

**Concept for a Landmark Community Hub for Food and Learning  
at the TDSB Bloor/Dufferin Redevelopment Site**

<b>Date:</b>	September 21, 2015
<b>To:</b>	Executive Committee
<b>From:</b>	Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration
<b>Wards:</b>	18
<b>Reference Number:</b>	AFS#21716

**SUMMARY**

This report seeks authorization for the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to approach the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Toronto Lands Corporation, local community partners including FoodShare, and the Province of Ontario to explore and further develop the concept of a landmark community hub for food and learning at the Bloor-Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site. Such an initiative would establish Toronto as a leader in cross-cutting social, educational, environmental, and economic development innovations.

At the direction of Council, staff conducted an assessment of City interests in Bloor/Dufferin as a site for a community hub. The property is strategically important for all four of the City's defined municipal interests in school properties, and in particular is recommended as the setting for a flagship urban agriculture centre/community food hub, as requested by Council in 2013. Such a hub would promote linkages between education, community economic development, and a healthy, sustainable urban food system. Parkland and City services including child care would also be prioritized.

The Province of Ontario has recently agreed to support cities, school boards, and local communities to work together to create innovative community hubs that are responsive to local priorities. In light of renewed interest in a community hub at the Bloor/Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site, it is timely for all of the potential partners to review their interests in the site in order to develop a collective vision for the future of Bloor/Dufferin.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **The Executive Director of Social Development Finance & Administration recommends that:**

1. City Council approve the concept of a landmark community hub for food and learning at the Bloor/Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site focused on linkages between education, community economic development, and a healthy, sustainable urban food system;
2. City Council authorize the Executive Director of Social Development, Finance, and Administration to enter into discussions on behalf of the City of Toronto, with Toronto Lands Corporation, the Toronto District School Board, the Province of Ontario, FoodShare, and other relevant entities, to explore interest in a landmark community hub for food and learning at the Bloor/Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site;
3. City Council request the Executive Director of Social Development, Finance, and Administration to report by the end of 2015 on the outcomes of exploratory discussions with the relevant stakeholders concerning a community hub for food and learning at the Bloor/Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site, and to provide, in consultation with the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, a description of next steps, including the initiation of a master planning process and the financial implications of project planning and development, should there be agreement among the relevant stakeholders to proceed with the project; and
4. City Council forward this Report to the Ontario Ministry of Education, the Government of Ontario Cabinet Office Secretariat on Community Hubs, the Toronto District School Board, and FoodShare.

### **Financial Impact**

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report. If there is agreement among the identified stakeholders to go forward with the development of a community hub plan for the Bloor/Dufferin site, then the Executive Director of Social Development, Finance and Administration will prepare a separate report detailing the project development plan for Council, including financial impact information. The Deputy City Manager & Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

### **Equity Impact Statement**

The concept of a community hub for food and learning is aligned with the equity goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Toronto Agricultural Program. The hub would provide a stable base for partners to: respond to immediate food security needs faced by vulnerable Torontonians through food distribution; establish pathways to prosperity for local food entrepreneurs; and promote the necessary systemic transformations to sustain Staff report for action on Concept for a Landmark Community Hub for Food and Learning at the TDSB Bloor/Dufferin Redevelopment Site

access to healthy, affordable food for all. The hub would also address equity goals for the local community. There is a significant shortfall of licensed infant child care spaces in Ward 18. Therefore, Children's Services is committed to capital expansion at the site. In addition, the site is in a parkland deficient area. Parks Forestry and Recreation seeks a portion of the open land for a new park.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

On June 10, 2015, City Council directed staff to develop a hub proposal for the Bloor/Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site with TDSB and the Toronto Lands Corporation and to report back to the September 2015 Executive Committee meeting. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.MM7.9>

On May 29, 2015, the City-School Boards Advisory Committee directed the Acting Deputy City Manager, Cluster A to prepare a submission to the Province of Ontario on the Community Hub consultation, based on current City policy. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getMinutesReport&meetingId=10388>

At its meeting on March 31, April 1, and April 2 2015, City Council directed the City-School Boards Advisory Committee to develop a new relationship for the City, the School Boards and the Province with respect to schools lands utilization and disposition that: takes into consideration the full value of schools as community assets and provides a viable framework for retaining public ownership of former school properties when there is agreement among the parties that the site should be retained. [http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncil Minutes Report &meetingId=9690](http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilMinutesReport&meetingId=9690)

