

## #MakingCentsTO

### Healthy Neighbourhoods

[Start of recorded material 00:00:00]

Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's so great to have all of you here today. My name is Kristyn Wong-Tam and I am a Toronto City Councillor. I also have the privilege of actually hosting today's panel discussion. I would like to begin before we go too much further is by acknowledging the space that we are gathered upon. I would like to acknowledge the indigenous peoples of all the lands that we are on today recognizing that we may be in different places. While we meet today on a virtual platform I would take a moment to acknowledge the importance of the moment and the land, which we now call home. We do this to reconfirm our commitment and responsibility in building relationships between nations and to improving our understanding of local indigenous people and their cultures. From coast to coast to coast we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis and First Nations people that call this land home, this land their nation.

Please join me in a moment of reflection to acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past and to consider how we can, and we can, work together in our own way to move forward in a spirit of collaboration and reconciliation. Thank you so much. OK, so we have so many reason to get together for this discussion, and I know that each and every single one of you who is joining us today we are super-privileged to have you here is coming to us with a wealth of experience whether it's professional experience, experience in lived experience. This is a pretty darn exciting panel. So the reason why we're actually hosting this webinar is because we want to build budget literacy. Whenever we talk about building cities or building city budgets I can tell you that there's a lot of people whose eyes glaze over and they wonder what are we talking about.

So let's try to make sense of city budgets. Every year the City of Toronto embarks on a really lengthy consultation. We do everything we can possibly to get citizens and residents out to speak to us about their spending priorities. We all talk about childcare and the need to build more. We talk about affordable housing. We all also are struggling with a transit system in the City of Toronto that's aging. But sometimes when we talk about how much do we want to spend on these vital city services the eyes glaze a little bit over. So what we want to do is make sure that this information is as accessible as possible. And we want to hear from our panel, our guests because each one of them is bringing to this discussion a

pretty powerful point of view. And I think hopefully this will be fun.

Whether you're joining us or if you're going to join us later we're going to be archiving all these panel discussions on our website which you can share later on or if you want to watch it again you are welcome to.

So I'd like to introduce a few of our, actually I'm going to introduce all our guests and I'm going to start with Andrea Reimer simply because she's from a different time zone. She's actually all the way out on the west coast and we're super keen to have her. Andrea Reimer is the former; and you can actually just salute or if you want to give me a thumbs-up or a wave we'll know who you are. Andrea Reimer is the former Deputy Mayor and city councillor of the city of Vancouver. She's served four terms in local government from 2002 to 2018 including 10 years on Vancouver City Council where I know personally, and I've seen her work, she led some groundbreaking policy efforts on social justice, the greenest city that democratizing engagement and the emerging economy. She was awarded the Loeb Fellowship at Harvard in recognition of her civic leadership and currently works as an educator and strategic advisor. Thank you Andrea. Great to have you.

OK just because we have a few other panelists you're going to all hang on. Now for those who are watching I'm going to tell you, I'm only sharing with you a very short tiny little portion of their bio. If you want to read more please go onto our website [kristynwong-tam.ca](http://kristynwong-tam.ca) and you will be able to find it there for the Making Cents Panel; so that's where you go. And cents of course is this one. Do you see it, great, and not sense as the other way of spelling it; c-e-n-t-s. I'm going to introduce now Paul Taylor who is the Executive Director of FoodShare Toronto. He is a lifelong anti-poverty activist. Growing up materially poor in Toronto Paul has used his experience to fuel a career, focussed not just on helping others but dismantling the beliefs and systems that lead to poverty and food insecurity including colonialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchal structures. Thank you Paul for joining us.

Following Paul we're going to be hearing also from Amanda O'Rourke. Amanda congratulations on a very successful installation of Open Streets this weekend. She's been the Executive Director of 8 80 Cities in the City of Toronto since the beginning of 2007. She's held several positions within this organization. For the past 13 years she has been building this non-profit. They now are global consultants. They work around the planet, anywhere from towns and cities across North America, Europe and Australia. She is the 2017 Salzburg Global Fellow and Co-Chair of Children Play, and Nature Committee for World Urban Parks. And then lastly but not least

I've got a few folks who are experts, absolute experts in mental health who work in the mental health field. I'm going to start off with Susan Davis who is the Executive Director, hello Susan, of the Gerstein Crisis Centre.

This is a pretty important institution in the City of Toronto especially we have been talking about alternatives to mental health delivery. Susan is in charge of a 24 hour mental health and addiction crisis centre here in the City of Toronto. She has over 30 years of experience working in the mental health field and addictions sector and she has held many positions in leadership. We are very grateful for her work in the Downtown East which is the area I represent because we know the work that she does on the ground and with the community. And then finally another practicing physician we've got Dr. Suzanne Shoush who is an academic physician with the University of Toronto. She is an indigenous black physician and a mother who lives and works in Toronto's Downtown where she has spent more a decade working with people who are living in and out of the City's shelter systems.

She is the Indigenous Health and Faculty Lead at the University of Toronto and a cofounder of Doctors for Defunding Police. Dr. Shoush is actively involved in the COVID-19 pandemic response for people experiencing homelessness. Thank you all of you for being here today. Now those are long bios but they're really doing you any justice. Let me start off with a big question and this is the one that probably is plaguing me and keeping me up at night. I represent a pretty Downtown part of the City of Toronto, so if you can think of the most urban densest part of a big city in Canada. Imagine the tall buildings imagine the civic squares, the festivals, and all the things that fall in-between that you're going to have a pretty good snapshot of Downtown Toronto.

Right now in the middle of a global pandemic we are seeing more and more people fall through the cracks. And it can't be said enough that the difficulties of people living with homelessness and mental illness is somehow sort of spilling out in more visible ways. I'm going to start off with Susan. Susan in your work working with people who are living with mental illness how do you think the pandemic has made things worse and is there a way for us to pull our way out of this? You'll have to take your microphone off of mute though.

