

OTR-Podcast-2026Apr3

Fri, Apr 03, 2026 2:25PM 11:39

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Municipal election, voter turnout, TTC fares, traffic congestion, Toronto Police Service, affordable housing, housing starts, municipal budget, transit safety, community crisis service, municipal politics, city government, municipal issues, candidate awareness, student engagement.

SPEAKERS

Speaker 5, Speaker 3, Speaker 4, Coun. Moise, Anish Dhupar, John Robinson, Julia Petrucci, Rakesh Mehta, Speaker 2

A Anish Dhupar 00:00
Welcome back to the OTR Podcast. I'm Anish Dhupar.

J Julia Petrucci 00:10
And I'm Julia Petrucci. This semester, we've been doing things a little bit differently. We're stripping back the campaign posters and looking at the gears actually turning inside City Hall as we head into a municipal election this fall.

A Anish Dhupar 00:22
fWe were focusing on municipal politics in the GTA, from who controls the multi billion dollar budget to why your commute feels like a permanent construction site.

J Julia Petrucci 00:32
If you have a question about why things work or don't email it us at on the record news at torontomu.ca,

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Anish Dhupar 00:40

to help answer this big question and more, we're going to be talking to Rakesh Mehta, a housing expert and real estate agent in Toronto, as well as students right here at TMU.

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Julia Petrucci 00:51

Let's start with a reality check. Voter turnout in Toronto is cratering in 2014 it was 55% by 2022 it was just 29% things got slightly better for the by election that gave us Olivia Chow as mayor, but at 38% the numbers were still very low.

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Anish Dhupar 01:10

That's a lot of people leaving the keys to an \$18.9 billion budget in someone else's hands. And yet, the city government controls everything from transit and housing to policing and infrastructure decisions that affect nearly 1.9 million eligible voters across Toronto. Let's look at where that money goes, starting with the TTC

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Julia Petrucci 01:34

Mayor Olivia Chow's 2026 budget just froze TTC fares for the third year in a row.

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Anish Dhupar 01:39

That's a major win for affordability, especially with the new fare capping system launching this September, where your rides are free after 47 trips in a month. But what Chow saw as an accomplishment is a double edged sword for Toronto, ridership is still hovering at roughly 82% of pre pandemic levels, while operating costs have skyrocketed to 137% compared to 2019 so who's responsible?

J

Julia Petrucci 02:05

The city funds the operations, but Metrolinx, a provincial agency, controls the big builds, while line six, Finch West finally opened in late 2025 we're still waiting on the Eglinton Crosstown. If your train is late. Tell the city if the new one isn't open yet. Look to Queen's Park.

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Anish Dhupar 02:27

Traffic is the city's most visible failure in 2025 Toronto was ranked the second most congested city in Canada by Tom tom.com trailing only Vancouver.

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Julia Petrucci 02:38

The fix so far the 2026 to 2028 congestion management plan. The city hired 27 new traffic agents and expanded smart street signals to 244 locations.

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Anish Dhupar 02:50

The mayor promised to get Toronto moving, but Torontonians still lost an average of 100 hours to rush hour traffic last year. The loss of time, combined with the record number of construction projects for city infrastructure means Toronto is stuck in traffic for hours more than anticipated each year.

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Julia Petrucci 03:12

This might be the most contentious line in the budget. The Toronto Police Service now has a \$1.43 billion net budget.

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Anish Dhupar 03:20

That's a 7% increase over last year. The accomplishment here chief Myron demu says priority one response times, including calls involving danger to life, have dropped by over five minutes. There are also adding a total of 143 new officers this year after retirements.

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Julia Petrucci 03:40

But critics point out that while police funding climbs, the Toronto Community crisis service, which handles mental health calls, is still scaling. They handled over 1200 mobile dispatches in January of 2026 alone. But the city is still debating if the funding shift is happening fast enough.

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Anish Dhupar 03:59

Finally, the roof over your head. The city's goal was 285,000 new homes by 2031

J Julia Petrucci 04:07

As of early 2026 the pace is struggling. Toronto actually saw a 28% decline in housing starts this past February compared to last year, mostly due to a dip in multi unit projects.

A Anish Dhupar 04:20

It's progress in some areas, but completions are lagging. The city can improve the permits, but it can't force developers to build when interest rates and construction costs remain high. This week, OTR managed to talk to Rakesh Mehta, a housing expert and real estate agent in Toronto, to better understand if the current municipal government has stayed true to its word. Here's what he had to say.

