

SATURDAY STAR

thestar.com

City cuts quality of life

New taxes still needed, Miller says

\$34 million lopped now, \$83 million next year isn't enough to deal with budget shortfall

DONOVAN VINCENT
AND THERESA BOYLE
CITY HALL BUREAU

Dirtier streets, more graffiti and potholes, less snow removal, city golf courses closing a week earlier, and no Monday service at community centres.

And things won't get better. These and other service reductions will become the norm in Toronto as a result of city manager Shirley Hoy's "cost containment" strategy, which trims \$34 million from the city's operating budget this year and for 2008 will slash \$83 million, far short of the city's projected \$575 million shortfall next year.

A subdued-looking Mayor David Miller told a news conference at City Hall that the changes are unavoidable given the city's fiscal crisis. The crisis peaked during the past two weeks after councillors, in a 23-22 vote, deferred a motion — backed by Miller — to raise about \$350 million by increasing the land transfer tax and vehicle registration fee.

BUDGET continued on A6

THE STAR'S VIEW: Current crisis is the result of council's failure to impose new taxes. AAG

LESS FUN: Community centres closed Mondays, golf courses shut down early, ice time squeezed



AARON LYNETT/TORONTO STAR

Angelina Monteiro swims with her mom, T. Angelica, yesterday at Scadding Court Community Centre at Dundas and Bathurst Sts.

Mayor's move ignites war of words

ROYSON JAMES
CITY HALL COLUMNIST

Today was supposed to be the beginning of a new era in Toronto's fiscal future — one based on hard facts and tough reality.

Without an extra \$350 million in taxes — proposals deferred for three months by city council last July — Mayor David Miller yesterday summoned the media to announce the fallout:

A hiring freeze affecting 376 jobs, 3,000 workers working fewer hours, closed community centres on Mondays, 16 libraries closed on Sundays, loss of premium snow removal service (except in massive snowstorms) pioneered by the old North York, and so on.

Surely, Torontonians would get the message: "There is no way to provide a good quality of life without paying for it."

More importantly, councillors

would be forced to unite behind the mayor, provide stable, confident leadership in the face of public angst over higher taxes and shepherd the city through the crisis.

Not quite. No sooner had Miller delivered the bad news — with warnings of even worse measures to come, if council doesn't rally in October and approve the taxing measures — than city councillors

JAMES continued on A7

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What's your view of the planned cuts to city services? Have your say at www.thestar.com

Every measure undertaken by staff appears to have been designed to punish the citizen of Toronto. This is the politics of fear at its most petty and irresponsible.
Greg Compton, Toronto resident

MORE local reaction on Page A6

GREATER TORONTO > CITY BUDGET

Raising debt by 1,000 cuts

Whether it's the irritation of standing in line a little longer, hitting more potholes or losing your community centre fitness class, the city's budget cuts are likely to affect every Torontonians in some way. Here's a summary of what was announced yesterday.

BUDGET from A1

"All of these things are a diminution of the quality of life in Toronto, and from my perspective that's why it was so important to try and avoid this day," the mayor said.

"All of it is something I don't think any member of council wishes to do, but we face a real choice. It's time for people to understand that you either pay for a quality of life in a city that you want, or you get a different quality of life. There is no way to provide good quality of life without paying for it," Miller said.

Savings from Hoy's reductions include:

- \$700,000 by closing all city community centres on Mondays beginning mid-September.
- \$800,000 by opening outdoor artificial ice rinks in January instead of December.
- \$1 million by providing sidewalk and window plowing only when there's 15 cm of snow. The current standard is 10 cm.
- \$120,000 by cancelling December yard waste pickup.
- \$125,000 by reducing automated leaf pickup, in areas that have it, from two pickups to one.
- \$230,000 by releasing seasonal litter-picking staff two weeks earlier than normal.

Miller says the city still needs the new taxes and council is to vote on them Oct. 22.

6 All of these things are a diminution of the quality of life in Toronto.

MAYOR DAVID MILLER

Yesterday's announcement led to emotional outbursts, with Councilor Howard Moscoe, a supporter of the new taxes, saying seniors will be crying foul over the reductions in snow removal, especially the window service, which is available in certain parts of the city.

"It's going to be awful. We've got an aging population, senior citizens who shovel their driveway, then the snow plow dumps the snow in front."

An ugly shouting match erupted immediately after the cuts were revealed, as councillors launched personal attacks against one another.

"You're a hypocrite, Denzil. You're an absolute hypocrite, and you haven't done the research. You've been on council since you were 12 years old and you don't even know the details in this budget. That's embarrassing," Councilor Adam Vaughan shouted at Councilor Denzil Minnan-Wong.