Susan Davis:

Apologies, sorry about that. I think that it's, you know we certainly have seen that COVID-19 has really inflated and expanded what people's experiences are out there. And typically people living with mental health and addiction issues, especially in the mid-east we see a lot of homelessness and poverty and the need to really address some of the underlying issues and thinking about mental health in the broadest context including social determinants is so

essential on how it is we're going to be able to move the dial on that. We really saw the inflation of, you know, social isolation, food insecurity, lack of housing, along with increased mental health concerns and with fewer places to go during COVID-19.

So I think that what happened through that process is a lot of organizations came together and did new kinds of responses that I think we can build on and strengthen moving forward where we really work across sectors and across as well, you know, funders and government areas where people can work more collaboratively and try to do something about some of the underlying issues that people are facing when they're living with mental health and homelessness.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Susan thank you. You just touched upon the social determinants of health, which I think are pretty critical to any conversation around city building. I'm going to just draw in Paul for second because one of the components of making sure we can building healthy neighbourhoods and cities is to make sure that people have the very basic needs that they need met in order so they can live a healthy life and one of those things is access to food and medicine. Paul in your work at FoodShare you're seeing, I'm sure because we're seeing it in the Downtown East food banks, just a shortage of food but also growing food insecurity. Can you speak a little bit about what it is that you're seeing on the ground from your organization there?

Paul Taylor: Yeah I guess across the country actually one of the thing that people don't realize is that food insecurity is at the highest that it's ever been. You know a recent Stats Canada report suggests that 5.5 million Canadians are food insecure. And I may talk about this more a little bit later but I think what's a really important part of that conversation is that when we talk about underlying issues that cause food insecurity and many of these issues that we're going to be talking about today. One that I think has to be central is talking about anti-black racism and anti-Indigeneity because those are systems that actually affect who has food, who doesn't, who has access to healthcare and who doesn't. So we're seeing a number of people struggling with access to food but especially folks that are black or indigenous. And they were struggling even before the pandemic.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: That's a really good point and I think it's something that, you know, probably elected officials sometimes struggling in addressing properly. So the dollar is quite finite. If I've got a dollar and I could stretch that across a number of city services, the City of Toronto just by example has an operating budget of over \$13.5 billion. That's just how much we have to spend the city services turning. It's rare, really rare when politicians including colleagues start to unpack the impacts of colonialism and the impacts of

racism and how that determines whether or not someone has an opportunity to succeed or not. Dr. Shoush in your work, I mean you work with some of the most marginalized members of our community disproportionately represented in the shelter system. We now know the statistics are irrefutable, indigenous and black people dominate, what are we doing wrong?

Dr. Suzanne Shoush: So I think that – thank you so much again, thank you for having us today and thank you for this important conversation. I think there is a lot that we're doing wrong when it comes to health and safety and meeting the needs of the “most vulnerable” people in our city. I really want to reframe the way that we think about social determinants of health as that these are structures that create privilege or deny privilege. And I think that we have such a tendency to look at things as individuals, our wealth is a result of our individual efforts and our poverty is a result of our individual failures. We look at things that when we're even discussion the social determinants of health we're really thinking of how collective the choices in the housing, the employment, food security, employment security, health and wellness.

All of these are heavily dependent on the structures of our society that we have, and you know like Paul said when we have a society that does have significantly embedded anti-indigenous racism and anti-black racism we are going to end up seeing the systematic results of that, you know, structural violence begets structural violence. And I think that one of the things that we really fail to understand or see if you are not in the neighbourhood is the extreme violence of poverty. It is a structural violence that we inflict upon people that are in the city. So I think that understanding our budget, understanding our priorities, understanding what we have money for what we don't have money for, and understanding like Kristyn just sand that this a zero-sum game.

A budget is a very limited resource and that requires prioritizing. I think that if we can look at ways to simply build privilege then we would see dramatically improved safety. We would see improved health outcomes, we would see improved mental health, and we would see improved food security. All of our inequities would start to subside. And building privilege is very straightforward, we've been doing it for some portions of our society for centuries, and to build privilege does not involve taking away anyone else's privilege. So that's something that we have to start understanding from just the very basics of our budget.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: I don't know if you noticed but Amanda was nodding enthusiastically at some point agreeing with you. Amanda what would you like to add to this discussion from your vantage point

because you actually do something that's a little bit different than perhaps Paul, Susan or Dr. Shoush are doing?

Amanda O'Rourke: Yeah I just want to, my head was nodding because all the panelists are so wonderful and I agree with all that's being said. I think, you know, just to reiterate that, you know, we really see amidst COVID the multiple crisis kind of intersecting. So we have the housing crisis, we have the opioid crisis, we have, you know a hostile public realm or physical environment that doesn't create a very welcoming space for folks, we have food insecurity. So all these intersecting layers that happen and really play out at the neighbourhood level are so important to look at when we're thinking about how do we create better cities that work for everyone.

One of the things that I've been kind of thinking about in our work with cities all over the world but really kind of going down to that hyperlocal level is actually a quote from Gautam Bhan, who wrote an article in 2018 pre-COVID talking about the infrastructures of everyday dignity. And this article was in the India Times and a reaction to kind of this phenomenon around smart cities and glittering super project and mega project around cities. And I think that turn of phrase is so relevant today as we think about importance of creating neighbourhoods that really are human-centred to the basic fundamentals of what humans need and that is food, you know, the basics, like you said Kristyn food, shelter, medicine, sanitization.

