

Tuesday November 26, 2024

To Economic and Community Development Committee

Re: EC17.2 - A Partnered Approach to Inclusive Economic Development

North York Harvest Food Bank (NYH) is the primary food bank serving northern Toronto, supporting a network of more than 100 community organizations across the city. First and foremost we would like to express our support of the development of a partnered approach to Inclusive Economic Development and we would like to thank Councillor Alejandro Bravo for her leadership on this initiative.

As the Economic and Community Development Committee and City Council meet to discuss the definition and guiding principles of this framework, we would like to share NYH's approach to inclusive economic development in the context of the food security crisis in our city with the objective of strengthening the City of Toronto's IED Approach.

Community Wealth Building at North York Harvest Food Bank

Today more than 1 in 10 Torontonians visit a food bank for emergency food assistance. We believe that **food insecurity is ultimately an economic issue** and that people are unable to meet their food needs because they lack sufficient income to purchase appropriate food for themselves and their family. At the same time, the nonprofit community sector that is already overcapacity trying to respond to this crisis are facing increasing threats of displacement – including NYH's own warehouse – due to mounting development pressures.

In response, NYH has developed a unique approach to addressing poverty and food insecurity through local community-centric economic development. We refer to our model as one of Community Wealth Building (CWB), centred on three key pillars: nonprofit social enterprise, workforce development for low-income communities and social purpose real estate.

FoodReach is a NYH **social enterprise** that allows food banks and other nonprofits to purchase food at affordable rates by pooling the collective purchasing power of the nonprofit sector. In 2024, FoodReach delivered food to 168 nonprofits across the GTA including food banks, meal programs, schools, community health centres, childcare centres, after school clubs, libraries, social enterprises and community markets. As a result, FoodReach retained \$2.4M in our sector that was reinvested into our programs and communities we serve.

Leadership in Logistics is NYH's **workforce development program** for low-income communities using our food banks. The program successfully facilitates access to decent employment through a 4-week paid internship program where 78% of graduates are hired into living wage jobs with health, dental and other benefits. To date, 47 program graduates have attained decent employment.

On the **Social Purpose Real Estate** front, NYH is actively working with Northcrest Developments on the possible development of a new **Food Security and Employee Training Hub** in partnership with community and workforce organizations. The proposed facility will encompass approximately 50,000 square feet and address the community's critical needs by providing food assistance to up to 1,000,000 people annually. In addition, it will offer training programs for 500 individuals each year, equipping them with the skills needed for well-paying jobs in the construction, trades, and warehousing sectors.

Recommendations

Given the food insecurity crisis facing Toronto today, it is crucial to explicitly recognize poverty reduction as a goal of IED. Additionally, given the threats of displacement and real estate barriers of the organizations like NYH and others who are responding to this crisis, it is essential that the IED framework aims to not only preserve these spaces within the communities by making public and private spaces accessible for nonprofit and community services, but also to include, reimagine and redesign these spaces in future community planning to better address local needs.

In conclusion, we welcome the City's initiative to develop a Partnered Approach to Inclusive Economic Development. We look forward to sharing lessons learned from our own Community Wealth Building model and further collaborating with the City to co-develop the IED framework.

Sincerely,

Ryan Noble
Executive Director
North York Harvest Food Bank