

Feasibility of Establishing a Food Security Relief Fund

Date: April 11, 2022

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to [City Council direction](#) to consider the development of a relief fund to facilitate grants for food security to community service organizations serving the Downtown East and West to enhance emergency support food infrastructure for the precariously housed and people with complex service needs. This report provides an overview of the state of food insecurity in Toronto and the initiatives that the City undertook to fund emergency food security supports during the current pandemic. Finally, the report outlines how the City will be incorporating the learnings from these initiatives into the development of the 2023-2026 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan, including ways to support the For Public Benefit sector to advance initiatives that advance food security and equity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration recommends that:

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receives the report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The City of Toronto currently makes a variety of investments to support food security, including but not limited to, \$16.8 million gross and net for the Student Nutrition Program annually and \$5.1 million gross and net to support COVID-19 related emergency food programs through TO Supports. Additional investments are made annually to community organizations supporting food security programs through the Community Services Partnerships program and through new initiatives such as the Black Food Sovereignty Action Plan.

There are no further financial impacts beyond these existing supports as this report does not recommend the establishment of a food security relief fund.

Further details on supports provided and recommended actions are available in the comments section of the report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on April 6, 2022 City Council adopted Updating Toronto's Food Charter For All which requested the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, to engage and work with residents disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, poverty, and other inequities in our food system, and with community groups working to defend the food rights of their communities, to update Toronto's Food Charter and report back on revisions to Toronto's Food Charter with plans for implementation, accountability, and resourcing as part of the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy 2023-2026 Term Action Plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EC28.15>

At its meeting on February 17, 2022, City Council adopted the 2022 Operating and Capital Budgets and directed the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to develop a relief fund to facilitate grants for food security to community service organizations serving the Downtown East and West to enhance emergency support food infrastructure for the precariously housed and people with complex service needs, and to report back to the April 28, 2022 meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EX30.2>

At its meeting on June 8, 2021, City Council adopted the 2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan Mid-Term Status Update which requested the Medical Officer of Health transfer responsibility of the Toronto Food Strategy to Social Development, Finance and Administration Division.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.EX24.8>

COMMENTS

Background

In December 2021, the Daily Bread Food Bank and the North York Harvest Food Bank released the [Who's Hungry 2021 Report](#). The report reveals that there were 1.45 million visits to Toronto food banks last year, the highest number of visits ever recorded in Toronto. This represents a 47% increase compared to the previous year and is 1.5 times higher than the previous record set in 2010 at the peak of the 2008 recession.

For the first time, new clients outnumbered existing clients at food banks with a 61% increase compared to the year prior.

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly reveals and exacerbates existing systemic issues of food security in Toronto, particularly among those in low-income or belonging to Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities.

Funding Role of the Municipality

Traditionally, municipalities do not provide direct funding for emergency food supports. This is a role that has historically been filled by community partners such as food banks and community organizations that do provide food relief and food security programs as part of their core business. Funding for these community programs is typically secured through Provincial and Federal grants, as well as through individual fundraising and corporate philanthropy. Where the City of Toronto has provided significant amounts of funding, it has been for cost-shared public health programs, such as the Student Nutrition Program, as well as community grants to organizations that provide programming that include emergency food services as part of broader community development initiatives. Currently, the City's Community Services Partnerships program, funds approximately 42 organizations from across the Toronto to mitigate the effects of poverty, with food access as a primary outcome of their program.

In April 2020 as part of the TO Supports: COVID-19 Equity Action Plan, the City increased granting on the issue of food security as a response to the immediate impact of the pandemic. Through the TO Supports Investment Fund, the Social Development, Finance and Administration distributed \$5.1 million to 38 organizations, providing community-driven and informed food security initiatives in such underserved neighbourhoods as the Downtown East and West, and the inner suburbs, and to socially isolated individuals across the city. This fund leveraged the Province of Ontario's Social Services Relief Fund as the primary funding source. One-time funding was also contributed by the Canadian Medical Association Foundation through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and private donors.

In addition, the City's Emergency Operations Centre also established a staff team to work with key partners to support food banks and emergency food programs that were experiencing acute needs to find space to deliver supports, receive direct funding and donation matching to deliver programs, and support community kitchens for prepared meals for delivery to socially isolated individuals. The table includes leadership from City staff, North York Harvest Food Bank, Second Harvest, Daily Bread Food Bank, Food Share Toronto, Salvation Army, Canadian Red Cross, United Way and others.

With the phasing out of the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund, TO Supports funding for emergency food security programs has ended. Currently, there are no identified funding sources that could support continued granting for emergency food supports.

A Renewed Approach to Food Security and Equity in Toronto

With the adoption of the Black Food Sovereignty Action Plan and the embedding of the Toronto Food Strategy within the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy Office, the City has recently recognized the need for a renewed approach to advancing food security in Toronto that embeds the principles of equity, inclusion, and systemic change at its core.

As part of the development of the 2023-2026 Poverty Reduction Strategy Action Plan, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office will be addressing food insecurity and access alongside issues of food justice, food sovereignty and food systems change. This will include an assessment of how the City can best support the For Public Benefit sector, which includes consideration of possible funding streams to support community-based non-profit organizations as well as grassroots and resident-led groups. The establishment of any food security granting streams will need to address both city-wide

systemic issues, as well as acute food security needs in specific neighbourhoods with heightened risk of food insecurity.

This report is anticipated to be delivered to City Council for consideration in 2023.

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SIGNATURE

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