

Food and Hunger Action Committee Phase I Report, "Planting the Seeds"

(City Council on July 4, 5 and 6, 2000, amended this Clause by adding thereto the following:

"It is further recommended that:

- (1) the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the appropriate City staff, be requested to identify and report back to Community Services Committee on:
 - (a) how many City of Toronto wards in the 44 ward system will not have community gardens; and*
 - (b) which of those wards would most benefit from access to a community garden (such as low income and seniors' communities);**
- (2) the City of Toronto move towards building community gardens in those communities before 2003; and*
- (3) Council express its appreciation to the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services and all staff involved in the preparation of this report."*

The Community Services Committee recommends the adoption of the report dated June 1, 2000, from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services.

The Community Services Committee reports, for the information of Council, having:

- (a) directed that the appropriate staff from the Urban Development Services Department and the Toronto Food Policy Council be requested to report to the Food and Hunger Action Committee in September 2000 on the following:
 - the result of the summer pilot project of the Organic Farmers' Market;
 - identification of City-owned land that can accommodate Ontario farmers who want to sell food to local neighbourhoods; and
 - the feasibility of establishing a policy whereby minimal rent can be charged to interested farmers in areas where access to food is a problem; and
- (b) expressed appreciation to the Co-Chairs and Members of the Food and Hunger Action Committee for their efforts.

The Community Services Committee submits the following report (June 1, 2000) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:

Purpose:

To report on the findings and recommendations of the Food and Hunger Action Committee's Phase I report, entitled "Planting the Seeds."

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no unbudgeted financial implications arising from this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) Council adopt the recommendations of the Food and Hunger Action Committee Phase I report, "Planting the Seeds", specifically that the City of Toronto:
 - (a) endorse the principle that all people in Toronto should have an adequate supply of safe, nutritious, affordable and appropriate food;
 - (b) promote the City of Toronto's role in advocating, co-ordinating, and supporting systems, policies, and programs to ensure food security in Toronto;
 - (c) approve the following actions for Phase II of the Food and Hunger Action Committee's work:
 - (i) develop a Food Charter for the City of Toronto;
 - (ii) develop a Food and Hunger Action Plan for the City of Toronto that proposes concrete strategies to improve food security and access to safe, affordable, appropriate and nutritious food for all Torontonians, identifies policy and program changes required to improve the co-ordination and delivery of services related to food and hunger, and recommends appropriate roles for each level of government;
 - (iii) report back to the new City Council with the Food Charter and the Food and Hunger Action Plan by February 2001;
 - (iv) identify priority initiatives for the 2001 budget process within the context of the Food and Hunger Action Plan;
- (2) the Food and Hunger Action Committee Phase I report, "Planting the Seeds" be forwarded to the Board of Health for information; and

- (3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its December 1999 meeting, City Council approved the creation of a Food and Hunger Action Committee with a mandate to improve food security and access to nutritious food and to reduce hunger in the City of Toronto. The work of the Committee was divided into two phases. Phase I was to consolidate information on the state of food and hunger issues in Toronto using community consultations and an internal review of available material. A literature review and inventory of existing City of Toronto programs and policies related to food and hunger issues and recommendations on how to proceed with Phase II were also to be included.

Phase II will identify policy and program changes required to improve the co-ordination and delivery of food and hunger related services, and determine appropriate roles for each level of government.

The Food and Hunger Action Committee has concluded Phase I of its work, the results of which are contained in the attached report, "Planting the Seeds." The following staff report provides a summary of the report and comments on its findings and recommendations. A separate report summarizing the results of the community consultations, entitled "Food for Thought: A What We Heard Report," was released in May 2000.

Comments:

The Food and Hunger Action Committee report provides a comprehensive summary of the state of food and hunger issues in Toronto within a framework that encompasses four main areas:

- (i) Food for survival;
- (ii) Food for health;
- (iii) Food for social well-being and community building;
- (iv) Food as part of the local economy and environment.

Key Findings of the Food and Hunger Action Committee Report:

The report concludes that despite the considerable efforts by the community-based sector and the City of Toronto in each of these areas to improve food security, more needs to be done before Toronto can be declared a "food-secure" City. Specifically, to ensure that all Torontonians have access to safe, affordable, nutritious and appropriate food.

The report finds that although Toronto has hundreds of food programs and initiatives, there is little consistency among programs and no overall co-ordination. Many programs depend heavily on donations and volunteer labour, which can be unpredictable in the short run and unsustainable in the long run.