On June 23, 2014, the Parks and Environment Committee received for information, an Update on the Toronto Agricultural Program, including a definition of Urban Agriculture Centres, in the context of searching for a relocation site for FoodShare. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getMinutesReport&meetingId=7893>

At its meeting on November 13, 14, 15, and 18, 2013, City Council requested the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, the Chief Corporate Officer, and the Medical Officer of Health to work with FoodShare and other appropriate partners through the City-Sector Steering Committee on Urban Agriculture to define urban agricultural centres and identify potential sites. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilMinutesReport&meetingId=6813>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

### **Regulatory Barriers to Purchasing Surplus School Property: O. Reg 444/98**

School buildings and school lands are often essential to quality of life and community vibrancy in Toronto neighbourhoods. The City of Toronto recognizes that schools often represent important value as community assets, and that there may be strategic community-building and city-building reasons to purchase a school property after it has been deemed surplus by a school board. The City has faced barriers in attempting to retain or acquire school properties for community use, related to O. Reg 444/98 of the Education Act, which governs the sale of surplus school board properties. The regulation applies narrow timelines that are difficult for the City to meet, and it requires school boards to realize fair market value on the sale of school properties, making most Toronto schools unaffordable for the City of Toronto. Over the last several years, the City has frequently appealed to the Province to amend O. Reg 444/98 to increase municipal access to surplus school buildings. Recently, the Province released a report on *Community Hubs in Ontario* that proposes promising options for addressing these challenges. The report has been endorsed by community-based sector, by municipalities, and by school boards.

### **What is a "Community Hub"?:**

A Community Hub is a central access point for a range of needed health, education and social services, along with cultural, recreational, and green spaces to nourish community life. There are multiple models for community hubs. Hubs can provide co-located services that are managed and delivered separately, or the hubs may be coordinated to respond to specific needs, populations, or sectors. Community hubs are advantageous in Toronto for many reasons, including potential cost-savings, service alignments and integration, the ability to target priority populations, bringing services to residents in their neighbourhoods, providing better customer service, and maximizing the use of and repurposing of public property. Every community hub will be spatially and organizationally unique, to reflect local conditions and community needs.

### **What is a Community Food Hub/"Urban Agriculture Centre"?:**

Urban Agriculture Centres are community food hubs fulfilling a range of economic, community, health, and environmental objectives related to a healthy, sustainable, urban food system, including: urban agriculture-related education and training; providing economic opportunities and pathways to employment in the food processing and catering sectors; augmenting green infrastructure and environmental protection; increasing food literacy and access to healthy, local food; creating safe, vibrant public spaces; improving physical and mental health; and leveraging funding for community projects.

### **Toward a Community Hub at the Bloor/Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site:**

Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the owner of a 10.4 acre site slated for redevelopment on the south-west corner of Bloor Street West and Dufferin Street. In 2013, TDSB declared 7.3 acres on the site as surplus. In light of renewed provincial interest in community hubs, in April 2015, TDSB Trustees deferred the sale of the surplus property and requested its real estate subsidiary, Toronto Lands Corporation, to explore the feasibility of a community hub demonstration project. The Toronto Lands Staff report for action on Concept for a Landmark Community Hub for Food and Learning at the TDSB Bloor/Dufferin Redevelopment Site

Corporation approached the City of Toronto to collaborate in the project, which is expected to include some private residential development, school refurbishment, and facility space for community and city services. In June 2015, Council directed City staff to review municipal interests in the site and prepare a community hub plan.

### **Site and Surrounding Area:**

The 10.4 acre site contains four schools as well as green spaces that are used by the schools and local community. The 7.3 acres declared surplus includes 3 out of the 4 schools (Kent Senior Public School, Bloor Collegiate Institute, Alpha II Alternative School) and green space. The remaining 3.1 acres on the western portion of the site at 90 Croatia Street were not included as part of the surplus property. This area contains Brockton High School (see Figure 1, identified as "Brockton Building"). Currently Brockton is occupied by a number of community-based agency tenants. TDSB has given notice to the tenants to vacate in order to renovate Brockton as a teaching facility. The Ministry of Education has granted the TDSB approximately \$12M for Brockton renovation, as part of the overall Bloor/Dufferin site redevelopment.

