MINUTES
COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE
Wednesday, March 4, 2009
4:00 p.m., The Hayloft
Dundurn Castle
610 York Blvd., Hamilton


Absent with Regrets: Liz Shaver-Heeney, Judi Childs, Maciej Kowalski, Emma Cubitt, Susan Coverdale

Also Present: Sapphire Singh

1. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

Additions to Agenda:
   6.2 Vicki Edwards - Local Food Speed Networking Event.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were identified.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

   (Russell Ohrt/Melanie Golba)

3.1 Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee Meeting Minutes dated February 4, 2009 were approved.

   CARRIED
4. PRESENTATIONS

4.1 Redirection of the Emergency Food Distribution - System Planning Project - Brian Kreps

Brian updated the committee on the “Emergency Food Distribution Plan”. The city will execute a strategic scan looking at hunger and poverty issues as well as food banks. A time line has been set for the end of April.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5.1 Board of Health report feedback

Sarah’s presentation to The Board of Health was positively received. The changes to the “Terms of Reference” were approved.

5.2 Recruitment of new members

Recruitment will start in April for four vacancies:
- Agricultural representative
- Related labour organization member
- Emergency food service provider
- Someone directly experiencing food insecurity

A member from the Campaign for Adequate Welfare and an agricultural representative have already submitted applications for membership. It was suggested that existing applications are considered in addition to new applicants. It was decided to recruit directly rather that putting an ad in the newspaper.
A position description will be drafted to recruit a staff person from planning.

5.3 Subcommittee roles and responsibilities

Sarah prepared a draft of subcommittee roles and responsibilities. Members are to forward suggestions or additions to Sarah.

5.4 Subcommittee reports

Coordination Network
Karen reported that the first meeting was held. The proposals for investigating the feasibility of a Niagara Food Terminal are being evaluated by Economic Development. Issues related to the development of new farmers’ markets were discussed. It was noted that although there is a special events supervisor in the city to assist in community events (Janine Gaunt), there is no such contact for new farmers’ markets or new community gardens.

Development of a Local Food Charter/Food Policy
Angela circulated minutes of the “Food Policies Sub Committee”.

She discussed community engagement and using the launch to get people involved in subcommittee groups by identifying the types of policies that could be developed. More to come in April.

Councillor Bratina suggested that the ‘Healthy Communities’ document from the Ontario Professional Planner Institute could inform this work. www.ontarioplanners.on.ca

**Education and outreach:**
Simon has forwarded two invitations to potential subcommittee members.

Vicki reported on a new community food security website out of B.C. "Bits & Bytes": [http://www.bitsandbytes.ca/](http://www.bitsandbytes.ca/)

**Enhancing community food access and services**
There is no chair as yet. Brian will schedule the next meeting.

### 5.5 Launch committee report

The Launch will be held on April 30th at the Spectator Auditorium from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. Three panelists are confirmed. Several names were suggested for the fourth panelist. Vicki collected feedback on some draft flyers. Changes will be made and the flyer will be finalized when the last panelist is confirmed.

### 5.6 Decisions on speakers in May and June

Potential guest speakers were identified for the May, June and fall meetings. Sarah will send out invitations.

### 5.7 Update from Policy Sub-committee

See 5.4, sub-committee reports.

### 6. GENERAL INFORMATION & OTHER BUSINESS

#### 6.1 Green Venture Local Food Fair and Dinner

Sapphire was asked to speak about the Green Venture, Green Communities Canada Conference Food Fair on March 19th at the Hamilton Convention Centre. Vicki and Sarah will bring a display and staff it. The evening is open to the public.

#### 6.2 Local Food Buyer Event

A flyer for an innovative ‘Local Foods Farmer/Food Buyer Speed Networking Event in London was circulated.

#### 6.3 Campaign for Adequate Welfare

Sarah summarized her meeting with members of the Campaign for Adequate Welfare. (See Attachment 1.)
7. **ADJOURNMENT**

(Adam Watson/Simon Taylor)

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

**CARRIED**
Background

The Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits (CAWDB) is an advocacy group made up of people currently on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support program and others who live with low income in the Hamilton area, supported by some people from faith communities, social agencies and the general public. One of their areas of focus is food security. Given the mandate of the Community Food Security Stakeholders Committee to “make Hamilton a place were all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes self-reliance and social justice”, it seemed appropriate to meet with the CAWDB members to discuss their perspectives on food security issues in Hamilton and to explore opportunities for collaboration. With this in mind, Sarah Wakefield attended a regular CAWDB meeting on February 25th, 2009. Approximately 25 CAWDB members were in attendance. At this meeting, she was given an opportunity to describe the committee, its mandate, and its actions to date, and then a discussion was held. The key points raised in this discussion are described below.

