

 **TORONTO** STAFF REPORT

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January 6, 2003

To: Board of Health  
From: Dr. Sheela V. Basrur, Medical Officer of Health  
Subject: Progress Report on the Toronto Food Policy Council

Purpose:

This report provides an update to the Board of Health on the activities of the Toronto Food Policy Council during 2002.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

On January 28, 2002, the Board of Health voted to renew the Toronto Food Policy Council's mandate, to approve a new committee-based structure for the TFPC, and to appoint 24 citizen members to the TFPC. The TFPC serves to identify and respond to emerging issues in the field of food security and public health, and to bridge innovative food security policies that come out of the experience of leaders of social agencies, environmental organizations and scholarly networks. The TFPC, which includes members of City Council and the Board of Health, reports to the Board of Health. The TFPC's Project Coordinator is a City employee funded by Toronto Public Health.

This report updates the Board of Health on the activities and achievements of the Toronto Food Policy Council during 2002. The minutes of specific TFPC meetings are filed with the Secretary to the Board of Health, and are also available from the TFPC secretary.

Comments:

In 2002, the Toronto Food Policy Council celebrate its tenth year of service to the development of healthy public policy and food security initiatives in Toronto. With volunteer community members appointed by the Board of Health and a small core staff supported by Toronto Public Health, the TFPC has been able to investigate, facilitate development and encourage a wide range of innovative community-based projects and programs.

The TFPC is able to make unique contributions because of its ability to draw on the energy and expertise of a wide range of volunteers, and because of its ability to link the work of food security advocates from many sectors of the community to the work of staff in many departments within the City. The names and outstanding qualifications of the TFPC's 24 members can be obtained from the Toronto Board of Health Administrator or the TFPC office. The knowledge and connections which these members bring to the work of the TFPC is augmented by the participation at TFPC committee meetings of a wide range of experts from both the City and community. The TFPC's four committees are organized to deal with both thematic issues (Planning and Economic Development, Food and Hunger Action and Advocacy, and Regional Agriculture) and tasks (Outreach and Education). But since their work focuses on project development and implementation rather than the adoption of policy, non-members of the TFPC and appropriate members of City staff are welcomed to participate. Thus, the committees have functioned to increase the TFPC's capacity as a diverse, knowledge-intensive and well-networked organization.

The public health contribution of the Toronto Food Policy Council's networking and policy innovation enjoys increasing recognition nationally and internationally. As a result, the TFPC Project Coordinator has been invited to make presentations on Toronto food security initiatives, and the work of the TFPC itself, at a number of major gatherings, including the World Food Summit in Rome, the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements in Victoria, and the Community Food Security Coalition in Seattle. As well, food policy councils or food charters modelled on Toronto's are emerging in centres such as Saskatoon, Ottawa, Victoria and Vancouver. The TFPC Project Coordinator has been elected to the board of the North America-wide Community Food Security Coalition, appointed to the advisory committee of the Ryerson University-based Canadian Centre for Studies in Food Security, and named to the United Nations' International Planning Committee, which coordinates relations between the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization and food security organizations around the world. In October 2002, the Toronto Food Policy Council and its Coordinator were also granted the Silver Canada Environment Award for contributions toward sustainable living by Canadian Geographic and Environment Canada.

The development of a committee-based structure for the TFPC has been successful on two fronts. The smaller working committees provide more opportunities to engage volunteers and members of various agencies dealing with food security issues, while allowing specific projects and proposals to be developed in more detail, than would be possible in a full meeting of the TFPC. At the same time, full meetings of the TFPC now have the time and opportunity to deal with general policy issues that were formerly crowded off the agenda because of the time spent on discussing specific projects.

There have been five full meetings of the TFPC since January 2002. For the first time in the TFPC's history, its meetings included reports from and discussions of ongoing food security initiatives within TPH, such as the redesign of Nutrition Services and "Cooking Healthy Together", a community-based train-the-trainer food-skills program. This ongoing TFPC-TPH dialogue enhances the potential for mutual networking and education, as well as possibilities for program development.

Now that its work is more streamlined, the full TFPC has also been able to respond to emerging policy issues that benefit from a multi-sectoral food systems perspective. Since September 2002, for example, the TFPC has adopted statements on a number of issues, including: a federal initiative through the Centre for Science in the Public Interest promoting more comprehensive nutrition labelling; the Official Plan's treatment of food security issues; the proposed community greenhouse and garden at the former Wychwood Barns; the Queen's Park Select Committee on Alternative Fuel Sources positive report on clean-burning and farm-based eco-fuels; and the impact of TTC fare hikes on food security. Each of these statements has stimulated informed discussion within a variety of groups, including the Board of Health, Food and Hunger Action Committee, Planning and Transportation Committee, as well as among the general public. Health Canada responded positively to the nutrition labelling recommendation and will be adopting a policy based on the recommendation beginning in 2003.