And beyond that how do we create neighbourhoods and budget that reflects our human desire for social connection with one another which has been really restricted amidst COVID, for moving out bodies and being physically active which is a fundamental human desire and need, our need to connect with nature and have access to sunlight and fresh air; and then also our human desire to participate in something bigger than us, to have purpose. So when it really comes down to thinking about healthy neighbourhoods I really start to think about what is a truly people-centered approach to doing that, and it really connects to what makes people happy at the end of the day. And we know those basic things that do and then beyond that what fulfills our human desires and needs.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: That's so well said and I love that the fact that you knit it altogether for us. So interestingly enough I think, you know, the first four they all reside in Toronto. They are – we tend to look down at the issues before us and we don't always look up, like is there another city somewhere else that could have been doing a better job or are there mistakes learned elsewhere that we can learn from. Andrea you and I have had some pretty interesting conversations in the past because you also had a role in shaping the

City of, sorry the City of Vancouver's Urban Agenda. I know that issues around social justice centre and everything that you do, with respect to how the City of Toronto, sorry the city of Vancouver I should say, has tackled some of their urban challenges whether it's structural racism, and colonialism that exists today, the housing crisis that I know that you folks are still facing and that we are facing here.

You know what are some of the big key learnings that you can think of, maybe two of them that you can share with us that you pretty much know we haven't deployed or we haven't done well? And it's OK if you criticize it because constructive feedback is always great.

Andrea Reimer:

Yeah no of course. Well I was listening to all the panelists thinking 'wow I have like nothing to add here other than to validate that 4,000 kilometres away things are pretty much the same, right. So when you talk about structural and systemic like it's not a thin layer on top, right, it's like a deep structural system. But I can talk like in terms of the learnings. I think maybe what's, well there's two things I would say that are different here so I'll start there. The first thing is that we, it's hard to say, like I think there's a bit of leapfrogging. So in Vancouver, you know, I was elected since 2008 and at the time David Miller was just sort of on his way into retirement from politics in the City of Toronto.

So Toronto was sort of the wane and Vancouver was on the rise so we have this sort of modern era push around progressive policies but taking over and learning from work that David and others did in Toronto before us, right, like part of what catalyzed us. And the other thing that's really radically different here, like as you were talking I was thinking about how much, and I am more I think than many of my colleagues at the city level, very much believe cities have to take the lead regardless of what the Constitution says or all this wrangling about jurisdiction. Like you have a moral imperative if not all the other imperatives to try and do everything you can on all the issues. But I do think the change in provincial government here, like you just can't articulate enough how different it's made lives for people who – these cracks you're talking about in Ontario look very big right now.

Here in British Columbia they're still here but the provincial government is doing what it can to try and hold some kind of safety net there for people; and cities, like it comes down to power, money and respect, right. So we were good as a city government at building power both from the community level and giving the people the microphone instead of taking it presumptively on their behalf and trying to give them a voice at the provincial and deferral levels as well as at the city level so that we could build the case for things like democratizing the streets, sex work guidelines, taking

decisive action on the public health emergency back in 2016 well before other levels of government were. We were good at the respect part.

We did what we said we were going to do even and especially when it was politically hard. But we didn't have the money, right, that is the challenge for cities. So I think why this cross-country discussion becomes really – like it would be hard to talk about what Toronto can do without building power with cities across the country so that we all have more fiscal capacity to act.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Yeah that's a really good point. I've actually been sharing some of the work that we've been doing in Toronto around addressing homelessness and poverty and I actually send it off to other city councillors in other cities in Ontario who I know are specifically struggling to get Premier Ford's attention on what seems like an issue that sits in neighbourhoods, poverty, homelessness; but at the same time, you know, my conversations with counterparts in Hamilton and Kitchener and Ottawa, we're all stuck in the same boat. And so I'm going to come back to you Susan for a little bit because sometimes the issue around mental illness and physical health and actually maybe for Dr. Shoush as well, is so tied to provincial funding. So we're constantly told at cities to stay in our lane.

So you know things that we should be really passionate about would be 311 pothole calls, perhaps making sure that the tree branches are properly tripped or making sure that there are city-adequate level services to Toronto Public Library or perhaps recreation services. But then there's another big cloud that sits over us about what we can do to influence other orders of government to help address the systemic issues that fill cities such as the lack of mental health supports, the lack of perhaps addiction recovery beds and those types of things. So if we don't have intergovernmental cooperation we don't have a successful healthy city or healthy neighbourhoods. To the two health practitioners, those who work in mental health and physical health, what message can our health practitioners be delivering to provincial partners or even to the City?

Susan Davis: Suzanne if you'd like to go first feel free but I can jump in. I think that, you know, we really do need to see that collaboration right across federal, provincial, as well as city and I do think there's a big role for the City to play in many ways in trying to, you know, help us make a difference especially at the neighbourhood level. And it's one of the things, and I think Amanda brought it up that, you know really talking about human dignity and what that means for people because, you know, without that dignity and without the respect, without opportunity people don't have hope. They have nowhere to go to, they can't – you know we can have treatment in

place and we can have access to housing etcetera, but if they don't see that as a possibility for them it's not going to make a difference in their lives.

And some of the, you know, issues around – you know what we hear from people who access services is that they can't access service when they need it. That they may get a crisis response but then the follow-up is very far down the road and that they're waiting too long, you know, to be able to access mental healthcare. Many of the folks we work with are homeless and are not, or substandardly housed or living in shelters and really haven't got the opportunity to find any kind of stability to try and build on their wellness and health plan. And so you know I really do think that there is the intersection and, you know, I don't like the notion of you staying in a lane as a city. I don't think that's exactly right.