Emergency Food

Comments about emergency food were most commonly in relation to food banks. A number of concerns were raised about the quality and appropriateness of food distributed in Hamilton food banks. These included:

- The age of the food (food past expiry dates, and/or visibly deteriorated due to age)
- Food with packaging removed (making it impossible to determine the age, brand, and sometimes even the type of food)
- Limited access to fresh food (fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy) and too great an emphasis on processed foods that are high in fat, salt, and refined sugars
- Food infestation and/or contamination (e.g., insects in food, insects/rodents on site, contamination of food with cleaning products, concerns about food product recalls)
- Limited selection and inability to meet special dietary requirements (e.g., peanut free for school lunches, heart healthy)

Concerns were also raised about the conditions in the food banks themselves, such as the visible deterioration of the buildings they were housed in, and inadequate or inappropriate waiting areas (e.g., long waits in line in the rain). Those present also expressed concerns about food access, in terms of the waiting periods enforced between food bank visits (often 30 days, with very little flexibility), the proofs needed to justify “need”. In addition, it was noted that recent increases in demand for the food banks has meant that people have been turned away. A number of people at the meeting noted that they had voiced these concerns to food bank staff, and were often told – in one way or another – that they had no right to complain and should instead be unwaveringly grateful for what they get.

Other emergency food programs, such as congregate dining and out of the cold programs were seen to have similar issues, although the specific issues vary according to the manner of food distribution and the type of foods provided. It should be noted that these concerns
Food Security in the Community

Meeting participants suggested that food banks were not sufficient for dealing with issues of hunger in the community, and while in the short term food banks might be the only option for individuals experiencing hunger, food banks were not a viable or socially just solution in the long term. Instead, hunger in the community was felt to be best addressed through ensuring that adequate income supports are in place (e.g., more robust welfare and disability programs). This is consistent with the positions held by many scholars (e.g., Tarasuk, 2001; Riches, 2003; Husbands, 1999) and indeed by many food banks themselves (see Daily Bread, 2009; Food Banks Canada, 2009). This was felt to be particularly important as we move into a recessionary period that is likely to impact a great number of Hamiltonians in ways far beyond the capacity of the food bank sector to respond.

Participants also suggested that other mechanisms for accessing food would enhance community food security. In particular, participants felt that a greater number of community gardens would allow individuals to grow their own vegetables, giving them access to fresh healthy food in season, and allowing them to take greater control of their own food security. Indeed, those at the meeting were quite enthusiastic about the prospect of being able to access land to grow food, and potential sites (such as Community Health Centre grounds, unused land in city parks around public buildings such as schools) were discussed. At the same time, it should be noted that gardens (given their seasonality and the resources needed to make them prosper) should only be seen as a supplemental source of food for those who are able to devote the time and resources needed to gardening. Gleaning programs were also discussed as a way of increasing access to fresh, healthy food. Long travel distances to food outlets were also mentioned as a problem.

Existing City Policy

Meeting participants were concerned about who would take responsibility for food security issues in low income communities and for emergency food access among existing City committees. In particular, overlap between the Community Food Security Stakeholders Committee (CFSSC) and the Emergency Food Distribution System Planning Project was noted.

It was felt that the city needed to play a greater role in food security and emergency food issues, particularly in the regulation of food bank activities.

Recommendations

At the meeting, a number of recommendations for the City and for the CFSSC were explicitly stated. Others can be inferred from the concerns raised. More specifically, the CAWB recommends that:

- The City take steps to improve the regulation and inspection of food banks, including the expansion of the Food Premise Inspection Program to provide more regular inspections of food banks and emergency meal programs, and the posting on the premises of inspection reports and the phone number to call with complaints, as with restaurants.
- The CFSSC collaborate with the Emergency Food Distribution System Planning Project so that the committees address food access issues in the most effective way, and to ensure that existing food insecurity in Hamilton is acknowledged and addressed.
• The CFSSC work to develop policies and programs to enhance opportunities to access healthy food, including but not limited to the development of more community gardens.
• The CFSSC work with those experiencing food insecurity as it undertakes its work in all four areas of its mandate (in particular, by including a member of CAWDB on the CFSSC).

The single most important message the group wanted to send to city councillors and city staff is to ask that they publicly and explicitly recognize the existence of the current hunger and related health crisis (see also Sick and Tired, 2009) and the imminent large increase in the numbers of people who will need emergency food, and give high priority to planning how to meet this expanding crisis in the short term, while continuing to work on an overall food security policy for Hamilton.

Additional important recommendations, such as the overhaul of social assistance rates (for example, through a $100 monthly health food supplement for Ontario Works and Disability Benefits recipients – Canadian Press, 2009), are directed at higher levels of government, but local lobbying to support these aims is essential.
References