The remainder of this progress report will review each of the TFPC's committees and the initiatives undertaken by them.

#### Food and Hunger Action and Advocacy Committee:

The Food and Hunger Action and Advocacy Committee advises and supports the TFPC Project Coordinator in his role as co-lead of the staff implementation team responsible for implementation of recommendations contained in "The Growing Season", the report of the Food and Hunger Action Committee approved by City Council in March 2001. The committee coordinates the TFPC's implementation of the Food and Hunger Action Committee (FAHAC) recommendations assigned to the TFPC. The committee also assists community groups and agencies in advocating food security programs.

Since January 2002, this committee developed the TFPC's response to the Board of Health report on the costs of a nutritious food basket. This fulfilled FAHAC's request that the nutritious food basket report be presented to City Council, along with recommendations for action that City Council might undertake. The TFPC's report was endorsed by the Community Services Committee and adopted by City Council during the spring of 2002.

This committee also supported TFPC implementation of several Food and Hunger Action Committee recommendations dealing with urban agriculture, farmers markets and educational programs. Encouragement of new post-secondary courses on food security met with success at Ryerson University (where a certificate program on food security was formally approved in December 2002) and the University of Toronto (where the Equity Studies Program sponsors a course on food security). Efforts to initiate community farmers' markets in neighbourhoods

under-served by conventional food retailers are also underway in two locations: Flemington Park and Moss Park.

This committee also supported the efforts to find financial resources for community-based food security projects, as endorsed by the Food and Hunger Action Committee's report, "The Growing Season", adopted by City Council in March 2001. During 2002, \$800,000 from Ontario Works monies was earmarked for a City grants program, administered by Community and Neighbourhood Services, supporting community-based food security initiatives.

This committee also oversaw TFPC staff involvement in preparation of a position paper on community food security that was adopted by the Ontario Public Health Association during its November 2002 annual meeting and conference. In addition, this committee will provide support to the staff Coordinator in new roles as board member of the Community Food Security Coalition and as International Planning Committee representative for North American food security groups at the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

#### Regional Agriculture Committee:

The Regional Agriculture Committee promotes food production within the GTA as a contribution to community development, environmental health, personal well being and fitness, and economic self-reliance.

Since January 2002, this committee received and reviewed accepted a consultant's report on low-cost methods of season extension gardening. The report is intended to increase the variety of foods grown in Toronto, and to assist multicultural gardeners interested in growing the healthful fruits and vegetables they enjoyed in their land of birth. About 150 copies of the report have been distributed to avid backyard gardeners and community gardening leaders. There is interest from managers of two community recreation centres to use this report for a pilot project in adult education on gardening during 2003. Copies of the draft report are available from the TFPC.

This committee undertook advocacy on behalf of community-based composting. One TFPC member, the manager of Scadding Court Community Centre, worked with the committee to secure financial support from the City's Works and Emergency Services Committee for composting at the Alexandra Park Housing Co-op. The proposed pilot project was designed to test various strategies for encouraging composting among members of diverse ethno-cultural groups living in multi-unit residences, groups often overlooked in recycling and re-use programs. The proposed pilot was also designed to secure federal employment-readiness funding to employ at-risk youth from the Housing Co-op, thereby developing work and life skills around recycling and community development. Works and Emergency Services supported the pilot project by making composting equipment available. Thus, the Committee was able to leverage resources from a variety of sectors that might not be attracted to a more narrowly-defined approach to composting.

The committee also initiated a partnership to sponsor two Aboriginal community gardens in Toronto: one near Allen Gardens (on the grounds of several First Nations organizations which adjoin the park) to showcase the agriculture practised by Aboriginal peoples prior to the arrival

of Europeans; and one to serve the First Nations communities living in the Gabriel Dumont Housing Co-op in the former municipality of Scarborough. Illustrating the TFPC's ability to catalyse partnerships, the Aboriginal Community Garden initiative links members of several Aboriginal organizations with staff from the TFPC, Economic Development Culture and Tourism, and the CAO's office.

This committee also led a delegation from Botswana on a tour of community gardens and community kitchens that assist citizens with their food security needs and that sponsor community economic development opportunities accessible to members of vulnerable or marginalized groups. Organizers of the Botswana delegation believed this tour was helpful for the design of programs to cope with the need for healthy eating, community development, economic recovery and personal healing in the wake of the AIDS crisis in Southern Africa.

