



November 11, 2020.

To: Toronto Economic and Community Development Committee; Meeting, Nov. 12, 2020

From: CREW (Community Resilience to Extreme Weather) Toronto
<https://crewtoronto.ca>

Re: Item 17.6 Feasibility Assessment of the St. James Town Food Hub (Ward 13)

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing in support of the work of OASIS by St. James Town (SJT) Community Co-operative and to deplore the City staff response to a community initiative that has been in the works for 7 years, and received \$50,000 in City funding. I will not refute the details of the City's response. Rather, I would like to put into context, from a community perspective, a climate and resilience policy and an equity lens, the level of disappointment that the spirit, if not the details of the response represents.

To provide some background on CREW. We were invited into the SJT community by SJT Community Cooperative to try out some approaches to emergency preparedness in a high-rise community with a vulnerable population. We have been working since the summer of 2017, and have been able to set up networks with residents, agencies, local groups, a volunteer steering committee of 14 residents and stakeholders and 14 emergency volunteers in one high rise at 77 Howard Avenue. We use What's App multi-media networks, Zoom technology and innovative recruitment methods and training to increase social capital. To remind the members, SJT is the most diverse and the most densely populated neighbourhood in the whole of Canada, and yet, receives very little support, relatively speaking, from the City of Toronto as it is not designated a Neighbourhood Improvement Area. Statistics from the 2016 census paint the picture. At that time, 67% of the population comprised visible minorities, versus 52% for Toronto as a

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whole. Recent immigrants made up more than twice the Toronto average, at almost 14% . Median family incomes were around thirty thousand dollars lower than the Toronto median and the poverty rate was more than twice that for Toronto. These conditions persist in a population where education is high, the average and median ages are lower than the city as a whole, and female lone parent families comprise 20% of the families. This is a racialized, low income, vulnerable neighbourhood.

Yet the City, through its own studies and work has identified such neighbourhoods and their respective populations to be high priority in many of its recent initiatives, including the Climate Emergency declaration, the Resilience Strategy of 2018 and the recent report of Councillor Mihevc on Food Security. The same attention will almost certainly be drawn to communities such as St James Town in the Report of the Toronto Foundation, being released just before your meeting, the morning of November 12, "The Toronto Fallout Report and Insights for an Equitable Recovery". At the top of the list of principles for recovery after COVID is equity and justice. The OASIS project and the efforts of the community toward greater food security are surely an opportunity for the City and the community to come together, to break down silos, and to achieve a solution that will meet common goals.

To cite a few recent reports and initiatives: Mihevc points to the City needing to facilitate community projects, not be a barrier, which he says, has in the past been too often the case.

As Mihevc's report recommends:

- 1) Develop a multi-departmental team tasked to implement the City's Food Strategy.
- 2) Increase the city resources to city food systems and urban agriculture initiatives; partner with the TFPC and other community partners in a more dynamic manner.
- 3) Support community food hubs that promote food justice.
- 4) Develop a long-term Black food sovereignty systems change plan that provides a comprehensive framework to increase community food assets (including, but not limited to access to land, local economic development opportunities and food security in Black communities).

The City's declaration of a Climate Emergency on Oct 2, 2019 includes recommendations such as:

- a plan to apply the City's Equity Lens to TransformTO decision-making in order to ensure that strategies include and benefit equity-seeking groups;
- engaging residents and stakeholders in decision-making and provide greater public accountability;
- options for establishing an advisory committee that includes scientists, businesses, community experts, labour groups, Non-Governmental Organization experts and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to provide regular peer review on plans to achieve net-zero; and
- engaging residents and stakeholders in decision-making and provide greater public accountability;

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Toronto's Resilience Strategy includes this premise under "What is resilience?":

- Advancing equity is a core component of building resilience. The ability of a city to survive and thrive in the face of challenges is as much about the strength of its communities and neighbourhoods as it is about the design and management of its infrastructure and buildings.

And this goal:

Priority Action: Neighbourhood Resilience. Enhance the capacity of neighbourhoods to prepare for and recover from shocks through grassroots action and network building.

We know we will have to do things differently to achieve our climate, equity and social justice goals in many areas, including Food Security. Why not make the effort now with the St. James Town Community Cooperative's OASIS project.

Respectfully,

Sheila Murray, Manager, CREW Toronto.

Madelyn Webb, Director of Community Engagement, CREW Toronto.