I think a lot of good work has come and been motivated through the City including Gerstein Centre 30 years ago. We came out of Mayor's action taskforce to look at the institutionalization of psychiatric patients in the City of Toronto. We were warehousing people at the time in rooms where they had eight to a room and they were, you know, substandardly fed and no access to ongoing care and that kind of thing, and you know, the City was the beginning impetus to try and create a real alternative. And I think we're kind of at that crossroad again and I wish we were further ahead to be honest. You know it really is daunting to think that a lot of the similar issues 30 years ago now exist right now as we're looking at how it is we can move forward.

So I absolutely do think it's a really important thing that the City gets involved and pushes that need for their citizens to have proper access to healthcare and to be part of really creating the environments in which people can live and be well and be healthy.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you for that. Dr. Shoush?

Dr. Suzanne Shoush: Yeah I would absolutely agree with everything that Susan said. I think that it's really important to look at healthcare as not just an appointment with your physician, so it's not something under the complete control of the provincial government getting your prescription filled or seeing a doctor. The City is absolutely staying in its lane when it comes to improving the health of the people who live here. That includes looking at childcare, looking at housing, looking at safe bike lanes, looking at green spaces, looking at everything that can be done to mitigate poverty. I think that we get so caught up in the post-crisis management once somebody is already in the street, when somebody is already struggling, when somebody is already overdosing, and we think about 'OK this is the provincial government that we need to step in'.

So we look and say there's so much that leads up, there's an entire lifetime that leads up to the moment that we see a crisis occurring. And the City has a huge role to play in that. And one of the reasons that, you know, as physicians we had come together to form Doctors for Defunding the Police is actually for that reason, looking at building a truly healthy society and a truthfully healthy community that is responsive and accountable and provided dignity. Because we know currently the budget is quite a black box around the TPS. A huge amount of our city resources are funnelled into the TPS and we're expecting the police to be the jack of all trades, to respond to a crisis, to respond to a fire, to respond to every single possible event that happens in our city.

There's healthier ways to do that, there's safer ways to do that, and there's a lot that we can do to prevent a crisis. We can look at safe supply, we can look at safe consumption sites, we can look at, you know, literacy programs, and childcare that's affordable and housing that's affordable. We know how much ODSP or OW pays and our City has been absolutely unaffordable in terms of housing. This is a housing crisis that leads to so much more of what we're seeing creating this lack of safety in the neighbourhoods. And I think that one thing that's really important to reflect on is who are we talking about when we talk about a lack of safety in our community?

Are we talking about the people themselves who are living outside, who are living on the street who are engaged in sex work, who are living in shelters, who are using safe consumption sites, or are we talking about the people who find that frightening to look at or frightening to be involved and frightened to be near? And I think that there is – you know we really have to look at the quality of life that we allow to have happen and who we allow that to happen to; and I think in order for that to happen you really have to have representation. So when you look at what even determines, the social determinants of health, what determines safety, and what determines wellbeing is not the same for every single person. You know for indigenous people wellbeing included access to the land, language, ancestral ties, kinship ties, elders being healthy.

That is not a classic definition of the social determinants of health. And when you have a homogenous leadership that is across the board in the city level, the provincial level, and the federal level it's quite homogenous white male leadership, what is valued as safety and priority and privilege is very, very different. If you don't have city councillors that use a bicycle the safe bike lanes become less of a priority. If you don't have, for the majority of women childcare, who provide childcare, you're not going to understand the importance of childcare. If you have never experienced food insecurity you're not going to understand that that's important. And I think that having that representation across

leadership is one way to bridge a path to true safety and true improved health outcomes and wellbeing outcomes.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Dr. Shoush thank you for that. I think what I found really valuable about what you said is about finding those solutions that are not necessarily within the mainstream little box. So there's probably a set of tools that most elected officials have whether it's at the city level, municipal, provincial or federal, and we use those tools because those are the ones that we have. But there are others and there's the thinking outside the box, so with respect to the connection to land and talking about food security, Paul I'm going to come back to you just because I know that you've been championing something that's pretty out of the box.

But at the same time when I think about what you've been saying about golf courses and reimagining what those green spaces can be with respect to food production for communities that are hungry it's not out of the box at all, it's actually so common sense. So do you want to explain to us a little bit about this proposal that you've been speaking about because I read your Toronto Life article that's why?

Paul Taylor: I read yours and it was great too. I was worried you were about to say 'cooking app'. I get a lot of food language. But yeah so as you know the City owns five golf courses, you know, and when I've had conversations with folks who live in the surrounding communities of those golf courses – actually you know maybe before I go into this I have to say part of the reason this really irks me is nothing represents in my mind privilege, patriarchy and white supremacy more than golf courses. So we as a city subsidized these golf courses that provide no direct benefit to the immediate communities around them. And they're huge swaths of land. So my piece was meant to really inspire creativity in thinking about things that are not so radical.

You know how do we leverage the public space that we have and challenge white supremacy and patriarchy and all of those pieces and say how can these communities that surround these golf courses have an opportunity to actually voice what they would like to see those spaces used for instead of the City extending the agreement. What's happening on September 30<sup>th</sup> is the City Council will vote on whether or not to extend the operating agreement for these five golf courses. So I encourage everyone to get in touch with your city councillor and say you want these communities to have a say in what happens with these of courses. But I just think, you know, especially in the context of a pandemic when we're entering the second wave, and again many of these communities are in communities where people lack green space to physically distance, you know.

This space could be leverage in so many more ways. And when it comes – yeah I've had this vision of it being like just beautiful with all kinds of food things happening, community things happening, people building community, and I think how do we resource something like this. Well you know there certainly are other budget lines that could do with further cuts that's been referenced already, certainly the police budget could be repurposed and used in this way to really benefit communities. September 30<sup>th</sup>, before September 30<sup>th</sup>.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: So we've got a few days for sure. So, you know, it's interesting to think about how do we repurpose public assets so they can actually create a much broader wide-spread public good. Amanda you and your team like literally work around the world, you have probably seen some pretty innovative out of the box thinking from other cities, food security, green spaces, healthy and happier citizens, you guys are the crunchy granola side, you strive for that; like those are the lofty ambitions. What do you think about turning Toronto's golf courses into places that people can congregate, learning about food, and to grow for themselves with their own hands and perhaps to feed others? Has that been done before or are you even surprised that we even have golf courses, are you at that stage?