### **FoodShare:**

The largest Brockton High School tenant is FoodShare, a City of Toronto-funded non-profit organization that promotes urban agriculture and access to healthy, affordable food. With funding from the City of Toronto, FoodShare has built a "Kitchen Incubator" at Brockton, which provides access to industrial kitchen space and advisory services for small and start-up food businesses and entrepreneurs in Toronto. FoodShare has been given notice to vacate the Bloor/Dufferin site by September 2016. In 2013, City Council directed staff to work with FoodShare to find an appropriate relocation property; however no successful options have emerged to date.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Concept for a Landmark Community Hub for Food and Learning in Toronto:**

As directed by Council, staff conducted a cross-corporate assessment of the Bloor/Dufferin site (see Appendix B). The site has been identified as strategically important with respect to all four of the City's defined municipal interests in school properties (i.e. child care space, green space, community programming, and future growth). A large number of City of Toronto divisions have expressed support for a community hub on the site (i.e. Children's Services, City Planning, Economic Development and Culture, Parks, Forestry, and Recreation, Social Development, Finance and Administration, and Toronto Public Health).

As priorities, staff have identified the Bloor/Dufferin location as an appropriate demonstration site for Toronto's first Urban Agriculture Centre/Food Hub, as an appropriate location for capital expansion of infant and child care space in Ward 18, and as a high priority area for parkland. For these reasons, staff are recommending the concept of a community hub for food and learning for the Bloor/Dufferin TDSB site.

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A community hub for food and learning would enable hub partners to link and coordinate: education and schooling; early years programming and child care and family services; access to public green space; and range of food security and urban agriculture-related programs, facilities, and training and learning opportunities. Mixed housing options may also be made available on the Redevelopment Site.

**An Appropriate Site for Urban Agriculture Centre:**

The Bloor/Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site is a promising location for Toronto's first Urban Agriculture Centre/Food Hub. A key factor is that FoodShare, a leading partner on the Toronto Agriculture Program, operates its Kitchen Incubator on the Redevelopment Site and has established positive relationships locally with the surrounding community and schools. The Kitchen Incubator provide access to industrial kitchen space and advisory services to small food businesses and entrepreneurs, helping them building their food businesses. Economic Development and Culture Division, Social Development, Finance, and Administration Division, and Toronto Public Health, which have all invested in FoodShare's programs and facilities, encourage an expanded role for FoodShare as an anchor tenant for community hub.

**An Appropriate Site for Expanded Child Care Facilities:**

Children's Services Division has identified the site as strategically important, particularly for expanding licensed infant child care spaces. There is currently a commercial child care centre operating in the closed Kent Public School, which has no service agreement with the City. Any child care spaced developed using city funds would be required to operate as a non-profit and have a service contact with Children's Services. Children's Services would also investigate opportunities to partner with other service providers to more broadly meet the needs of children and families as part of this community hub.

**An Appropriate Site for Parkland Acquisition:**

The surrounding area has a low level of parkland provision and is identified as a Parkland Acquisition Priority Area. Parks, Forestry and Recreation has an interest in acquiring or securing (through parkland dedication) a portion of the existing open space for a new park, conditional on the overall redevelopment concept.

**Strategically Situated; High Market Value Property:**

The Bloor/Dufferin site is centrally located at a major downtown route intersection, and is proximate to the Bloor subway and the Dufferin bus line. Because it is accessible to local residents and also to students, commuters, and business vehicles, the location of the site is highly desirable for attracting local Torontonians, entrepreneurs and businesses, schools, and the wider community. Given the central downtown location of the site, the fair market value of the property is anticipated to be very high. A portion of the site can be expected to be sold to private development, to ensure that the TDSB can realize financial value from the property. City staff have noted that the Fair Market Value price of the property would likely be out of reach of the City of Toronto, and that accommodations from the Province with respect to O. Reg 444/98 would be necessary to make a community hub project financially feasible for the City.

**The Need for a Bloor-Dufferin Comprehensive Master Plan:**

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The TDSB's Bloor/Dufferin property is a large and complex site with a range of existing and proposed uses, built form typologies, heritage buildings and parks and open space. In order to support the development of a community hub on this site and balance the other existing and potential uses being considered by the TLC the site will require the preparation of a comprehensive master plan. The Chief Planner and Executive Director of City Planning would initiate this exercise with an interdivisional City team including, but not limited to: Economic Development and Culture, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Transportation Services, Social Development, Finance and Administration and Children's Services. This team would work in conjunction with the TLC, TDSB, and a multi-stakeholder advisory group including the Toronto Agriculture Program, community and cultural organizations, relevant residents' associations and Business Improvement Area Boards and members.