"Adam, you may be interested in increasing the ratings on your television program, but I'd like to answer this (reporter's) question... do you mind?" Minnan-Wong fired back, a reference to the fact Vaughan hosts *How To* a monthly political special on CP24.

In giving her presentation, Hoy said the city's "financial issues" are on the revenue side.

Under provincial law, the city is required to balance its operating budget every year, she said, adding it has done that over the past few years in part by depleting the city's reserve funds and exhausting all potential one-time fixes.

Hoy said the "long-term sustainable solution" to the city's financial challenges must include: Getting the province to pay the true costs of its social programs and resume carrying half of the TTC's operating budget; obtaining new and diverse revenue sources; and continuing cost-control measures.

The city's operating budget in 2007 is \$7.8 billion. One-quarter of that pays for roads, garbage collection, recycling, parks and recreation services and libraries.

A third covers provincially mandated programs, and another third is spent on TTC, police, fire and ambulance.

Hoy asked for \$30 million in savings from the TTC and \$10 million from the police.

The TTC came up with \$6 million, police \$3 million.

LESS FUN

- Community centres will close Mondays and all programming that day will be cancelled.
- Golf courses will shut down one week early.
- Outdoor artificial rinks will open one month later, in January
- Sixteen library branches will close Sundays. The storyteller-in-residence and teen fine forgiveness programs will end.

CHANGE/IMPACT

- Forty-nine outdoor artificial rinks, including those at Nathan Phillips Square and Mel Lastman Square, will be affected.
- With the end of Monday programs at the city's 130 community centres, thousands of residents who rely on them for fitness, fun and even homework help will be affected.
- Cutbacks in library programs and hours could discourage young readers.



Brenda Morse of the Family Resource Centre at Scadding Court Community Centre reads yesterday to Clara Coleman-Hagy, left, her brother Declana, and Sebastian Garibay, right. Under the city's new budget plans, the Monday-Friday program will now be closed on Mondays.

AARON LYNETT/TORONTO STAR

LONGER WAITS



Lineups to deal with parking tickets could get longer.

- Because of the hiring freeze, "significant delays" are anticipated in issuing licences and responding to requests for inspections and bylaw enforcement, such as calls about graffiti.
- Expect longer lineups at the counters dealing with parking tags, taxes, water payments and building applications.
- Because half of the court services customer phone service staff will be "redeployed," callers may find themselves on hold for as long as 20 minutes, or be referred to the Internet or required to visit in person.
- Support services like information technology will be reduced, resulting in longer system down times.

- Vendors will have to wait longer to get their invoices paid.

CHANGES/IMPACT

As the freeze begins to be felt, expect reduced service in city departments like Municipal Licensing. By the city's own account, you'll have to wait longer to get answers to questions or finish necessary paperwork.

VOICES

"We once again find council taking a chunk out of the taxpayer for our governments' inability to govern a city with limited access to funding. Where is the token reduction in council salary? The refusal of free golf? The refusal to take free TTC passes? Zoo passes? Reduction in

VOICES

"When I was 10, I had no place to go but here (Scadding Community Centre). Now I volunteer here — I escort kids from schools to Scadding. We do all sorts of activities. But with the closures, there's going to be more kids on the streets doing stupid stuff instead of being in here doing progressive stuff. It's messed up. All the parents that work on Mondays, they are going to be stuck about where to put their kids. It's an extra day off for nothing."

MARK HARRIOTT, 21, TORONTO

"I think Mayor Miller wants to punish the citizens for not accepting another tax hike so his plan is to go for services they need the most. Childish, isn't it? Well, he can start by giving up his city-funded privileges."

DEE BLACK, TORONTO

office budgets? Every measure undertaken by staff appears to have been designed to punish the citizen of Toronto. This is the politics of fear at its most petty and irresponsible."

GREG CROMPTON, TORONTO

"It's outrageous that city councillors voted to procrastinate on finding new sources of revenue and, instead, brought down services on their own heads. ... We can't afford these cuts, because it's not cutting fat, it's a total evisceration of how our city functions. We need to bring in the land transfer tax, a liquor tax and congestion tolls."

DAVID DEVEES, TORONTO

MORE MESS

- Park maintenance reduced.
- Residential tree planting reduced.
- Green Roof Initiative delayed.
- Seasonal litter-pickers will be let go two weeks earlier than usual; litter vacuuming will be reduced.
- Grass cut less often on streets and expressways.
- December yard waste pickup cancelled.
- Automated leaf pickup, in areas that have had it, will be reduced from two pickups to one.
- Introduction of curbside garbage pickup at townhouses cancelled.
- Night shift at Etobicoke's Disco Rd. transfer station cancelled, requiring contractors and residents to drop waste there during daylight hours.
- Adoption of a bylaw to regulate construction-related vibration delayed.
- A hiring freeze means delays in bylaw enforcement, "particularly for graffiti eradication."

