



Making Voices Count works with city decision makers to create a city for all. It is driven by residents, the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres, City for All Women Initiative, and community partners

A 2022 City of Ottawa Budget for All: Community Asks and Background Document

November 2021

Every year we advocate for budget priorities that reflect the needs of community members and which, if followed, would increase equity for those who are marginalized in our City, including women and gender diverse individuals, disabled individuals, newcomers to Canada, Indigenous and Black people and people of colour, and those living on low incomes.

2022 Budget Asks from Making Voices Count

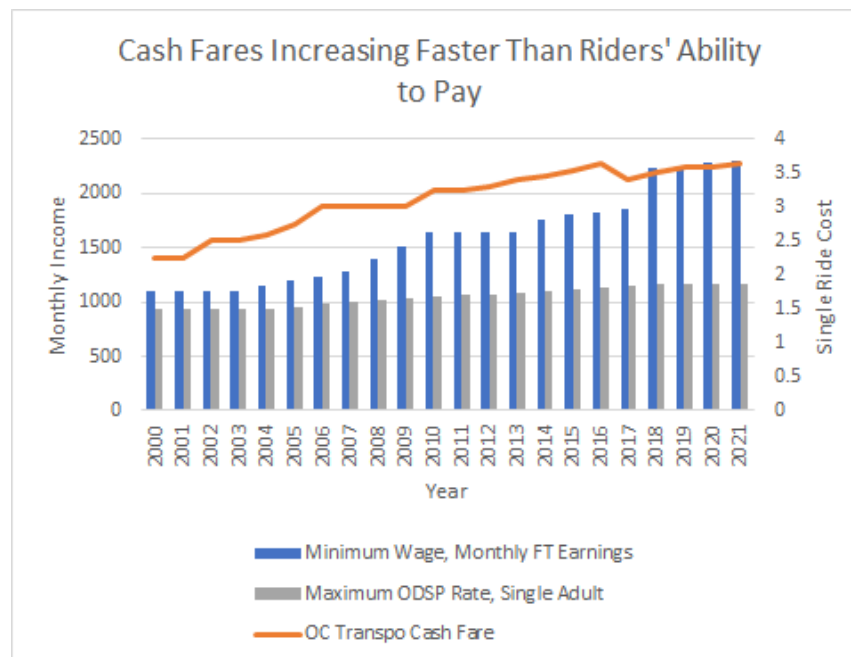
The City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) and the community members of Making Voices Count (MVC) are asking Ottawa City Council to:

1. Provide free OC Transpo and Para Transpo service to residents receiving income from Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).
2. Stop the planned 2.5% fare increase on OC Transpo and ParaTranspo due to the extremely high costs of transit and in light of the ongoing problems with Ottawa's LRT system.
3. Make affordable housing a key priority in the municipal budget by investing \$38.5 million dollars into deeply affordable housing and supportive housing to address the City's housing and homelessness emergency, by reducing the housing waitlist and reducing the number of families and individuals seeking emergency shelter.

Provide free OC Transpo and Para Transpo service to Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients

Background: OW and ODSP recipients spend a large portion of their monthly income on transit fares.

- Recipients of social assistance should not have to pay for transit. Even with reduced fares, ODSP and OW recipients struggle to pay for fares and often have to choose between paying for transit or other vital necessities like groceries or rent. At times, important health appointments and educational and employment opportunities are missed because of the burden of transit fares. Eliminating public transit fares for these individuals would instead increase accessibility to basic and vital services, improving their quality of life and offer better access to the city. This means better access to not only necessary appointments or employment opportunities, but also for leisure. Access to equitable and affordable transportation is a right that everyone in Ottawa should be able to enjoy without having to think about missing an opportunity, or putting food on the table. Increased access to mobility options leads to more opportunities for a better life, leading to healthier communities overall.
- **Need for this ask:** The Community Pass, which costs \$43.25 per month, asks ODSP recipients to pay 3.6% of their \$1,169 monthly income to take public transit. An OW recipient who qualifies for an EquiPass, pays \$58.25, or 8% of their \$733 monthly income. As seen in the chart below, transit fares have continued to increase while ODSP income rates have increased minimally since 2000. Additionally, minimum wage has not increased proportionally to fare increases. This means that low-income earners pay more for fares, unjustly.