The growing problem of hunger is highlighted as a result of the deepening poverty of Toronto's low-income citizens. The benefits of the recent economic boom have not been distributed evenly throughout society. Changes in eligibility requirements in income support programs and cuts to social assistance benefits at a time of rising housing costs have left many people unable to both pay their rent and feed their families.

(a) Food for Survival:

Toronto food banks serve about 60,000 people every month. Volunteer groups run emergency shelters that serve meals to homeless people. More than 650,000 charitable meals are served every month in drop-ins, hostels and similar meal programs. Many of these programs have been in existence for 10 to 15 years, and have become permanent fixtures in Toronto. Because so many people rely on them as sources of food, they now act as an unofficial, non-governmental "top-up" to social assistance benefits or minimum-wage incomes.

(b) Food for Health:

The City of Toronto plays an important role in promoting nutritional health, mostly through its Public Health programs. Poor nutrition is a problem that affects Torontonians in all income groups. The Toronto Food Policy Council has estimated that 20 percent of the \$17 billion spent annually on health care in Ontario can be traced to diet-related health problems.

The most important priorities for nutritional health are infants, children, and pregnant women. Toronto Public Health offers prenatal programs that aim to give children a good nutritional start in life, and public awareness programs to encourage better eating habits. The City also contributes about a quarter of the cost of Toronto's over 300 children's nutrition programs, mostly delivered through schools. Several non-profit organizations, such as FoodShare and the Red Cross, offer programs to provide families, the elderly, and disabled people with nutritious food, through initiatives such as the Good Food Box and Meals on Wheels.

(c) Food for Social Well-Being and Community Building:

Food is important not only for physical health; it can also play an important role in community building and improving the quality of life for all Torontonians. Community gardens, cooking programs, and congregate dining programs bring people together to grow, prepare, or enjoy food. Through these programs people learn new skills and get to know others in their communities. Community gardens help green the environment and make people more self-sufficient.

(d) Food as Part of the Local Economy and Environment:

Food is also an essential part of Toronto's economy. One in ten people in our City works in the food sector, which includes restaurants, food stores, and large food manufacturing plants. The City of Toronto supports the Toronto Kitchen Incubator, which provides facilities for start-up food businesses. However, Toronto is behind many other North American cities in capitalizing on the benefits of urban agriculture. In addition, people in certain areas of Toronto do not have

good access to large food stores, either because there are few stores in the vicinity and the area is poorly served by transit, or because the only available shops are expensive convenience stores.

The Role of the City in Food Security:

In addition to its Public Health and Community Services programs, many City policies affect the food security of thousands of Torontonians. For example, transit policies and pricing affect the access of low-income people to stores and food programs. Parks and Recreation policies affect the land available for cultivation as community gardens. Economic development policies affect the growth and viability of food-based businesses.

Despite Toronto's important role in the production, distribution, and consumption of food, the City does not have an overall food policy. The next phase of the Food and Hunger Action Committee's work will be to focus on creating such a policy as well as an action plan to ensure that the City takes a consistent, co-ordinated approach to food-based needs and opportunities.

The City of Toronto cannot act alone, however. In Phase II, the Food and Hunger Action Committee will also consider ways in which the City, in co-operation with community groups and anti-hunger organizations, can advocate to other levels of government regarding their responsibility to relieve hunger and improve food security for all Torontonians. The goal must be to prevent problems, rather than continuing to pour money into stopgap measures.

Conclusions:

Access to safe, nutritious, affordable and appropriate food is an important issue for us all. Despite its broad ranging significance, however, Canada does not have a national food policy. There are no provincial food or nutrition policies. In addition, over the past few years a number of provincial decisions have negatively affected social programs in Ontario and deepened the poverty of its low-income individuals.

In the absence of federal and provincial leadership, the City of Toronto has, most recently, created the Food and Hunger Action Committee as part of its commitment to these issues. The Committee's Phase I report highlights that much is already being done by the City of Toronto and the broader community toward increasing food security for all Torontonians, however, it is clear that more needs to be done. It is, therefore, recommended that City Council adopt the recommendations contained in that report in order to move forward with creating a food charter and comprehensive food and hunger action plan to ensure that the City is capitalizing on all potential opportunities to ensure food security for everyone in our City.

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List of Attachments:

Appendix A: Food and Hunger Action Committee Phase I Report, "Planting the Seeds."

(A copy of the Food and Hunger Action Committee Phase I Report, "Planting the Seeds", and its Executive Summary was forwarded to all Members of Council with the supplementary agenda of the Community Services Committee for its meeting on June 15, 2000, and a copy thereof is on file in the office of the City Clerk.)

Councillor Pam McConnell, Co-Chair, Food and Hunger Action Committee, appeared before the Community Services Committee in connection with the foregoing matter.