#### Planning and Economic Development Committee:

The Planning and Economic Development Committee promotes dialogue among public health staff, urban planners, economic developers and farmers – all key partners in a comprehensive food system approach to food security.

Since January 2002, this committee worked to ensure that the Official Plan, the City's major blueprint for the future, registered the importance of food security. Dialogue with Urban Development staff led to the inclusion of over 20 significant references to food security and public health themes in the final draft of the Official Plan.

This committee organized a public lecture by Robert Baldwin, a New Hampshire real estate developer who is a leader in the U.S. development industry. Baldwin designs countryside communities that meet the desires of homebuyers for rural scenery and open space while respecting the need to protect rural food production. His lecture attracted about 40 planners interested in alternatives to urban sprawl, and helped establish the TFPC as a contributor to the development of what's increasingly called "smart growth" policy around sprawl.

This committee worked with Guelph University's Centre for Land and Water Stewardship to co-sponsor an Ontario Farmland Conservation Forum in Mountsberg on April 20, 2002. The success of this forum encouraged committee members to develop programs to protect GTA farmland by encouraging more regional self-reliance in food production. Organization of a networking conference for 2003 – designed to bring GTA food producers, distributors, retailers and consumers together to promote locally grown and processed food – is underway. The success of such conferences testifies to the TFPC's ability to partner with a range of community groups to promote innovative "win-win" relationships among groups that are too often at odds with one another as a result of different perspectives on the issues involved in food security.

#### Outreach and Education Committee:

The Outreach and Education Committee recommends and supports new TFPC members, and ensures that the TFPC represents Toronto's diverse population and the variety of food security

initiatives that flourish in Toronto. The committee also manages the TFPC's public education programs.

Since January 2002, this committee has overseen preparation of the TFPC's first orientation kit, "Introducing the Toronto Food Policy Council: Who We Are, What We Do and How We Do It". The kit explains the mandate and structures of the TFPC and reviews the TFPC's ten years of accomplishment. While designed for new members, the kit is also appropriate for the students, public health staff and food security advocates from across North America who call to find out more about the TFPC. The kit is available from the TFPC, and an electronic version will be posted on Toronto Public Health web site pages.

This committee oversaw initiation of a daily e-mail information service, providing subscribers with information on jobs, volunteer opportunities, publications, trends and positive developments in municipal food security organizations. The service has approximately 400 subscribers, many of whom post TFPC material on various list-servs. About 250 of the subscribers are active in food-related organizations and agencies in Toronto; the TFPC service gives them information they would otherwise have trouble getting hold of. About 150 subscribers live in various places across Canada or around the world, so this service also affirms Toronto's leadership in municipally-based food security programming.

This committee fielded speaking requests directed to TFPC representatives, (usually the Coordinator). Since January, ten invitations have been accepted. Several invitations came from professors in local post-secondary institutions. There were also invitations to speak at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, to a conference of Alberta dietitians, to a special session of the Environmental Studies Association, and to the House of Commons Committee on Agriculture. Such presentations provided opportunities to showcase the work of the TFPC and to facilitate information sharing among the many organizations involved with food security. All expenses related to these presentations were paid for by the host organizations.

This committee oversaw the TFPC's presence on TPH web site pages. From January to July 2002, the TFPC's web page, presenting TFPC reports issued over the last ten years, received 2,824 visits. The increase in visits during the spring (from 358 in February to 518 in May) probably reflects the influence of the TFPC's e-mail information service, which draws attention to the web site.

Through this committee, the TFPC coordinated the rental and resourcing of a Food and Hunger Action Committee booth at the 2002 Royal Winter Agricultural Fair. This provided the community partners of the Food and Hunger Action Committee, as well as TFPC members working at various community-based food agencies, an opportunity to meet with the public, to speak at a number of Royal Fair events, and to enlist volunteers to help with their work.

Members of this committee were also involved in the production of "Chutney Reader", a bi-monthly electronic bulletin designed to serve the needs of people working in community-based food agencies across Ontario. The bulletin is produced by Kathryn Scharf of FoodShare (also a member of the TFPC) in partnership with the TFPC.

Conclusions :

The Toronto Food Policy Council has made many impressive contributions to the fields of health promotion and food security in this past year since the Board of Health approved its renewed mandate, membership and structure. Its new structure has helped the TFPC focus on practical deliverables while engaging knowledgeable citizens from many walks of life in the work of food security policy, program and project development. This work has been of benefit to a wide range of residents in Toronto, and to food security practitioners across the country and internationally.

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