



Joe Cressy 周凱捷

City Councillor | Ward 10, Spadina-Fort York

March 22, 2021

Toronto Board of Health

Re: Strengthening the role of the Toronto Food Policy Council

Colleagues,

The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) is a true success story for our city. It was 30 years ago this year that the TFPC was established as an advisory body for the Board of Health. In that time, hundreds of dedicated volunteers have worked with City staff and the Board to advance critical projects like the Toronto Food Charter and Food Strategy. The TFPC built capacity and connections across organizations and over the years has supported countless food solutions to the complex challenges facing too many Torontonians.

However, this past year has been exceptionally challenging for the TFPC, exacerbated by years of diminishment of funding and of allocation of resources to strategic alignment of food systems. When Toronto Public Health (TPH) made the difficult decision to redeploy all of their staff to the COVID-19 response, staff who normally support the TFPC were reassigned to other work as the focus of the organization had to be placed on responding to the public health crisis. In recognition of the importance of the food strategy, TPH temporarily assigned two of its food strategy staff to the Social Development, Finance and Administration Division (SDFA) to support the COVID-19 emergency and recovery food response, and this work continues. Like so many others, the volunteer members of the TFPC also had to manage tremendously difficult circumstances created by the pandemic for their organizations and their families.

The pandemic has highlighted and worsened the inequities that already existed in our city, and made the work of the TFPC all the more important for both the COVID-19 response as well as planning for recovery. Simultaneously, this period has also brought forward structural inequities within the TFPC. Following calls to action by Black members of the Council, the TFPC as a whole has called for “a process of internal reckoning and anti-racist analysis” recognizing a traditionally white-centric leadership that must change.

In this context, the inability for the City to provide formal staff support for the TFPC has become increasingly unsustainable. I want to thank every TFPC volunteer member for their dedication to food solutions, equity, and justice this past year – not just through the TFPC, but in their communities and across the entire city.

There is an urgent need to address the issues that the TFPC brought to my attention in their letter on March 8th, 2021. Resources must be restored to the TFPC - and these must first be tied to the renewal process called for by the Council, and re-establish an advisory model that can continue to support the food system and anti-racism work.

The most urgent priority of the TFPC is to confirm a permanent paid, and well-resourced staff position devoted to food and health issues and priorities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). As the Board of Health prepares to receive a report on Black Food Sovereignty this spring, this recommendation from the TFPC must be integrated along with the full report.

There is a great deal of work to be done as we continue to respond to the pandemic, in the planning for recovery from COVID-19, and in our continuous commitment to improve public health through the social determinants of health across Toronto. Staff will be reporting back on Black Food Sovereignty later in the spring, and there will be an update on activities associated with the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the C40

Good Food Cities Declaration, and the World Resource Institute's Cool Food Pledge before summer.

I have prepared these recommendations in close consultation and with advice from TPH and SDFA staff. Immediate one-time funding will stabilize the TFPC for 2021, and City staff will undertake consultations this year on ways to strengthen the role of the TFPC going forward.

Recommendations:

1. The Board of Health acknowledge and affirm the important contributions made by the Toronto Food Policy Council, and the Council's own call for a full renewal and anti-racist analysis and as such:

- a. Request the Medical Officer of Health to approach the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, about the possibility of providing a one-time grant from the Community Partnership Investment Program to the Toronto Food Policy Council to sustain their work through 2021, preferencing Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) for leadership roles in paid position(s), in order to advance a full renewal and revitalization process for the Toronto Food Policy Council;
- b. Request the Medical Officer of Health, in consultation with the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, and in alignment with the work led by the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, to include in the upcoming report on the creation of the City of Toronto's Black Food Sovereignty Plan options for resources and staffing support tied specifically and adequately to Black-led food sovereignty leadership, infrastructure, and capacity; and
- c. Request the Medical Officer of Health, in consultation with the Executive Director of Social Development, Finance and Administration, to undertake consultations with food policy, food security, and food systems stakeholders, including current and former members of the Toronto Food Policy Council, and make recommendations to the December 6, 2021 meeting of the Board of Health on:
 - i. an optimal advisory model for the Toronto Food Policy Council and its relationship to the City of Toronto and City Council decision-making;
 - ii. sustainable resourcing options to support the work of the Toronto Food Policy Council under the recommended model; and
 - iii. alignment with the City's recovery and rebuild efforts in the area of food security and food equity to advance the development of sustainable food systems, in alignment with municipal and international commitments (the Food Charter, the Food Lens, the Milan Food Policy Pact, and the C40 Good Food Pledge).

Sincerely,

Joe Cressy
Chair, Toronto Board of Health