



May 2024

Planning and Housing Committee
City Council and Councillor Gord Perks
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Expression of Support for the Downsview Secondary Plan

To Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

I am writing to you today to express **North York Harvest Food Bank's strong support of the Downsview Community Development and Actions Plans which are included as part of the Downsview Secondary Plan.** We have served the Downsview community for almost forty years and have participated in various forums and consultations to inform these plans. We are particularly encouraged to see that access to healthy and affordable food, including the support of food banks; access to affordable and appropriate long-term spaces for not-for-profit organizations; access to employment opportunities; and establishing an inclusive economy have all been prioritized.

We also desire to be a part of the implementation of these plans and have been in discussions with **Northcrest Developments** for several months to relocate our distribution centre and **establish a community hub as part of the redevelopment of the hangar district.** Along with our key nonprofit partners we envision that this hub will provide capacity for **food distribution for up to one million people across the GTA and beyond while generating up to 500 well-paying jobs in the construction, trades, warehousing and logistics sectors.**

As you are undoubtedly aware the City of Toronto is currently experiencing a crisis of affordability, poverty and food insecurity. In 2023 North York Harvest served over 300,000 people through a network of 38 agencies and programs. That is a record level of usage in our organization's history, and represents a 25% increase from the year prior, 92% since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Almost 76,000 of those food bank visits were in and around Downsview.**

This level of food insecurity should shock us all and is simply unsustainable.

We know that this cannot continue this way and that we must do things differently as an organization and a city. To that end, we have long championed **a holistic approach to supporting individuals** struggling with poverty alongside community-level strategies that **foster our local economy and generate wealth in neighbourhoods that have been historically marginalized.** In addition to our charitable emergency work, we have built important partnerships in social enterprise and workforce development.

These programs are tested and **proven interventions** that support people's immediate needs while producing long-term solutions to food insecurity at individual and community levels. But they are at significant risk. An underappreciated challenge for nonprofit organizations like ours is the **lack of affordable spaces** for our programming. The cost of real estate in this city is driving more people to food banks while also driving many



food banks to close down or curtail their services. As a distribution hub, North York Harvest is feeling this pressure acutely, as our **current warehouse lease will expire in 2026**. Without a suitable replacement will simply will be unable to continue our operations.

It is with these concerns in mind that we have engaged Northcrest Developments to establish this new community hub as part of the redevelopment. Our discussions have shown great promise to satisfy the needs of each organization and most importantly, address the critical needs of our community.

This is a **once-in-a-lifetime opportunity** to build upon proven programs and partnerships with an innovative, purpose-built community asset at the onset of a major community revitalization project.

We urge the committee and all of City Council to endorse this plan so that we can continue our discussions with Northcrest Developments to bring this vision to fruition and address the priorities outlined in the plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryan Noble', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ryan Noble
Executive Director