CHANGE/IMPACT

The city that recently embarked on a plan to become "greener" — literally and figuratively — is putting some of those goals on hold because of the cost. You can expect a somewhat dirtier and less attractive Toronto in months to come.



BEN JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR

VOICES

"Announcing reduced maintenance for parks and trees is laughable. The maintenance is negligible and has been for years. Walk through Taylor Creek Park: weed-choked, fallen insect-infested trees, clogged drainage. It's a disgrace. The water fountain doesn't work and the water from the creek/ravine smells like a cesspool. Of course that's because sewers drain into

R. But Mr. Mayor, I'm sure your office is really nice."

LAURIE HARBABARAS, TORONTO (VIA THESTAR.COM)

"I lived in Toronto for over 20 years. I can't believe the dismal state the city is in. It seems to get dirtier and dirtier every time I visit; oh, that's right, service cuts. ... The last I heard, tax hikes were

required in order to maintain such basic services as garbage collection and maintenance of city parks.

Now they're being reduced, if not cut? Something doesn't smell right, and I don't mean the garbage that's been sitting on the curb since last Tuesday."

DENNIS SINTIC, ATLANTA (VIA THESTAR.COM)

WORSE ROADS



STAR FILE PHOTO

- Less street cleaning.
- Fewer potholes fixed.
- Sidewalk plowing and clearing of snow left in driveways will only occur if there is a minimum of 15 centimetres of snow, versus the former 8 centimetres.

CHANGE/IMPACT

The downtown area will suffer the most with reduced snow-clearing operations. That area is where most of the sidewalk snow removal takes place.

The city's road repair backlog will only get worse. The fewer road repairs done, the faster it deteriorates. Last year, city staff funded more than 40,000 potholes.

VOICES

"I think that everyone who thinks that the city is not spending money properly needs to take a seat and think about it for a second. Maintaining a city is not cheap and people need to understand that. We here in Toronto are fortunate to have such good city services when compared to other cities, both in Canada and the United States — from transit and garbage collection to parks and social services. It was only a matter of time before our 'lower than most other GTA municipalities' taxes caught up with our spending and voila, we get the present day."

JOSH ANDERHECK, TORONTO

'We are on the precipice,' councillor says

JAMES FRASER

turned on each other in a vicious public and personal attack not seen at city hall in decades, if ever. Before journalists could digest the cuts, city councillors went nose-to-nose, shouting, accusing, fighting about who is most responsible for the city's fiscal mess. With television cameras and tape recorders running in the hands of bemused reporters, the bad feelings over last July's vote boiled over.

Former journalist and rookie councillor Adam Vaughan accused Miller's toughest critic, Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong of grandstanding. Minnan-Wong stood nose-to-nose and blasted Vaughan for moonlighting on Citytv to raise his profile. Howard Moscoe hurled his burly frame into the imbroglio with charges that North Yorkers would hold Minnan-Wong responsible for lost snow removal services. And Glen De Baere made piled on blame, Minnan-Wong for Mike Harris's fiscal attacks on city hall.

It is this group that Miller must herd into the council chamber in October to take another stab at approving the new taxes. It's almost inconceivable council would outright reject the taxes, having seen the result of a three-month delay. But all bets are off.

Miller obviously does not have a political strategy yet to deliver the vote. Yesterday, for example, with several news media carrying the news conference live, he failed to directly address Torontonians, opting to give crucial time to city manager Shirley Hoy. She delivered a sober, nuts-and-bolts presentation, not the political, rally-the-citizens address some felt was needed. Even Miller's supporters on council were left scratching their heads over the handling of the crisis.

With a new system that gives him control over the city's agenda, a powerful executive committee and the power of patronage appointments, supporters felt Miller had the tools to deliver the vote. Besides, if the matter wasn't ready for a vote he could have delayed it.

Having lost the deferral vote at council in July, supporters like Vaughan are now freeloading, taking matters into their hands as they panic over the prospect of losing valuable city services. If the public continues to rail against the taxes, councillors who voted for the deferral may kill the proposal outright — changing the city into chaos.

"I'm scared," said De Baere, explaining the verbal brawl. "This could be the end of civilized society for us," he said afterwards. "We are on the precipice."

Miller has 10 weeks to fix it.

Reporters James usually

appear Monday.

Write to James at jfraser@thestar.ca.