Amanda O'Rourke: Well first I just want to say I love the idea and also to knit the two ideas together of Suzanne and Paul is that, you know, to kind of lean into this metaphor what was also really interesting were the public, the golf courses were opened before playgrounds were. So I have three kids at home and, you know, what better example of our decision-makers and their priorities at work in opening up golf courses for folks to go play golf before we were able to open up playgrounds for kids to play amidst the pandemic. I think it's a fantastic, you know, thinking about how do we actually take all of the spaces that cities currently have, all of the things that belong to everyone, as you said Kristyn our public assets, and think about where we're actually putting our investments, where we're actually spending our time and energy, and who's benefitting from those investments.

So you know when you were talking about the golf courses Paul I immediately thought of, you know, Bogota in Columbia, our founder is known for starting the Ciclovía which basically he was the Commissioner of Parks in the late 1990s and at the time Bogota had, you know, 8 million people, a lack of public green space and very, one ninth of per capita income of a city like Toronto. And so Guillermo at the time 'why don't we use them streets as a space to actually invest in people and have people walk, bike, use the streets as a public space which they are' every Sunday. He knew he could never build, you know, a central park like New York but

he had streets and he could repurpose them and them as an asset to promote health and wellbeing.

I think the public golf courses present a similar opportunity, and there are cities that are serious looking at this and I imagine maybe you've done a bit of research. I know San Francisco there's been a big public debate around their public golf courses and I think now is the time more than ever to really reimagine all of those spaces that belong to every single citizen and think about who they're benefitting and how to get better use out of them.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: That's a great suggestion is being able to sort of look elsewhere. I'm actually going to look to Andrea. I've actually seen some pretty interesting things in the city of Vancouver plants as well as vegetables growing in vertical wall communities. And I saw this about I'd say probably about 10 years ago before we were even talking about this, really talking this in the City of Toronto. I saw large brown fields in Vancouver there was owned by, I think at that point in time, Concord Adex where they built massive planters so people can do container gardening. And those communities would go off and harvest vegetables, and how they would distribute them I'm not sure. But I thought that was all pretty cool and I don't see why we can't get this done in Toronto, but we've been slow to jump to it.

So what was the difference in Vancouver, how is it that you guys have been able to develop some of these really interesting food incubation projects; and what was the key, what was the special sauce there? Was it just the purpose of Mayor? Was it just the purpose of Mayor and the council or if we don't have that or if we do, what was the accelerant?

Andrea Reimer: So many things. Well so I'll back up a bit to, I think Kristyn you were the one who introduced this idea of being outside the box. Maybe it was Suzanne but one of you did. And if you think about it, like who build that box, this metaphorical box. I mean it was built by a very tiny number of people who come from an even tinier slice of demographic, so if we're not acting outside that body we're not acting on behalf of or for or supporting most people, right. So by definition I think if we're working for social justice or to address the structural issues we must be outside the box, right? So it's a challenging space to be I I'm not going to lie. I mean I think everyone's on this call has found themselves in that space more often than not, so it's figuring out like how do we support each other in doing that, and this is one way, right, building these conversations cross community sectors but also across the country as we've discussed.

So we did I mean food and we did so much stuff. Part of that comes from own background. I have – it turns out – I found out I

was a foodie in my thirties for my whole life but I had just thought of it when I was younger as being hungry and wanting to eat, right, like I lived on the streets for a period of time. I worked with other people to secure food from dumpsters, from recovery efforts. We tried to learn how to grow things in alleys, this as guerilla gardening concept, and it turns out that was part of this bigger movement called Foodies which I just didn't know, right. So I once I hooked up with them and met people like Paul, you know, you start building power. And the cool thing about the food movement is everyone eats, right, so whether you're middle-class or upper-class or whether you've had a fantastically stable low-trauma life or a high-trauma life you've hopefully, you're eating if you're alive.

So you're able to build power in ways that are harder for communities that traditionally may not have allies in these other communities, right. The trans community for example is highly marginalized because they tend to be marginalized economically, socially, in all they ways, right. So we were able to use that power within this broader envelope of greener city to really push forward on food. But it also hits directly at the most critical issue in the City which is who owns the streets, right, this very literal question of who gets to decide what happens in so-called public space. I mean I'm using the streets but it could be the lawn of City Hall where we had an epic battle over community garden versus heritage grass which apparently a thing that they wanted to protect the grass against the incursion of food.

It turns out there were heritage gardens that had been there during the Second World War, so we were able to make a successful case around that. But it really – food is just such a great place to both, you know, to think about what is the box and how do we get outside of it. Now I'm going to bring in Bogota really quickly because I ended up in Bogota in 2009 to accept an award on behalf of the City for that we've been doing on food policy. I had been Chair of the Food Policy Council before so it was going sort of like that sort of as a councillor. You know I'm up there accepting this award and I'm explaining the changes in Vancouver and people were surprised in Bogota to hear that 30% of Vancouverites are low-income and that housing costs was the number one driver of that.

