

DATE OF MEETING October 1, 2020

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**SUBJECT EMERGENCY FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY STRATEGY**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To provide the Health and Housing Task Force with the Emergency Food and Nutrition Strategy along with implementation actions for the Task Force to consider recommending to Council.

### **Recommendation**

That the Health and Housing Task Force recommend that Council:

- 1) endorse the Emergency Food and Nutrition Strategy as formal stakeholder input into the **REIMAGINE** NANAIMO process; and,
- 2) support the creation of a Nanaimo Food Policy Council as an independent, arms-length body that would continue collaborative work to strengthen the local food system and request that Staff bring forward a report on how the City can facilitate this work.

## **BACKGROUND**

On 01-APR-2020, Council passed the following motion:

*“That Council direct the Health and Housing Task Force to develop a food security plan; including funding, procurement and distribution options to provide safe and consistent meals for individuals experiencing homelessness and the vulnerable population.”*

The COVID-19 Food Security Working Group of the Health and Housing Task Force met for the first time on 09-APR-2020 and developed the Working Group Guidelines (see attachment A).

The Guidelines, which were approved by Council on 11-MAY-2020, identify two purposes for the project:

- 1) To develop a food security plan; including funding, procurement and distribution options to provide safe and consistent food for vulnerable individuals<sup>1</sup>, including those experiencing homelessness and seniors; and,

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<sup>1</sup> Vulnerable populations are groups and communities at a higher risk for poor health as a result of the barriers they experience to social, economic, political and environmental resources, as well as limitations due to illness or disability. In addition, in the context of a pandemic vulnerable populations may include infants and young children and women, seniors, people with compromised immune systems or chronic illness, disabled, and those experiencing homelessness.

- 2) To ensure that all Nanaimo residents have access to safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice.

The Working Group met weekly fourteen times between April and August 2020. The group included the co-chairs of the Task Force, Snuneymuxw First Nation, Island Health, Chamber of Commerce, Loaves and Fishes Food Bank, Nanaimo Foodshare, the United Way, the 7-10 Club, Salvation Army, Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre, Nanaimo Family Life Association, Food for Thought, Vancouver Island Community Corrections, the Nanaimo Community Health Network, and the Nanaimo Foundation. Representatives from other agencies, such as the Island Roots Co-operative Farmer's Market, also joined for specific conversations as requested.

In the initial months of the pandemic, the weekly meetings focused primarily on sharing information and resources and providing updates on which service organizations were reaching out to various communities. There was also a significant amount of new funding available through grants from the Nanaimo Foundation's Community Response Fund and Federal Government's Emergency Community Support Fund (distributed through the United Way and the Nanaimo Foundation). The meetings served as an opportunity to share information about funding opportunities (see Attachment B, pp. 5-6, for details on funding allocations) and for the different agencies to support each other in finding solutions to challenges identified.

Some of the lessons learned from the information sharing included that Nanaimo is actually well-positioned to respond to emergency food needs. However, continued coordination and information sharing remain key for the following reasons:

- 1) Nanaimo has an excellent food recovery program through the Loaves & Fishes Food Bank, which saw an increase in food donations and a significant increase in food distribution to agencies since April. The pandemic has actually increased the amount of surplus food available through the Food Bank; for example, they received 9000 dozen eggs a week for over two months. The top concern of the Food Bank is warehousing space as they are currently not able to accommodate all the donations they would like to store. The Food Bank would like to encourage agencies to avoid purchasing food where possible and make use of the abundant surplus food available.
- 2) The need for low-cost/free groceries and meal programs rose during the pandemic and continues to remain high. A number of service providers have partnered as a result. The Good Box Food, a low-cost/free grocery box program operated through Nanaimo Foodshare, has increased 400% during the pandemic and led to new partnerships with groups such as the Nanaimo Aboriginal Centre. The box includes locally produced goods and bulk purchased food. The Salvation Army is providing hampers of ready-to-eat food to the outreach teams for distribution by the Canadian Mental Health Association who provide outreach to the homeless encampments.
- 3) Meal programs at the Salvation Army and the 7-10 Club saw some initial fluctuations in numbers when the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) came through, but overall numbers at the Salvation Army remain higher than pre-pandemic. The 7-10 Club has had to move to a takeaway model, which has reduced numbers. The Salvation Army is looking at potentially offering brunch on the weekends rather than lunch. There is currently no free meal service on Saturdays and Sundays except for a Sunday breakfast program on Wesley Street funded through the BC/Yukon Association of Drug

War Survivors, which only has temporary funding. Seating and cold storage remain an issue for the Salvation Army, though the Food Bank has been able to assist with the latter.

- 4) While some service providers regularly work together, overall there is not a coordinated approach to advancing the long-term, shared goals of the community groups involved in supporting food security in Nanaimo. For example, there is currently an open funding call for the Local Food Infrastructure Fund (LFIF), a five-year, \$50 million initiative ending 2024-MAR-31. Eligible projects can range from simpler requests such as purchasing a refrigerator for a food bank to more complex requests that strengthen local food systems, such as projects that integrate multiple areas of the value chain through the creation of partnerships. While the group discussed the merits of making a joint application, the Working Group was not the appropriate venue to develop such an application and there was no alternative food security coalition/group to which to forward this opportunity.

