

January 19, 2021

**THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL**

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Social and Ecological Justice Commission
Tuesday, January 19, 2021**

The Social and Ecological Justice Commission of Shining Waters Regional Council met on January 19, 2021 by video conference. The meeting began at 1:00 p.m.

Members Present

Susan Eagle (Chairperson), Lois Brown, Tina Conlon, Elizabeth Cunningham, Donna Lang, Alana Martin, Moon-Ja Park, Eleanor Scarlett, Cameron Watts

Staff: Bri-anne Swan, Kim Uyede-Kai, Jeffrey Dale

Guests: Brandon Stiles, Betty Lou McNabb, Dave Gordon

Welcome, check-in and prayer

The chairperson welcomed everyone. Cameron Watts opened with prayer, gave an acknowledgement of the land, and acknowledged our commitment to being a safe place for all people to gather and participate in our Region.

The chairperson constituted the meeting in the name of Jesus Christ.

Guest Speaker: Brandon Stiles re: Upper York Sewage Solution

Brandon Stiles, Environmental Coordinator from Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, gave background and an update on the Upper York Sewage Solution (UYSS) in York Region. Brandon was asked to take on leading the opposition to the UYSS project, which was conceived in order to service population growth in Newmarket, East Gwillimbury, Aurora and upper York Region. The UYSS was proposed as a leading-edge sewage plan with benefits to Lake Simcoe (e.g. lowering phosphorus). However, Georgina Island was never initially invited to the discussion. Georgina Island considers the current environmental assessment to be outdated. It was only through the media that Georgina Island found out that the province has asked York Region to revisit a Lake Ontario option. They were never formally notified. Georgina Island is sending correspondence to get more information about a Lake Ontario option. There has been no consultation on how this affects Georgina Island. Anishinabeg territory extends to Lake Ontario. Currently, there is work being done on giving Lake Simcoe individual status.

There were questions about the current health of Lake Simcoe. Some of the conservation efforts in the past have worked. A number of groups have participated in conservation efforts around the health of the lake. e.g. It had been a long time since Lake Simcoe had eagles. They are now coming back.

What do we do next? Brandon says there is no one answer. Best thing to do is stay informed. There was a petition to oppose the UYSS which received over 35,000 signatures which did get the attention of the government. Georgina Island may opt to do something like that again.

The Commission thanked Brandon Stiles for joining them.

Guest Speaker: Jeffrey Dale, Minister for Faith Formation, Youth and Young Adults

Jeffrey gave an update on his work advocating for safe consumption sites, especially within the Barrie area. He described the opioid and toxic drug crises we find ourselves within, giving a brief overview of The United Church of Canada's policy from the 1980s through today. Out of a proposal from British Columbia Conference to GC43, Jeffrey has been working with General Council to create a three-part conversation for the wider United Church:

1. Harm reduction and what is The United Church of Canada's involvement
2. A theology of harm reduction
3. Why it matters to decriminalize illicit substances for personal use

These conversations will be hosted by United-in-Learning, but they would like to partner with Shining Waters Regional Council. There is no cost to Shining Waters.

MOTION by Tina Conlon/Eleanor Scarlett that Shining Waters Regional Council co-sponsor a three-part conversation around substance use and safe consumption sites, in partnership with General Council/United-in-Learning.

MOTION

CARRIED

Agenda

MOTION by Cameron Watts/Moon-Ja Park that the agenda be approved as circulated

MOTION

CARRIED

Minutes

MOTION by Elizabeth Cunningham / Donna Lang that the Minutes of the meeting of the Shining Waters Social and Ecological Justice Commission held December 8, 2020 be adopted as circulated.

MOTION

CARRIED

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Business Arising

Christian University Letter

Bri-anne Swan has written a letter outlining concerns about legislation being passed allowing Canada Christian College to grant degrees in arts and sciences, particularly as this legislation passed before the proper assessment and accreditation process had been completed. (attached as Appendix A)

MOTION by Moon-Ja / Lois Brown that Shining Waters Regional Council send a letter to the Government of Ontario in opposition to Canada Christian College being granted university status.

MOTION

CARRIED

United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel (UNJPPI) - request from Brian McIntosh

UNJPPI is looking to create a more formalized relationship with the Social and Ecological Commission and the Regional Council.

There was recognition that this is a group that's already gathering and working together.

The Palestine/Israel subgroup will connect with UNJPPI to clarify questions around their ask for funding, reporting, staff support and further explore what a relationship might look like.

Reports back from sub-committees

Anti-Racism

Have not yet met.

There was recognition that February is Black History Month and there is a need to highlight the work that Black Canadians have done.

Poverty/Income Inequality

Have not yet met.

