

For Information

DATE: May 8, 2009

SUBJECT: **REVIEW OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN PEEL**

FROM: Keith Ward, Commissioner of Human Services and General Manager, Peel Living
Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health

OBJECTIVE

To update Council on the status of the review of food distribution in Peel.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- At Council's direction, Regional staff hosted several meetings with a number of stakeholders to discuss whether there exists a need for a review of food distribution and food security in Peel.
- On February 23, a community forum for representatives of food banks, breakfast programs, food pantries and all stakeholders who provide food to the community was held to network with each other, share information about their respective organizations and identify challenges facing the food sector.
- On April 16, a second community forum was held to get feedback on the report and support for the recommendations proposed by staff.
- Food organizations have agreed to establish a regional Network of food providers that will propose a sustainable plan to provide more, healthy and fresher food to Peel residents.
- As a result of initiating this review, several individual and varied requests from food organizations have been received.
- The review of food distribution is one component of an overall poverty strategy being developed in Peel region.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

In 2008, Council directed the CAO to arrange a meeting with the Commissioner of Health Services, the Commissioner of Human Services and the representatives from the Region of Peel Food Banks to discuss the feasibility of preparing a report similar to the one prepared by the Region of Halton, which includes solutions to growing concerns such as food shortage in Region of Peel Food Banks, for consideration at a future Regional Council meeting.

As a result, on July 22, 2008, Regional staff and the United Way Peel Region had the first of several discussions with representatives from Foodpath (now the Mississauga Foodbank) and Eden Community Food Bank to gain an understanding of the challenges in

REVIEW OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN PEEL

providing food in Peel and determine whether a review process would be helpful. At that meeting, it was agreed that staff would move forward in exploring options around how a review might occur. It was agreed that this work would be conducted through support from the Region of Peel and the United Way. Letters were sent to more than forty stakeholders informing of a meeting to further understand their operations, challenges and assets and inviting them to participate.

To assist in this process, staff sought advice from the consultant who worked with Halton Region to create their comprehensive strategy to ensure sufficient solicitation and distribution of food as documented in their report "Food for All, A Blueprint for Regional Collaboration in Halton to Acquire and Distribute More, Fresher Food to Halton's Hungry".

On February 23, 2009 Region of Peel and United Way Peel Region hosted a community forum for food service providers and stakeholders in Council Chambers. The forum provided the Region of Peel and United Way Peel Region with the opportunity to acknowledge the important work that food banks and food organizations do in the community, share information about their organization and identify challenges facing the food sector. Over 20 organizations serving Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon attended the meeting and expressed their appreciation for the leadership role the Region of Peel and United Way taking in addressing food shortage and distribution in Peel.

2. Findings

The meeting highlighted the many disparities and differences between the organizations and between the communities of Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon. Some are staffed and funded, some rely completely on volunteers and others have a combination of all. Many have inadequate space to hold the food that they collect, where others have space but insufficient food. Some see their strength in distribution and some are more comfortable operating small, local and more intimate operations within their local communities and/or parishes. More than one organization sees their role as growing to take on leadership and coordination responsibilities in their community. In short, pointing to a single solution for the many challenges is difficult, if not impossible.

Generally speaking though, the food distribution organizations identified the following as their key issues:

- Access to more, fresher, culturally diverse food to serve clients
- Finding, transporting and storing food
- Transportation issues for clients (high costs of public transit, getting there and carrying home their food, often with young children)
- Increasing demand for food and decreasing financial and human resources (putting their operations in jeopardy)

Based on the February 23 meeting, staff developed a report that summarizes the concerns of food organizations in Peel and provided a brief overview of each of the organizations (attached as Appendix I). On April 16, the report was presented to the group for validation and to gain consensus recommended next steps. The group agreed to the following:

- 1) formation of a network of frontline food organizations in Peel
- 2) contribution to a study to further inventory and better understand the food distribution system in Peel and to determine how best to fill gaps related to getting and distributing food

REVIEW OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN PEEL

As a result of initiating these discussions, a number of other supplementary issues and observations are apparent:

- There is a significant difference between Brampton and Mississauga in the coordination and distribution of food – there is not an official food bank in Brampton and therefore needs are being met almost exclusively by faith based organizations;
- For the most part, service providers do not work together and are very vocal and critical about each other's perceived weaknesses;
- Many of the organizations rely exclusively on volunteers which limits their ability to participate fully in collaborative efforts;
- There is some confusion about the role of the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB), the benefits or restrictions of membership and the role it plays in Peel;
- Regional staff has received several requests for assistance with a variety of issues including soil for a community garden, help with start-up of food pantries in communities that are being impacted by the current economic situation and requests to attend meetings. Unfortunately, staff resources are limited and the Region is not equipped to handle the number of requests being made.

3. Next Steps

In spite of the challenges staff have encountered to date, participating organizations have agreed to commit to the formation of a regional network whose purpose is to further analyze the gaps in food distribution to needy Peel residents, help the Region and United Way Peel Region better understand food insecurity in the region and develop a recommendation or recommendations that address how to collectively and sustainably fill regional gaps in getting and distributing food as well as increase the amount of food delivered and improve service delivery to clients. Food organization representatives agreed that there is a sense of urgency in creating a collective solution and therefore, the process will be completed as quickly as possible, but will not exceed the end of the year.

Staff is aware that expectations have been raised that this process will solve the problems identified by the food organizations. Staff continues to engage the various stakeholders to ensure they participate in the review and work collectively to reduce food insecurity in Peel.

Issues and requests will be directed to the "network" for full discussion and a collaborative approach to problem solving.

May 8, 2009

HS-A2 - 4 -

REVIEW OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION IN PEEL



Keith Ward
Commissioner of Human Services
and General Manager, Peel Living

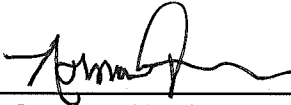


Janette Smith
Commissioner of Health Services



David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

Approved for Submission:



D. Szwarc, Chief Administrative Officer

PER

*For further information regarding this report, please contact
Janet Menard at extension 4939 or via email at janet.menard@peelregion.ca*

Authored By: Adaoma Patterson

c. Legislative Services