use mobility aids, such as wheelchairs or walkers; or travel with a companion or attendant.
- Many seeking transportation alternatives find that they are often scarce, inaccessible, inconvenient, and, for some, unaffordable
- Municipal decision-makers need to address this issue as a priority.

RESOURCES:

- Care Watch: <https://carewatchontario.com/elections-2018/municipal-toronto-election-2018/>
- Social Planning Toronto: https://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/municipal_election_2018
- Commitment TO Community: <https://www.commitmentto.com/>