Guaranteed Livable Income: Susan Eagle has been part of two conversations. One was with the national UCC network, identifying smaller networks of people to work on a strategy re: guaranteed livable income. The second was a senate poverty gathering.

Correspondence

Letter to the City of Toronto

A joint letter with dozens of Toronto community partners was written and sent to Toronto City Council on January 15th in anticipation of Toronto City Budget talks. (Appendix B)

There was discussion about the communication streams in Shining Waters Regional Council, and that it is not easy to send out an email exclusively to ministers and communities of faith within the City of Toronto. Currently, lists are divided into North and South of Hwy 407. Bri-anne Swan, along with Susie Henderson, has started on a list of media for the Regional Council.

There needs to be some discussion about when and how Regional communication channels are utilized, particularly for calls to action originating from outside the church.

Cameron Watts and Susan Eagle will have a conversation about communication.

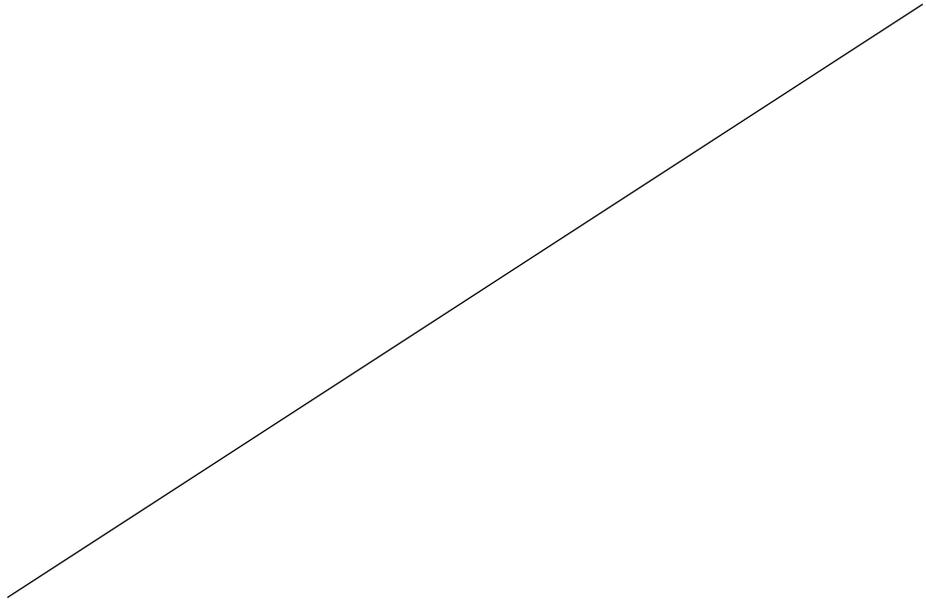
MOTION by Tina Conlon/Alana Martin that the Open Letter to the City of Toronto be distributed to communities of faith south of Hwy 407 encouraging them to contact their local councillors in support of the open letter.

MOTION

CARRIED

Closing – The meeting closed with prayer.

Next Meeting: February 16, 2021, 1 p.m.



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Appendix A

by email only: ross.romano@pc.ola.org

Honourable Ross Romano, MP
Minister of Colleges and Universities
Ministry of Colleges and Universities
5th Floor, 438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Dear Sir;

On behalf of Shining Waters Regional Council, I am writing to express our dismay and disappointment that your government has passed legislation making it possible for Canada Christian College to be granted university status with the ability to award degrees in arts and sciences.

Charles McVety, president of Canada Christian College, is well known for his Islamophobic, homophobic and transphobic comments — views that are also espoused by the College. As he is a close ally to Premier Ford, we are additionally concerned that the government is granting political favours and disregarding the college and its founder's troubling record of advocating for discrimination. We are not only concerned with the proposal that McVety's College secure University status in Ontario, but we are also deeply concerned about the undemocratic process utilized by your government to fast track Mr. McVety and Canada Christian College's request for degree-granting status. The proposal for re-designating the name change for the College into a University was buried in Omnibus Bill 213, *Better for People, Smarter for Business Act*. The very fact that this bill was carried before Canada Christian College had even completed the process of applying for re-designation is both alarming and undemocratic.

Shining Waters Regional Council is one of 16 administrative groupings within The United Church of Canada, with approximately 170 congregations spanning an area from the shores of Lake Ontario to northern Muskoka. We come from a tradition that understands God's deep love and affirmation for those of us within queer communities, as well as our neighbours who belong to traditions outside the Christian faith. It is heartbreaking to watch this government cater to the whims of hatred and exclusion, all the while not even following its own established protocols.

