

# Trudeau mum on city's plea for aid

Toronto Star · 20 Sep 2023 · A2 · DAVID RIDER CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF

The Justin Trudeau government is refusing to say if it will accept an invitation from Premier Doug Ford and Mayor Olivia Chow to help fix Toronto's pandemic-ravaged finances. The Prime Minister's office and staff for Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, a Toronto MP, would not say Tuesday if they will accept an invitation issued Monday from Ford and Chow after they met at Queen's Park.

"Simply put, Toronto needs a new deal," Ford told reporters after the meeting, for the first time publicly agreeing with Chow that Toronto's battered finances are structurally unsustainable, not the result of wasteful spending. "We need all levels of government working together. That's why we're urging the federal government to meet us at the table by joining this 'new deal' working group. It's certainly my expectation that any agreement will include additional financial support from the federal government."

On Monday, a spokesperson for Freeland emailed the Star: "The federal government has been — and will continue to be — a committed partner for the City of Toronto. We are pleased today to see the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto take steps to work together, which is both appropriate and necessary."

Katherine Cuplinskas, however, has not responded to followup requests for a direct answer as to whether federal civil servants will join those from the city and Queen's Park in the working group focused on fixing Toronto's finances. Mohammad Hussain, Trudeau's press secretary, responded on Tuesday: "Nothing to add to (deputy prime minister's) response."

One Toronto Liberal MP, however, said her government needs to talk about putting Toronto and other cities on a stable financial footing.

Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport) said it's important to note that the Trudeau government has made "historic" investments in city infrastructure and that Toronto's most important relationship is with the province "because there is such a dependent relationship in terms of costs and services."

But, she added: "You cannot have Canada's largest city not knowing what services are supposed to be delivering and whether or not they have the finances to be able to deliver on those services."

"There will be a time, and I would argue for it to be sooner rather than later, that there will be a role for the federal government to have a discussion about ensuring that Canada's largest cities, including the city of Toronto, have a long-term stable fiscal framework."

Discussions should include the possibility of Ottawa helping to fund TTC operations, in addition to help with transit construction costs, she said.