

Municipal Election 2006 - All Candidates Environment Survey

Please email your answers to tea@torontoenvironment.org

1. Smog

The Issue

Toronto's Medical Officer of Health asserts that 1,900 Torontonians die every year as a result of smog. The Ontario Medical Association predicts that premature deaths among seniors will grow by 81% over the next 20 years. Unlike ozone, half of which comes to Toronto from the United States, the key element that causes death is particulate matter - which is produced locally. Every level of government has a role in solving this problem including the City of Toronto. The smog reduction plan that TEA led in creating in 1997 included action plans for green energy, transit, walking and cycling, the use of green vehicles, and intergovernmental action, and a commitment to continuously update the plan.

Council's Record

Toronto Council has a long and proud record of smog and air quality resolutions, but there is no bold agenda, no transformative leadership that addresses and confronts the heart of the smog problem. A prime example of this not-good-enough performance is the City's Air Quality Improvement record. As scientific reports add new verifications to the growing evidence of the negative health impacts of our unclean air - especially for our senior citizens - the 2006 update on the Air Quality of Toronto focuses on the need to set up more measuring stations around Toronto to confirm precisely where and by how much our air is getting worse. At this pace, when will we ever get down to tackling the real causes of this pollution that are within our control - motor vehicle exhaust and toxic pollution?

The full TEA Smog Report Card for 2006 can be downloaded from:

http://www.torontoenvironment.org/files/Smog_Rep_05.pdf

Questions

1. Will you support implementation of all outstanding actions in the City's existing smog plan within the first two years of the next term of Council?

Yes

2. Will you support the drafting of a new comprehensive plan that will reduce smog-causing pollution within the City of Toronto from current levels by at least 20% by 2012?

Yes. Environmental awareness must be built into everything the city does: design of new buildings, transportation decisions, etc.

2. Waste Disposal

The Issue

Toronto recently acquired a new landfill in St. Thomas but the garbage issue remains very much alive. We need to find alternatives to decrease our waste production. TEA successfully campaigned in support of a Citizen's Environmental Assessment Team to ensure that community voices can stand up for our environment. TEA's waste management work has also succeeded in bringing Toronto the Green Bin and apartment recycling.

Meanwhile, the incinerator lobby is after Toronto's garbage. Incinerators have fundamental problems. They demand a constant flow of garbage for at least 20 years, creating a disincentive for recycling. They cost two or three times as much as other approaches, eating up money that could be better spent expanding composting and recycling. They are still giant polluters. They convert waste into climate changing gases and toxic emissions. The United Nations Environmental estimates that burning waste forms over 60% of the world's dioxins and furans. Incinerators are also among the top global sources of toxic heavy metals such as lead and mercury.

See: <http://www.torontoenvironment.org/waste>

Council's Record

During the last election Mayor Miller ran on an anti-incineration platform. To date City Council has not taken a formal position either way, preferring to wait for the results of the community-lead Environmental Assessment.

Questions

3. Will you support the Citizen's Environmental Assessment Team 's continued work in creating a long term garbage solution?

Yes

4. Would you support better recycling collection and ensure a budget for a new organic program in all apartment buildings (the only way to get to our 60% recycling target)?

The green bin program is one of the best things to happen in Toronto in the last 5 years. It reduces waste and at the same time engages residents at the household level in taking action and thinking about the environment in their everyday life. The next step is supporting residents to grow more food at home and take packaging and excess food transportation right out of the equation.

3. Community Right-to-Know

Many citizens are unaware of the hundreds of toxic and hazardous chemicals used and released daily in the City of Toronto. Access to information about these uses and releases is critical to understanding and preventing potential risks to those who live and work in our communities. Although the federal and provincial governments have some provisions to make information on toxic and hazardous chemicals publicly available, this information is hardly comprehensive. Most facilities are exempted from public reporting and little information is available on use or storage. U.S. jurisdictions have attacked this lack of information by implementing local Community Right-to-Know laws.

Council's Record

In 2000, City Council committed to adopting a "Community Right-to-Know Bylaw that empowers community members to know the location, sources and health effects of toxics in their community." In 2002, Council once again committed to CRTK and directed staff to develop a strategy.

At TEA's insistence the City has begun developing a community right to know strategy, including a bylaw. At present it is in the early consultation stage. Toronto's Public Health Department is leading the process – emphasizing the health and environmental benefits of Community Right-to-Know.

See: <http://www.torontoenvironment.org/node/315>

Questions

5. Will you support the implementation of a Community Right-to-Know bylaw during the upcoming term of council that:
- Requires all facilities to report the use, storage, transportation and release of toxic chemicals in their neighbourhood.
 - Focuses on toxic chemicals that contribute to occupational and environmental cancer and poor air quality, and on chemicals that damage children's health.

I support this as long as the outcome is a reduction of the use of toxic chemicals and cleanups, not the ghetto-ization of certain neighbourhoods.

6. Will you support a City of Toronto sustainable business program which advises, encourages and rewards local industries to reduce the use and release of toxic chemicals?

Yes

4. Public Transit

The Issue

If Toronto is going to become an even better place to live, better public transit will be one of the main ingredients. Over the last ten years TEA has lead a campaign to make dramatic improvements to the TTC. Because of our work Toronto has developed and approved two transit improvement plans. Cutting fares and improving service will pull people out of cars. The TTC's Ridership Growth strategy set out a timetable and budget to do just that. Toronto also needs to expand its rapid transit network particularly outside of the downtown core.

Council's Record

Council's record on transit has been mixed. Some aspects of the RGS and Transit City have been implemented: transferable Metropass, some service improvements, and the new St. Clair street car right of way. On the other hand the City's budget setting has often left the TTC in second place. This has slowed the implementation of these programs and has lead to fare increases in the last two years.

Question

7. Will you make implementing the TTC's Ridership Growth Strategy and Transit City plans your top budget priority?

See: <http://www.torontoenvironment.org/transit>

Yes, we must get this right! Public transit is a youth issue, a senior's issue, an environmental issue, a public health issue, a safety issue, a social cohesion issue and a social justice issue. Poor funding of the TTC is incredibly shortsighted.