After the first month of information sharing, the group began to work on developing a response to the immediate and longer-term food security needs of the community. The ideas generated fell into five broad policy goals:

- Meet basic food needs of vulnerable populations during emergency incidents;
- The education, support and promotion in support of food literacy and empowerment;
- Growing, raising, and harvesting more food in Nanaimo;
- Expanding local food infrastructure; and,
- Recognize and support Indigenous food sovereignty.

## **DISCUSSION**

Food security has long been identified as an issue of importance to the City. In 2008, the City of Nanaimo adopted food security goals and policies as part of the Official Community Plan (OCP). The key needs and opportunities identified for developing a coordinated strategic approach to local food systems included:

- The need to protect farmland and increase food growing opportunities;
- The need for local food infrastructure;
- The need for more and better access to fresh healthy food and community food assets;
- The potential to expand the value of the local food economy; and,
- The opportunity to elevate Nanaimo food culture.

The OCP also included an action item within the Implementation Strategy to develop a food system strategy to establish objectives and policies for the implementation of a food program, which has not been completed to date. However, many of the other action items are already underway through the City's Parks, Recreation and Culture department (see Attachment C). As well, the City continues to seek opportunities to support long-term food security initiatives through programs and partnerships.

In terms of emergency food provision, the City of Nanaimo has a more limited role. The City is legislated to follow the British Columbia Emergency Management System and applicable Provincial and Federal Emergency Management Legislation. Emergency Management BC (EMBC) takes a "whole of society" approach in managing emergencies. In emergencies, where there is a disruption in the Provincial Supply Chain, the City would work with local distributors

and EMBC through legislated channels to attempt to re-establish the supply chain for the whole community. The purchase of food does not fall under the mandate of EMBC or municipalities under the applicable legislation.

However, the City does acknowledge the value of collaborating with the non-profit community and individual volunteers to strengthen our capacity to respond collectively to the basic needs of vulnerable people in the community. As we have seen through the pandemic, community and residents can be even better prepared for future emergencies through collaboration that plans for a coordinated community response.

One of the ways our community could enhance existing coordination would be the initiation of a Nanaimo Food Policy Council (NFPC). Food Policy Councils are relatively common throughout much of the province and across the country, providing a forum for community and food system stakeholders to work collaboratively to improve the local food system. The formation of a local Food Policy Council has the potential to provide significant value and synergies with local government initiatives including, but not limited to, sustainability, solid waste management, water supply, emergency planning, economic development, and land use planning.

The Working Group identified several areas where a NFPC could take the lead:

- Provide an ongoing forum for emergency food response and distribution that includes emergency food providers, Island Health, BC Housing, the Regional District of Nanaimo and the City to develop an emergency food response plan between the key players where supply chain remains intact.
- Work with the City's emergency coordinator and community stakeholders to identify areas of opportunity to include food and nutrition security in their community outreach role, and identify the additional resources required to implement food and nutrition.
- Develop a food infrastructure strategy that supports community organizations who provide healthy food to the community.
- Facilitate partnerships with Island Health and the Regional District of Nanaimo to secure funding for a full-time dietitian with background in food and nutrition security with a mandate to work directly with community groups to build capacity for food and nutrition security in the Nanaimo Local Health Area.
- Identify resources for collective action to create an Indigenous Dietician position for the mid-Island/Nanaimo Local Health Area through Island Health/First Nations Health Authority.

Should the Task Force recommend that Council support the creation of a Nanaimo Food Policy Council as an independent, arms-length body and Council agrees with this recommendation, the next step would be for Staff to bring forward a report to Council on how the City can facilitate this work through in-kind and/or financial support.

In terms of the goals and actions in the Strategy related to City programs and policies, Staff are recommending that Council endorse the Strategy as formal stakeholder input into REIMAGINE NANAIMO (the City's Coordinated Strategic Plan Review). Some of the suggested actions need further research that could be part of updating the City's Official Community Plan, while other actions are already underway (see Attachment C). All of the input provided by the Working Group moves in the common direction of strengthening our ability to respond to local food and nutrition needs and would strengthen this aspect of the REIMAGINE NANAIMO process.

## **OPTIONS**

1. That the Health and Housing Task Force recommend that Council:
  - 1) endorse the Emergency Food and Nutrition Strategy as formal stakeholder input into the **REIMAGINE** NANAIMO process; and,
  - 2) support the creation of a Nanaimo Food Policy Council as an independent, arms-length body that would continue collaborative work to strengthen the local food system and request that Staff bring forward a report on how the City can facilitate this work.
  - The advantages of this option: Provides concrete, actionable next steps for advancing the outcomes of the Working Group and improving food and nutrition security for Nanaimo's vulnerable populations.
  - The disadvantages of this option: Requires returning to Council with a follow-up report related to options to support the creation of a Nanaimo Food Policy Council.
  - Financial Implications: Any financial implications related to supporting the creation of an arms-length Nanaimo Food Policy Council will be provided in a future report.
2. That the Health and Housing Task Force provide alternative direction.]

## **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The COVID-19 Food Security Working Group of the Health and Housing Task Force has created an Emergency Food and Nutrition Security Strategy.
- The purpose of the Strategy is to address both the short-term and longer-term food security concerns of Nanaimo's vulnerable populations.
- The Strategy could be applied as formal stakeholder input into the REIMAGINE NANAIMO process.
- The City's potential role in the creation of a Nanaimo Food Policy Council can be considered in a future staff report.

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment A: Working Group Guidelines (COVID-19 Food Security Working Group)  
Attachment B: Emergency Food and Nutrition Security Strategy  
Attachment C: Parks, Recreation and Culture – Food Security Actions Underway |

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