And after in the Question and Answer they were like, “So if this big problem why are you devoting so much land to growing food, like why aren't you doing more innovative things?” And it just totally changed my mind about, you know, using the top floor of parkades, about doing the vertical farming, about really pushing ourselves not to put people's housing in competition with ground space for food. And what's where a lot of the most innovative ideas came from.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, that is truly inspiring and I know that even the City of Toronto and our Toronto team at Toronto Public Health that works with the Toronto Food Policy we watch other cities and then we try to figure out what they're doing and how we can best do it. Sometimes we run into this wall of bureaucracy and all the reasons why we can't do things, right. The city budget is set in a particular way and then it's mostly baked by the time the residents even get a chance to look at it. And then in about three weeks to four weeks the City Council then votes on it, on \$13 billion worth of expenditures. So the question is like how much influence do really residents have when it changing the city budget.

And I think this is a question – I mean as an elected official I like to do these webinars and then trying to figure out how to demystify the process so more people get involved because I think there's power in people and power in voices when they come together. But I have to admit it has been challenging in terms of that engagement piece. So Paul if we were to host a big banquet, a big dinner and we get FoodShare to help us out here and we somehow incorporate food in the conversation around budget how would you start that conversation?

Paul Taylor: You know differently I guess, you know, with little kids drawing what their city looks like or telling us what's missing in their city. You know just a variety of ways to engage people differently. But I also think it's really important to go, you know, providing capacity but go where people are, you know I think. When I was living in Vancouver and working in Downtown Eastside one of the things that we did that helped informed our programs at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House was we went into the back alleys with bananas and we were sharing banana's with folks and having conversations about what they wanted to see. We didn't say, "Come to the Neighbourhood House at 16:00 where we will sit and have this conversation about whatever it is". We went to where people were hanging out, and I think that's really key.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Right, meeting people where they are. So recognizing that in this pandemic world we don't get to do that in the same way that we used to and so, you know, being able to influence change and sort of bring folks together in the new virtual world. I mean I know that this is not going to, I'd like to think that this will not be the way it is forever but in the next foreseeable future including the fact that our budget is going to be passed at the City of Toronto, Vancouver's going to have one and other cities; we've got to figure out how to do this differently, so I'm just really interested.

And I'm going to come to Dr. Shoush. You work with folks who are really quite marginalized, folks who are in shelters and often times probably live on the street or perhaps housed precariously. What is the best way to engage a population like that considering

what we're seeing today especially when we want to talk about things that could make lives better, more housing, more food, better access to services?

Dr. Suzanne Shoush: So I think honestly the same way we engage anybody. Just like Paul said, outreach, going to places where people gather, going to places where people feel safe. So for example, you know, at my place of work I very quickly noticed that we had very few indigenous patients that were coming to my mainstream place of work and then went into the community to find out why, asking "Why are you not coming to me, you know, I'm an indigenous physician, why wouldn't you be here?" And then you quickly realize that there are certain places where many people feel comfortable and you go to those places yourself and build credibility, and be there and be reliable, treat people with dignity, care about the outcomes.

And as you're doing that you're both learning an incredible amount about the community that you live, and then also building a relationship with people who have incredible insight into solutions that would actually help. I think that we get really caught up in the making decisions for not with, or not in consultation for, and I think that we can ask people very easily like, "What is it going to take to successfully house". You know I do a lot of teaching for example with medical residents and one of the things that I teach at one of the shelters is every single person you meet start looking at it in the framework of what is it going to take to end homelessness for this specific person and how do you build capacity within the city structures, how do you build housing that actually works, how do you build supports that work.

The Gerstein for example is one of the most incredible resources that the City has and that is an incredible trauma response, crisis response service that doesn't involve violence, that doesn't involve weapons, that doesn't involve harming the people who are asking for help. And that is something that reflects need of the community. I think that we often think that because of poverty that people are unable to speak for themselves and that's not true. You can speak just like Paul said in an alleyway, you can speak on the sidewalk, you can speak in a shelter, or you can speak at a school. There are so many ways to be out and hearing stories. But you're definitely right if it's like "Come to City Hall" not many people will even if it's an open invitation; maybe if FoodShare is catering it but [laughs].

But otherwise a lot of people don't feel comfortable or welcome or wanting to be in City Hall. I think that overcoming the cynicism involves us being out. People who have power, who have privilege, who have a voice; go out and use it and find out how do you bring back a story or how do you bring somebody to tell their

story. And I think that people can absolutely speak for themselves in really profound ways.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: That's a really excellent point and I think that when people are speaking we have to listen, and not just with our ears but also with an open heart. Susan your services is of interest and I think, you know, Dr. Shoush just has mentioned it and gave you this big shout out about what a critically important service you offer, mental health crisis support. And your team shows up not with bulletproof vests, and not necessarily armed like a police officer but you show up in a very different way; and as this conversation around defunding the police or reallocating police resources to reimagine what public safety looks like. There's going to be more and more attention now that's going to be turned towards mental health service providers such as the Gerstein Centre. If there was an opportunity to reallocate those police dollars, just for everyone's information the police budget is \$1.22 billion in 2020.

Yeah Paul that is right, that is the right face. It's a heck of a lot of money. And this past summer Councillor Matlow and I suggested that we reallocate at the very minimum 10% of those dollars, so let's just round it out \$122 million to reallocate to alternatives to policing that drive community safety. Where the conversation has now taken us is what is the alternative because even now the police are starting to and they weren't before, but they're not starting to admit that they can't do it all. And in some ways, you know, the system is set up where sometimes they will fail because they're not equipped to do it all. So Susan if \$122 million was made available for alternatives to policing that drive community safety that address some of the mental health challenges and for people who were in distress how would you spend a little bit of that money?

Susan Davis: And that's a big huge question, money like that we just don't see very often so I think that there's a lot that can be done with that amount of money on the community level. And just to quickly go back a little bit too though is to talk a little – right now we are hearing very loud and clear from the people in our communities about what it is they want, what it is they don't want. And I think you were asking about engagement, we've got some pretty active engagement right now around this issue. And your point about listening is so important that we really are listening and actually not just listening but you actually see results because of that kind of engagement. So you've got the community engaging you as a city at the moment and how is it we're going to listen.