- **Estimated loss for OC Transpo:** we estimate the loss to only be \$14 - \$15 million per year: \$8M from the Community Pass, \$2M from Equipass, and approximately \$5-6M from Cash/Tickets.
 - The Community Pass generates \$8M in revenue for OC Transpo, representing 4% of total fare revenues (\$200M).
 - Some revenue would be lost from the Equipass, but this pass only represents around 1% of Fare Revenue in total or \$2M. The percentage of this that comes from OW recipients is unknown. But given the cost of the Equipass as a percentage of OW income, it is likely to be very small.
 - It is possible that OC Transpo would also lose any cash or ticket revenue from OW and ODSP recipients who do not purchase passes. Cash/Tickets are 15% of Fare Revenue or \$30 M. The percentage coming from OW and ODSP recipients is unknown. But an estimate of \$ 5 – 6 M seems reasonable.
 - The estimated losses to OC Transpo revenue show that providing free transit for Ottawa residents that depend on public transportation every day and do not have alternative mobility options would make a negligible difference to OC Transpo revenue and would be extremely beneficial to our low-income neighbors.
 - Further, when lower income groups have improved access and mobility, it generates savings on government services and support programs. Making transit accessible benefits everyone.

Stop the planned 2.5% fare increase on OC Transpo and ParaTranspo

Background: Ottawa's transit fares are already costly and an increase in fares is unjust in light of the ongoing problems with the LRT system

- Ottawa residents already pay some of the highest fees in North America for public transit service. Not everyone who lives on a low income can access discounted passes, and many of the working poor are paying a significant amount of money in order to use public transit.
- In addition, transit service is inefficient and disproportionately affects those who rely on public transit. Those that do not have other options for transportation and struggle to pay high transit fees should not be burdened with paying higher fees.
- Affordable transit leads to increased ridership, a goal the City of Ottawa has outlined in the draft 2022 budget. Instead of allocating \$650,000 to increasing ridership, these funds can go to the OC Transpo and ParaTranspo budgets instead of raising fares.
- More transit riders also helps reduce harmful effects to the environment.
- Access to equitable and affordable transportation is a right that everyone in Ottawa should be able to enjoy without having to think about missing an opportunity, or putting food on the table. Increased access to mobility options leads to more opportunities for a better life, leading to healthier communities overall.

Invest \$38.5 million dollars into deeply affordable housing and supportive housing

Background: The current funding is not enough for building the amount of new deeply affordable and supportive housing that is needed to address the housing emergency

- The City has seen a growing number of individuals and families struggling to afford their housing or in need of deeply affordable housing in recent years.
- Rents are rising faster than inflation with year-over-year rental prices increasing from 3.2% for 3+ bedrooms to 7.2% for bachelor units between 2019 and 2020, according to the CMHC's Housing Market Information Portal.
- This year, minimum wage went up by only \$0.10 per hour (less than a 1% raise) and social assistance rates are staying the same year after year.
- The centralized waitlist for subsidized housing remains at over 12,000 individuals and families and shelter stays, especially those for families, are growing longer. In 2019, families were, on average, spending 137 nights - more than four months - in emergency shelters waiting for housing. Shelters and temporary housing is meant to be an emergency or temporary response. More funds need to be invested in permanent solutions to address the long-term needs of families.
- These numbers do not include the "hidden homeless" population, or those who rely on their social networks to be housed. This may also include those who may be physically housed, but lack the security, ownership, or control over their living arrangements. Additionally, women's homelessness is less visible as they tend to couch surf or stay in unsafe conditions. Trans persons are overrepresented among the homelessness population and are vulnerable to negative treatment.
- The City should match the National Housing Strategy's commitment to allocate 25% of funding to women and gender-diverse people by designating 25% of all new builds and acquisitions for women's housing needs. In addition, we urge the City to respond to calls from local Indigenous organizations and allocate 30% of all new builds to Indigenous-led housing initiatives. The commitment to capital expenditure in housing must include funding streams that prioritize retrofitting existing high-rise towers (Udoh-Orok, 2018) and emphasize access to shared common space that encourages social interaction as well as safe, walkable and connected neighbourhoods. It is also critical that allocated funding incentivizes spending on accessible units and larger family units (2-3 bedroom units).¹
- Ottawa housing is fully subscribed. This includes Violence Against Women shelters, leaving women who have experienced violence without adequate supports that satisfy their psychological and safety needs.
- More funding needs to be allocated towards supportive housing services that are overwhelmed and at capacity.
- There is a lack of accessible units which affects the disabled community in need of housing disproportionately, as they often wait longer to find housing appropriate for their needs.
- We know that due to COVID-19, many people are struggling more than ever, making investments in safe, accessible and deeply affordable housing more important than ever. The City of Ottawa wants to eliminate chronic homelessness by 2024, but will need to invest more to make this happen.

¹ CAWI, 2020. *A Municipal Gendered Recovery Plan for All* (<https://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/cawi-genderedrecovery-en.pdf>)

- Having housing that is affordable, adequate, and suitable contributes to overall well-being. It helps decrease stress and contributes to an increased sense of personal safety, improving physical and mental health.
- Investing in more affordable housing means investment in healthier communities and helps prevent illness. Adequate housing removes one stressful issue that provides more time to focus more of their income as needed.