A comprehensive planning exercise will allow the site to be planned carefully and thoughtfully, ensuring that the various components, including: a community hub for food and learning, residential, educational and retail uses, park and open spaces, public roads and mid-block connections are designed and sited in a manner that ensures their compatibility and offers optimal utility. There is both an existing and planned context, including heritage resources, that requires careful consideration and any proposed built form including height, mass, scale and articulation has to fit within this context.

### **Window of Opportunity: Pitre Report Recommendations**

On August 10, 2015, the Premier and the Minister of Education agreed to adopt recommendations from *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*, a report prepared by Karen Pitre and the Premier's Community Hub Framework Advisory Group. Importantly, the Report proposed a "*short term strategy for school properties*" which includes: an exemption on fair market pricing for schools that would be used for public purposes (such as a community hub); an extension on the time frame for submitting community expressions of interest in surplus school properties, and the use of provincial funding to offset the financial impact of these changes on school boards.

These proposed changes present an immediate window of opportunity for Toronto partners to apply, as a demonstration case, for a pricing exemption, and to submit a landmark community hub proposal for Bloor/Dufferin that incorporates innovative community programming, effective governance, and a realistic financing model that will keep the TDSB "whole" while repurposing important public infrastructure.

### **Considerations for Moving Forward:**

In order for such an initiative to proceed, an initial set of commitments would be required of the relevant entities, as follows:

1. That the community hub planned for Bloor/Dufferin would be designed with a focus on linkages between education, community economic development, and a healthy, sustainable urban food system.
2. That the City of Toronto, TDSB, TLC, FoodShare and the Province of Ontario will conduct a visioning exercise with community stakeholders, with the goal of establishing a shared vision, mission and core objectives for a community hub at Bloor/Dufferin.

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3. That a comprehensive master plan will be prepared for the site to determine how to balance the range of current and future uses being considered for this site, should a shared vision be achieved by the relevant entities.
4. That the visioning exercise and ensuing master planning process will address the full Redevelopment Site (10.4 acres), including Brockton High School.
5. That a portion of the 10.4 acre site will be sold to one or more private developers at fair market value to ensure that TDSB can realize value from the property. The private development portion will be determined through the master planning study.
6. That the community hub planned for Bloor/Dufferin will include FoodShare's Kitchen Incubator and related services as an anchor tenant.
7. That FoodShare shall not be displaced: i) during this investigation stage and ii) during potential hub development; and that if the hub is not pursued, FoodShare will have a minimum of 12 months to relocate.
8. That the Ministry of Education allocation to TDSB to refurbish Brockton High School will not be rescinded during the planning process for a community hub nor during the period while the community hub proposal is under review by the Province of Ontario;
9. That the Province of Ontario will allow changes to the sale of surplus school property at Bloor/Dufferin as proposed in *Community Hubs in Ontario*, including an exemption from fair market value pricing, an extension of the 90 day window for expressions of interest, and the use of alternate provincial financing mechanisms to ensure the school board is "made whole" through the property transaction, should community hub plan be approved as viable.
10. That the City of Toronto will establish a single window for communication with partners on matters related to this initiative, to ensure efficiency and coordination.
11. That the community hub partners will consider submitting a joint application for funding to the Ontario Local Poverty Reduction Fund (2016/2017 Call for Applications).
12. That the partners will consider engaging Build Toronto for project development.

**Next Steps:**

With Council direction, the Executive Director SDEA will invite the TDSB, TLC, community partners, including FoodShare, and the Province of Ontario, to explore and further develop the concept for a community hub for food and learning at Bloor/Dufferin, as well as the initial commitments outlined above in this report. Should the partners agree on the concept and initial commitments, then a formal task force will be created to pursue a visioning process with the community, develop a project plan, and apply for financial accommodations for a Bloor/Dufferin Community Hub, under the terms of the new "Short Term Strategy for School Properties" as outlined in the Pitre Report on Community Hubs in Ontario.

## **CONTACT**

Kelly Murphy  
Policy Development Officer  
Social Policy, Analysis and Research  
Social Development, Finance and Administration  
Phone: 416-338-8368  
Fax: 416-392-4976  
E-Mail: kmurphy@toronto.ca

## **SIGNATURE**

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Chris Brillinger  
Executive Director  
Social Development, Finance and Administration

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix A: Figure 1: Bloor/Dufferin Site  
Appendix B: Assessment of Municipal Interests in Bloor/Dufferin TDSB Redevelopment Site (Children's Services; Economic Development and Culture; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; City Planning)  
Appendix C: *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*  
Appendix D: FoodShare New Location Prospectus