And one of the things of course we'd like to see is really turning around our current crisis response from being one where we have the most coercive or the most invasive kind of response being the number one where we start from, and whether that be the police or I'm just sorry to say even in some instances medical, you know,

where that's the first response, that we have to flip it on a dime and really look at the least intrusive ones, the ones where people are able to maintain autonomy and make decisions for themselves that done totally undo their life up till that point because they're having a crisis. Because I think you know Gerstein has been operating now for 30 years which is long time, when we opened people thought it couldn't be done but we know, we've been responding to crisis in the City without police officers.

We work in collaboration with police and we work in collaboration with medical folks as well but we are not in that moment. And it's been a really important resource to thousands of people over that time. And we don't actually have a lot of times where we have to bring people to hospital or engage police. It doesn't happen very often. There are occasions that happens and it's done very carefully. But we know that this can work and we have a lot that we know can work. So I think that that really being able to invest – and you know we talked a lot too about, you know, the structures that exist and how do you change those structures. We have, you know, racism and inequity is a public health issue. It's become extremely clear through COVID-19 that that is the case.

We have people who are living in the City right now and the opioid crisis who are dying on a regular basis. We have these major kinds of issues. We don't want to just make it all invisible. I mean that's unfortunately how things have been done. It can't just be invisible, it has to take up space and we have to create opportunities for people to really be able to engage with services that will be meaningful to them and help them really build on their recovery. So there's quite a bit that's out there is involved with that. Of course housing cannot be ignored. It's just such a major, major issue for so many of the folks that we see, and you know, people say, "Well you know housing won't solve everything" and my answer has always been, "Well I'd just to see if we could try". Because, you know, I don't know why we say that to be honest.

I think it's a huge, huge part for so many people. So I think there's a lot that we can do with that money but part of it is really pushing and changing how it is we do things. And one of the other factors, you know, talking about engaging people, we have to change the structure so that folks who are indigenous, folks who are, you know, black community, or people with lived experience in mental health can be really part of decision-making. So organizations like Gerstein Centre, we have 30% of our board are people with lived experience. We also have a number of people from BIPOC communities. We have, you know the Chair of our board at the moment is a person with lived experience. This is so important.

These structures matter hugely in terms of changing how things are done, and so unfortunately we can get – those really important

factors in how we move and change agendas moving forward. So I would say I don't have an answer for you to go ahead and spend this money in this way but I think really exploring those alternatives and really creating the platforms for that to happen, engaging with the communities. You know what happens Downtown isn't necessarily exactly the same as Rexdale or exactly the same, you know, somewhere else around Toronto. We need to have really built in the community solutions that really acknowledge what people's experiences are and make a difference in their lives in meaningful ways.

And you know I think that whole idea of creating communities where people feel they belong, connected, able to move physically, all the things that Amanda talked about, about what makes someone feel well. The same thing if you've got mental health and substance use issues, all those things make you feel better. And we need to create opportunities right from the start for people to be able to access those kinds of, you know, amenities and services that are there for them too and not just for everybody else.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you. That was certainly a very – there was a lot there and just to unpack a little bit of it but I think it's critical, you talked about lived experience and being able to sort of bring people to where they are. Another thing that the City has been talking a lot about and I don't know if we've done it well is disaggregated data when it comes to driving outcomes, to understanding the environmental baseline of where we are. Let's just have a moment, a conversation just for a second about disaggregated data because I'm not sure what city actually does collect this information well. And often times we do fall upon what does the census data look like, and that of course is under the purview of the national government and we try to use some of that.

But if we were to ask people and sort of really solicit their opinion about what is the best way for the city to deliver these services to foster healthier communities, sorry this is the real life of, you can hear my child is crying in the background, this is the real life decisions of councils and of course even citizens in terms of how do you allocate those dollars to the best that you can and how do you drive those outcomes. Disaggregated data and this is for everyone on the panel is there a particular municipality and I'm going to city that does this very well, the collection of disaggregate data that you know of? It's not a pop quiz I'm just curious. No?

Andrea Reimer: I can just in Kristyn. I mean I can tell you why Vancouver historically hasn't done well at it, I mean all the reasons we've talked about, and then on top of that it's quite a coercive position for someone to be in to be accessing a government service or an employment situation. So them to also ask them to self-disclose gender, race and for them to feel that they have an obligation to

disclose it is a, it's not a simple question, right. So then you get down into observe gender and observe, like and that's more complicated again. I have seen in Europe some good examples and Vienna has a really good program on it, but historically a much more homogenous, at least racially homogenous community; so as that's changed it's gotten more complicated for them, right. So I think it's a critical issue that's much more complicated that it seems on the surface.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you Andrew. I think Paul was trying to pipe in there and I also saw Suzanne. Paul you want to go first? You're on mute. Oh you're back on mute. There you go.

Paul Taylor: OK sorry, oh I'm not sure what's happening. Can you hear me?

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Yes perfect, crystal.

Paul Taylor: OK. I was just going to add one little piece. You know every time I hear about the calls that I've been involved in to, you know, force government to collect disaggregated race-based data, you know, it's so appalling to me. You know when I think about, you know, City Council is predominantly white, predominantly male and we're having to plead for these issues whether it's defining the police or collecting race-based data at various levels of government; and to me that's so heartbreaking. But it also reflects such a low bar because it's less about simply collecting the data, and I would be worried that we will have government say, "We collect this data, here's what we found" but nothing happens.

So for me it's about what municipalities are using the data, the race-based data, or the socioeconomic-based data that they're collecting to inform a health equity response to the issues that they're facing. And when it comes to how to spend that money we have to use the health equity approach and look at where the risk is. I think had we used a health equity lens to respond to the pandemic at every level of government we would have had fewer black and brown dead bodies. So I think it's about health equity and the data is one tool along that journey.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Dr. Shoush, final comment on this issue?

