

## Tory calls on federal, provincial governments to negotiate Safe Restart Agreement

Angela Gismondi January 18, 2021



SCREENSHOT — Toronto Mayor John Tory discussed the need for the federal and provincial governments to begin talks with municipalities for a Safe Restart Agreement for 2021 as soon as possible.

Canada’s economic engines, its cities, need further investment in 2021, Toronto Mayor John Tory said in a recent address.

The city continues to face major budget impacts from COVID-19, said Tory, during a live webcast billed as Ready to Restart: Toronto’s path forward beyond COVID-19 hosted by the Empire Club of Canada in Toronto. The event sponsors were the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario and Waste Connections of Canada.

“The impact of COVID goes beyond one budget year and it goes beyond 2020,” he said. “I firmly believe now is not the time to be cutting services and individuals cannot afford huge tax increases to cover any shortfall.

“Our challenge beyond the pandemic is to make sure our city, the economic engine of Ontario and the economic engine of Canada, restarts and recovers strongly.”

Last year, Tory worked with the provincial and federal government to negotiate the Safe Restart Agreement for 2020 which provided emergency funding to municipalities across Canada to help fund COVID-19 response and other shortfalls experienced by municipalities as a result of the pandemic. A similar agreement is needed for 2021, Tory said.

“I have already begun to advocate to them so as to secure a Safe Restart 2.0 shall we call it, or Safe Restart 2021 agreement for Toronto and for municipalities right across Canada, because many, certainly the larger ones, are in the same boat. I think a number of the smaller ones have challenges in front of them as well,” he noted.

“I will say that it is not a minute too soon for all three orders of government to seriously dedicate themselves to those discussions about a restart for 2021 as it relates to all cities in Canada. The time is now. I say that given the length of time it took to reach agreement on Safe Restart funding in 2020.”

### **Safe Restart Agreement needed to keep capital projects on track**

A renewed Safe Restart agreement for 2021 would provide the support necessary to keep much needed capital projects on track.

“This year’s capital budget, \$3 billion or thereabouts, means more jobs for people, helps the economy to keep growing and makes sure we keep making the long overdue investments in infrastructure that we all know are necessary,” said Tory. “You cannot recover without continuing to build and our capital investments will do just that provided that we have emergency federal and provincial support to keep responding to the pandemic and dealing with some of its consequences.”

No funding agreement could result in consequences for the city’s residents and businesses, he added.

“Make no mistake, if we have a significant shortfall because there is no Safe Restart funding support from the other governments we will have no choice but to cut back up to \$860 million of capital spending. That will affect jobs, it would affect economic activity and it would affect just keeping Toronto in good repair. We can’t afford to have that happen.”

### **Tory stresses importance of affordable housing**

Despite the pandemic, the city was able to implement a number of initiatives in 2020.

“We continue to advance affordable housing with some 9,800 affordable units now in the pipeline and Toronto’s first two modular housing projects now both in place,” Tory said. “These were projects that went from the selection of the sites to people actually moving in in six months. It proves it can be done and it is going to be repeated.”

For the 2021 budget, new investments will be made in parts of the city hardest hit by this virus.

“One area that is fundamental to our recovery is our ongoing need to build housing including, in particular, affordable and supportive housing.

“The pandemic has only made the housing situation far more tenuous for many,” said Tory. “Thousands of Ontarians have been helped through this emergency thanks to our health care workers but many of those same heroes can’t even call our city home due to the increased cost of housing.”

Tory encouraged everyone to continue to adhere to public health advice and follow the guidelines set out by the provincial and federal governments.

“We are poised for a strong comeback when this pandemic is over and that day is coming,” said Tory. “Every shot in the arm with the COVID-19 vaccine brings the end of this nightmare a little bit closer. We all just need to hang on a bit longer.”