Yours truly,



David Leyton-Brown, President
Shining Waters Regional Council

c.c. The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario (doug.ford@pc.ola.org)

Open Letter to Toronto City Council

January 15, 2021

It's 2021. Toronto's budget must tackle inequality.

This is no time for business as usual at City Hall.

As Mayor John Tory and Councillors ponder the next municipal budget, our city's decision-makers need to be brave, and bold.

The draft 2021 budget presented yesterday fails to respond to the dire emergency impacting communities across our city.

Since last March, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed our city to us as never before. In the shadows of gleaming office towers, we see tent cities. In the midst of incredible wealth and comfort, we see poverty and distress.

Inequality and systemic racism are defining our city. We can no longer let this continue.

So much is at stake for so many community members: For persons with disabilities. For members of Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities. For women. For youth. For seniors. For essential workers and for those who have lost jobs. For all who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Our city faces many challenges, and the 2021 budget is a unique opportunity to tackle them as part of the pandemic rebuild. With insight, compassion, and energy, we can make the changes we've needed for so long. We propose that the mayor and council do three things in their budget deliberations:

- **First**, focus on inequality. Council must identify new spending to tackle the inequality crisis, and make sure the scale of investment matches the scale of the problem.
- **Second**, focus and move resources to where they are needed most. This is especially important with regard to community-led alternatives to policing that will make life safer for persons with disabilities, Black, Indigenous, and racialized community members, the LGBTQ2S+ community, people experiencing gender-based violence, and people with lived experience of mental health issues.
- **Third**, develop a budget based on what our community needs during this crisis. Some voices in the budget debate will demand that we ignore great suffering in order to balance the budget. Instead, we urge you to listen to residents who are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and ongoing inequities. We encourage you to make the needed investments and balance the budget through "assumed revenues" from the provincial and federal governments, even if those revenues are not yet committed.

We'd like to draw attention to the [ten principles for a bold, green, and just Toronto](#), which were communicated to Council in April 2020 (summarized in the Appendix). Thousands

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of residents and organizations took part in the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild's (TORR) process to create a vision for truly building back better in Toronto. The 2021 budget summary, released today, all but ignores the vision articulated by communities and residents through this work. We ask Council to try again to better align the budget with this vision.

As part of this work, we also urge the City to three lenses to guide the budget decisions:

- Equity – with an intersectional perspective – race, gender, disability, economic/poverty, age
- Indigenous self-determination – services developed by and for Indigenous people are a critical component, instead of simply providing equitable access to colonial systems
- Climate – an existential threat is posed by the climate emergency

As the pandemic grinds on, our Mayor and Councillors must bring their most courageous selves to the budget table. This is no time for half measures or mere good intentions.

Governments at all levels have recognized the need for exceptional measures during the pandemic. In December 2020, the federal and provincial governments funnelled an additional \$1.2 billion to the city to help address pandemic-related shelter and transit costs. That support helped avert a financial crisis. Our provincial and federal governments know that supporting municipal systems and services is key to protecting the health and well-being of Canadians. City decision-makers must continue to insist that higher orders of government, with the revenue streams to support our city, provide the necessary funding to fill operating and capital gaps and enhance investments.

City council has relied on assumed revenues to balance the books in the past. On two occasions, when confronted with extraordinary costs associated with refugee settlement supports, Council passed a balanced operating budget that assumed it would get \$45 million in 2019 and \$77 million in 2020 from the federal government – funds that had not yet been approved. The TTC's 2021 budget already assumes funding from other levels of government will cover their extraordinary pandemic-related costs. Council needs to be bolder in assuming revenues for vital services and its negotiating position and should address shortfalls by drawing down on its under-resourced capital budget.

Council must also commit to expand programs and redesign systems at the scale needed to start to address the racial disparities of the pandemic, the death toll of seniors in long-term care and, the lack of supports for persons with disabilities and people on fixed incomes, and the climate emergency. Given years of chronic under-investment in community infrastructure and social supports, these needs are large and include:

- Civilian crisis response programs to replace our expensive and too-often-harmful policing responses to people experiencing mental health crises. Investing \$150 million in safe beds, consumer/survivor initiatives, and other crisis services could move us quickly toward community-led alternatives.
- Over-policing of Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth must end. For \$65 million, the City could double the number of youth hubs and youth outreach workers and also provide peer mediation and alternative conflict-resolution

supports in all Toronto secondary schools. Such peer-led and community-led supports would work better and cost less than what the city does now.