Dr. Suzanne Shoush: That was beautifully said. I was also add that it's about data sovereignty, and I think, you know, like Andrea said people from communities who are historically marginalized and made vulnerable do not want to disclose or feel safe to disclose, and not from a City lens but one incredible kind of self-governance data collection has been going on for the indigenous community through Our Health Counts, through Well Living House which is an indigenous-led research organization that works in parallel to the census and has an incredible reach because of the credibility

and the safety that they have built in. So when you look at data from Our Health Counts Toronto it will look at everything from the number of indigenous people living in our city, the people living in poverty, 91% of indigenous adults living below the low-income cut-off.

It looks at immunization rates, preventative care rates, housing, everything, and there's recommendations made. And that is the type of data that is so much more reliable than race-based data collected by somebody that you don't know who is really deciding 'like look at me OK this person looks like a woman, she looks like this race'. Those things and self-disclosure like in a circumstance where someone feels safe to disclose can be life-changing and this can be incredible changing for our whole city. And I think that it's so important that everybody understands equity is in everybody's self-interesting. It is not safe or healthy or food for any society to live with extreme inequity.

It is absolutely self-interest that everyone should be working towards equality, reducing income gaps, providing housing, improving health. We're seeing this in the pandemic. We will never get COVID under control and our lives back to normal until we address inequities; and so just that really has to be stressed how important it is to take the equity lens in everything that we do.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you. Wow, this was a really powerful discussion and I feel like I've been receiving just little gems and gifts from all of you. Just one final thing and we're going to wrap up really quickly because our time is up. I'm going to ask each and every single one of you if there was one thing that we can give you in the city budget that you think will drive a healthier city, make and build a healthier city, a better neighbourhood, better neighbourhoods I should say, what would you like to see; but only one? I'm going to start with Amanda, go ahead.

Amanda O'Rourke: OK I have to be sure there's so many wonderful things that people said. I will say one thing that stood out to me from a community organizer in New York who said, you know, "We don't need you to be the voice for the voiceless we need you to focus on giving ears to the earless" which I think is like a perfect snippet of connected to your point Kristyn about really listening. Black and brown communities have been asking for these investments for a really long time. We need to listen to them and believe them, so that is – I just want to say that. And then I think in terms of really addressing and creating a fully healthy neighbourhood we need to end homelessness.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you. OK so Susan, what do you see in the budget? And your microphone's on mute. You're still on mute.

Susan Davis: I agree with – oh I am not on am I. I'm unmuted now. I would absolutely agree that we need to end homelessness, it's a major, major factor in the City and one that we need to do and we need to do it soon. And we've seen progress over the last little while and I think that it shows that we can and I think we just need to keep moving at it and make it happen.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you. Dr. Shoush?

Dr. Suzanne Shoush: Oops. Yes I know what I want and I think Kristyn knows what I want; I want to see full transparency of the police budget. I really want to see a full dollar by dollar line by line transparency of the Toronto Police Services budget with and explanation on why that budget allocation is prioritized above housing, above childcare, above safety, above safety, above streets, above climates. That's what I want. I really do want to see that and I think that that is the very least we can ask for, so full transparency, line by line budget made public that people can understand.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you, Paul?

Paul Taylor: Some of mine were taken because I had a list of a few so I'm going to take this in a different direction. I think food insecurity has been mentioned a number of times and one of my concerns when we mention food insecurity is I don't think we all really understand it and sometimes what ends up happening is that people perceive it to be an issue of enough food. There's more than enough food to feed people in this country, in this city. It's about distribution. Food insecurity is an issue of income, so you know, one of the things I realized at FoodShare is the people that I have an impact on their food security are the people who work with me because we're setting their pay rates.

So what I would love to see in the City of Toronto budget, I'd love to see City really lead with being a living wage employer and then encouraging other municipalities or other cities to do the same. I think we need to have a living wage movement in this country that is bigger than it has been because that's one of the ways we're going to ensure that work actually lifts people out of poverty.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: Brilliant, thank you so much. OK Andrea I started off with your bio and I'm going to end off with you, what do you want out of a city's budget?

Andrea Reimer: I was going to say like I feel like Vancouver telling Toronto how to spend money is a recipe for some sort of bad outcome. So I guess what I would say is all city budgets need to give people power. They need to give them spatial power, they need to give them power over their voice, they need to give them power over the choices that they're able to make within a city. The job in my

opinion of the City Council is to give them money and to get out of the way and protect them when they fail because they need to fail to learn to get better.

The food examples I was giving I may have given the impression that was like the City of Vancouver running around doing all that, it wasn't. It was the City cutting cheques to people like Paul's organization and many other communities in the city. And then going out in the media and defending why these innovations and thinking outside of the box is so critical to building the power that people need to be successful and feel happy in the city.

Kristyn Wong-Tam: OK so this has been a really powerful conversation and I thank all of you for sharing your time, your talents and also just to bring us what I think is a really valuable insight to what are really complex structural challenges. I want to finish off with just one comment. I have a friend who's passed away now, her name was Charity Hicks. She was an environmental and water activist from the city of Detroit and she often said to me, "Kristyn you don't think out of the box you've got to smash the box". So let's leave on that note in Charity's spirit and let's continue to be out of the box thinkers but out of the box smashers.

And I wish all of you well and thank you for your time and your talents and just being here today. And of course for those who are watching you can continue to see the next virtual webinars that will be hosted on our website. This is all about making cents of the City's budget, building back better, and we look forward to you joining us for the next discussion. Thank you so much everyone.

[End of recorded material 01:07:25]