R Rakesh Mehta 04:45

The mayor of Toronto that just announced, in coordination with the, I think, with both provincial and federal party that they're going to be developing, I think I don't remember. The precise, exact number, but 1000s of affordable units in the near future, they're giving up some, some of the lands that are owned by the city versus province versus the federal land. So there, matter of fact, there was a, I think there was an article or something, to relation with a parking lot, or something a GO station parking lot somewhere, they were thinking of converting it into putting up some affordable housing. But this one seemed like a very positive step that the city of Toronto had just taken not too long. I think it was like a few weeks ago that she made the announcement that they're going to be building all across the Toronto area a lot of affordable housing.

J Julia Petrucci 05:52

Meanwhile, Toronto Community housing's 2026 budget sits at \$666 million and their focus is on maintaining and cleaning up the housing that they are responsible for,

R Rakesh Mehta 06:03

although the the rental prices have drastically, have come down from from the pandemic. Days, like during the pandemic, the one bedroom rent had gone up to 26 to \$2,800 and and now it has come down close to \$2,000 but these the new development that the city is thinking of, they're thinking of even trying to come up even lower than that, if possible.

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Anish Dhupar 06:36

And in March, the City Council approved what could amount to 7855 new residential units in the city, including 3019 rental units and a new YMCA facility in North York. So progress is being made, but will it be enough to convince you to vote in October? Taking a look back at our previous podcast episodes, we had talked about promises being kept in Toronto, especially when it comes to housing. Here's what Professor John Robinson, a member of the City Council in Toronto's climate advisory group, had to say:

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John Robinson 07:09

People are concerned with affordable housing. They don't think of that as a climate issue. It is a sustainability issue. They're concerned with transit access, right? They're concerned with food deserts and unavailability and unaffordability of fresh vegetables in their neighborhood, or whatever it might be, and they're in groups, trying to, you know, tenants associations and so on, trying to make things better in all those ways. That's what we have to do. We have to find out what they're doing, what they care about, what they want, and then we have to make the connection to that.

J

Julia Petrucci 07:39

We wanted to hear what you thought outside our newsroom, we posted the question, what would drive you to vote? Providing three options, a candidate who spoke about police presence on campus, a candidate who spoke about improving transit safety, or a candidate with ideas to improve housing, we received 29 responses, of which 17 chose a candidate that prioritizes police presence on campus, 12 for a candidate with ideas to improve housing, and only two in favor of a candidate who spoke about improving transit safety.

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Anish Dhupar 08:10

We also wanted to include a clip from on the records first podcast this semester where we talked about how power works at a municipal level. Councilor Chris Moyes had said

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Coun. Moise 08:20

everything that is closest to the people is useful governments that deals with that. So it's, I think it's more important. I mean, I'm a little biased than any other level of government, because we impact and touch your lives every second of the day. So I really think it's important that young people engage, you know, municipally, because it does impact them.

J Julia Petrucci 08:54

We also hit the streets to see if students actually know who their candidates are for the upcoming election spoiler most don't. Here's what they said.

S Speaker 2 09:04

Definitely being more informed about it. I think if I knew what I was voting for, and you know what, like strategies that they're putting out for me to vote, that's, yeah, that would make me want

S Speaker 3 09:16

to vote. It would be probably just being more aware of, like, what's going on and what like their like plans for us are, and also just having like information be more accessible, because right now, like, I don't, I don't really see a lot of it like on the internet. So yeah, yeah,

S Speaker 4 09:37

for me to vote in the municipal election, I think I would first need to know what it is, just generally speaking, and what the candidates stand for, and how that would benefit me, both as a student and as someone who's trying to have a career in

S Speaker 5 09:55

Toronto, I just feel like more awareness and like more information about it, and like just getting to learn. Bit more about it, and then they'll have my vote overall. In the past, I think candidates have been very watered down within their policies and leanings. I really want a candidate that is pro Palestine, pro trans rights, pro free health care, pro, you know, free transit. I personally lean more towards democratic socialism, so a candidate that aligns with that as well, just someone who I genuinely feel cares about me as a student, a person, you know, stuff like that. I like Olivia Chow, but I do feel that she has been too watered down in her approach to aligning herself with certain causes and ideologies.

A Anish Dhupar 10:34

We reached out to Toronto Police Services and Toronto metropolitan campus security for a comment on safety, but received no response.

J Julia Petrucci 10:42

Thanks for stepping up to the mic, TMU. It was a shock to find out that of the 15 or so Streeters we did not a single student on Tmu campus knew about the upcoming municipal election. If you want to know more about the politics in our city, you can visit the City of Toronto's website, forward slash elections for more information.

A Anish Dhupar 11:01

Remember, the city government affects your rent, your commute and your safety more than almost any other level of government. Don't leave it to the rest of the city to decide what Toronto looks like for the next four years. I'm Anish Dhupar, thanks for listening to our podcast this semester on the upcoming municipal election.

J Julia Petrucci 11:20

And I'm Julia Petrucci, special thanks to almost barely for our theme music. Letting go. Thanks for listening.