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THIS TIME, IT'S PERSONAL

Councillors take their frustrations out on each other after announcement by Mayor David Miller of service cuts in response to city's worsening fiscal crisis



ARON LINETT/TORONTO STAR

Councillors Adam Vaughan (right) and Denzil Minnan-Wong get into a heated discussion at city hall yesterday. Vaughan accused Minnan-Wong, calling him a hypocrite; Minnan-Wong accused Vaughan of 'self-promotion.'

REACTION

Residents critical about budget cuts

City officials announce plans to decrease snow removal service and temporary workers

JEN GERSON AND ROBERT BENZIE
STAFF REPORTERS

Though the weather is warm, it's the winter months that were on the mind of 79-year-old Lina Gramolini, as one of Mayor Miller's budget cuts may leave her stuck when the snow piles up and the plows come through.

"We'll be snowed in," she worries. "My husband can't (drive) it. He's 82 years old and he's not well."

Since the '60s, residents of North York have had their sidewalks and driveways cleared of the piles of snow scooped to the side by plows.

The program was so popular in the region, that it spread to other parts of the city. No more.

In an attempt to contain costs, the city is changing the service. Now, sidewalks and driveways will only be cleared after at least 15 centimetres of new fall.

It's one of many cost-cutting measures announced yesterday by Mayor David Miller and city officials, nearly two weeks after a plan to increase taxes was deferred until Oct. 22 by council.

About 3,000 temporary and seasonal city workers are also going to be affected by the cuts.

"They're going to have less money in their pockets. Two weeks less work in the summer. These are frequent students who are depending on that money to pay for tuition in the fall," Councillor Howard Moscoe said.

Q The taxes keep on going up for everything and they keep taking everything away

CAROL THERIAULT

CUPE 416 president Brian Cochrane said he and several union representatives met with City Manager Shirley Hoy about an hour before the cuts were released to the public. Cochrane said the union asked which workers would be affected, and by how much, but wasn't provided any answers.

"You would have thought that they would have those numbers readily available, but they didn't," he said.

Miller and Hoy yesterday said the

province must help the city. In Moncton, N.B., Premier Dalton McGuinty said he treats the city of Toronto as a mature level of government that can make its own "frequent decisions."

"They've got to make their own choices," the Premier said yesterday at the conclusion of the annual Council of the Federation meeting. On the street, Miller found few friends. "I was against the (land transfer) tax. I thought was a real cash grab," said a Robert Alexander, who was having lunch.

At a downtown Tim Hortons, Carol Theriault and Anne Henderson, both Toronto residents since 1973, criticized the mayor and his cuts over buttered bagels and hot coffee. "I think they need to get new people in there who can decide on something," Theriault said — her faith in city council still shaken by their inability to sit for a photograph together, a petty squabble among members that was publicized this year.

"The taxes keep on going up for everything and they keep taking everything away," she said.

Henderson gave a talk to the city's management. "They should manage their money the right way, like a business," she said. "I hope Miller is already packing."

With files from Theresa Boyle

COMMUNITY CENTRES

Monday closings hurt pupils, daycares

It's not just recreation, 'it's serious life, personal skills,' one director says

SUEVA BHATTACHARYA
STAR REPORTER

Gerson Rodriguez feeds mothers who bring kids along to their high school classes at the Scadding Court community centre on Monday evenings.

The 20-year-old cooks tostadas, souvlaki, fries and burgers, "so they have something to eat while they study," he said. But soon Rodriguez, who makes \$10 an hour, will not be feeding his favourite group, which meets once a week; he'll also lose a day's wages and will have to find another job to make ends meet.

"Money comes and money goes, but with the program gone, what are people going to do?" he asked.

On Mondays starting in mid-September, all community centres will be closed and programs cancelled, as part of budget cuts aimed at saving \$34 million by the end of 2007.

"Community centres have gone beyond recreation," said Suzanne Burkhardt, director of development and community engagement at the centre. "It's about imparting serious life and personal skills. It comes to people to stay fit."

The centre, across the street from Toronto Western Hospital, also operates an occasional and emergency daycare. Neighbourhood families and those using the hospital will find it closed Monday.

Ed Garbay, who came by to pick up his two children, works as a teacher and contractor. He says he can adjust his Monday schedule to hang out with his children, but "others may not be so lucky."

A Monday swim program that attracts about 15 to 20 swimmers with disabilities will be affected, said the centre's executive director, Kevin Lee, who heard of the closings from the Star. "This is the only social time they have. For some, it's the only time they get out of where they live." More than 500 people use the centre daily.

"We are calling governments to stop short-term thinking. It ends up on the backs of the most marginalized," Lee added.

El Son 20, who lives in nearby social housing, plays basketball and uses computers at the Scadding Court several times a week.

"Community centres are for youths in the 'hoods, and usually these centres are in bad 'hoods. They don't care about us," he said after hearing the news.