- Addressing homelessness through policing is not working. For \$100 million, we could significantly expand homeless outreach, drop-ins, and safe consumption sites, and help more homeless Torontonians make the transition to supportive and affordable housing.
- Gender-based violence has increased during the pandemic. For \$25 million we could expand programs to support survivors and fund transformative justice to prevent future violence.
- The \$860 million in support that the City is assuming from the provincial and federal governments in 2021 will contribute to important transit, road, housing, and environmental projects (creating jobs and economic spinoffs, when work is safe to proceed). However, that level of support is not enough to support investments in services, programs and infrastructure to address the urgent, unmet health and survival needs of residents during the pandemic and to begin the planned recovery.
- The threat of climate change is not abating: a key learning from the current pandemic is that there is an unacceptably high human cost to inadequate preparation for crises (health or climate-related). Progress on Toronto's Climate Emergency commitments were largely delayed in 2020, and the proposed 2021 budget for the lead Climate department - Environment and Energy Division - is \$6M (or 33%) below the previously projected spending level. We must not lose another year in tackling the climate crisis. Effective and equitable climate action can protect residents, generate benefits for communities, and create good green jobs.
- The child care crisis must be addressed. [The City of Toronto Licensed Child Care Growth Strategy](#) needs to continue, and be modernized and expanded to provide the benchmarks, costs, and direction for new funding. The Safe Restart funding provided by the federal government was meant to sustain non-profit child care programs, however, the City needs to provide further funding dedicated to operating costs; increase affordability for families; decent work/wages for Early Childhood Educators; expand inclusion for all young children; and expand non-profit child care programs. [27 child care centres have permanently closed since the initial mandated closures in March, 2020](#). 40 child care centres remain closed with no known reopen date. Without significant funding from the City, and bold advocacy from the City to the provincial government, child care centres will continue to close permanently.
- If other orders of government do not provide appropriate funding to address the budget shortfall, the City plans to gut the capital plan for essential infrastructure. This will set the city back a decade or more and reduce the employment and economic benefits from needed infrastructure projects. Council needs to immediately take that option off the table.

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Looking ahead, Toronto City Council must continue to advocate for funding from other levels of government. However, in addition, Council must not hesitate to raise additional revenues in ways that push back against inequality.

Recovering from COVID-19 and building back better calls for a bold vision and must include major, transformative investments. It is time to raise our expectations for our city's budget.

Toronto depends on it.

Signed,

Labour Community Services
East Scarborough Storefront
North York Community House
Centre for Connected Communities
Toronto & York Region Labour Council
Good Jobs for All Coalition
Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
TTC Riders
Parkdale Activity – Recreation Centre
Toronto Seniors' Forum
Shelter & Housing Justice Network
Health Providers Against Poverty
Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC)
Open Policy Ontario
Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services
Faith in the City
Findhelp | 211 Central
West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre
Times Change Women's Employment Service
YWCA Toronto
Working Women Community Centre
Scadding Court Community Centre
Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre
Lady Ballers Camp
FCJ Refugee Centre
Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic
Margaret's Housing and Community Support Services
Access Alliance Multicultural Health & Community Services
North York Women's Shelter
Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC)
Syme Woolner Neighbourhood and Family Centre
Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT)
Evelyn Fox - Mother of Kiesingar Gunn, Founder of Communities for Zero Violence
Afghan Women's Organization Refugee and Immigrant Services
South Asian Women's Centre
Redwood Shelter
Toronto Community for Better Child Care
GTA Disability Coalition
Social Planning Toronto

Toronto350
Black Legal Action Centre
The Windsor Women Working With Immigrant Women
The Centre for Independent Living in Toronto
North York Community House
KCWA Family and Social Services
Louis March - Zero Gun Violence Movement
Rexdale Women's Centre
The Neighbourhood Group
Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA)

Appendix: 10 Recommended Principles for a bold, green, and just recovery for Toronto:

1. For best results, ensure the recovery and rebuilding process is transparent and community-led
2. Make evidence-based decisions, informed by disaggregated race-based and sociodemographic data collection
3. Advocate immediately and powerfully to secure a *New Deal* for Toronto from our Federal and Provincial Governments
4. Fast-track and improve Toronto's existing strategies, plans, and commitments in Toronto's recovery and rebuilding plans, in order to build a more equitable, healthy and climate-resilient city
5. Invest in, protect, and centre workers in recovery and rebuilding plans
6. Prioritize low-carbon infrastructure, social procurement, and equitable local job creation in recovery and rebuilding
7. Invest in public and community ownership of land and housing to ensure everyone is permanently housed, local food production is increased, and jobs are created
8. Support and sustain the community infrastructure that has developed in response to COVID-19 for ongoing response and recovery work
9. Encourage and prioritize community support and discontinue programs that increase surveillance and harm social cohesion and solidarity
10. Make permanent and expand the public supports and services that have been put in place to respond to this pandemic, rather than cutting services