SUBJECT: Funding for the Food Share Member Agencies’ 2008 Christmas Campaign (ECS08053) (City Wide)

RECOMMENDATION:

That $100,000, funded through the Social Services Initiative Fund, be provided to Hamilton Food Share, on behalf of the emergency food provider agencies, for the 2008 Food Share Member Agencies Christmas Campaign.

Joe-Anne Priel,  
General Manager  
Community Services Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Hamilton Food Share, on behalf of its member agencies, has requested that the City of Hamilton financially support its 2008 Christmas Campaign (attached as Appendix A to Report ECS08053). The 2007 Christmas Campaign provided hampers to 20,000 individuals at a cost of $675,000. The City of Hamilton contributed $100,000 toward the cost of the campaign. Hamilton Food Share and its member agencies fundraised 85% of the campaign through corporate and individual donations.

Hunger relief agencies anticipate that demands will increase in 2008 for Christmas hampers and Christmas meals. Rising energy prices have placed a higher strain on low-income Hamiltonians already struggling to make ends meet. The recent economic turmoil has the potential to increase demand and reduce donations. Hamilton Food Share also notes that they have already experienced reduced giving through both food drives and the food industry.
The City of Hamilton supported requests from Hamilton Food Share, to fund a portion of the Christmas Campaign, in 2004, 2005 and 2007. On December 5, 2008, staff was prepare a report respecting a Strategic Plan for the emergency food sector, and report back to the Emergency & Community Services Committee. The Plan is not yet complete, but a number of steps have been undertaken, including the hiring of a consultant to develop the Plan, which is expected to be complete by the end of June 2009.

**BACKGROUND:**

The request from Hamilton Food Share, on behalf of its member agencies, states that assistance is needed due to recent difficulty in raising food donations through food drives and the food industry. Stocks were so low early this summer that the Emergency Food Action Committee organized a press conference to solicit assistance from the community. The request also notes that need will likely be higher this year given increasing energy costs and economic uncertainty, which puts pressure on donors and food bank clients.

The City of Hamilton has historically supported the emergency food system in Hamilton. Prior to 2006, the City of Hamilton provided approximately $150,000 in funding a year through the Ontario Works program for non-social assistance recipients, by providing emergency assistance to fund the distribution of emergency food. However, at that time, this amount was cost-shared 80/20 between the City and the Province. This practice was deemed non-compliant with the Ontario Works Act in a program review conducted in 2004. The practice was discontinued in order to comply with the Ontario Works Act. In the 2006 budget process, Council approved funding emergency food in the amount $134,000 as a means to continue to support the food banks.

The City of Hamilton has also provided periodic financial support for Hamilton Food Share and its member agencies’ Christmas Campaign. The City of Hamilton contributed an additional $100,000 in both 2004 and 2005, using surplus dollars from the National Child Benefit Fund and one-time funding through the Employment Target Funding, respectively. No funding was requested in 2006. In November, 2007 Council approved Report ECS07101; a request from Hamilton Food Share for $100,000 to support the 2007 Christmas Campaign. Report ECS07101 also indicated that support for future requests would be contingent upon the development of a strategic plan for the emergency food sector.

As a community, planning with the emergency food sector is critical to identify needs and develop a comprehensive response to meet the needs of our community. The Community Services Department staff and Hamilton Food Share have taken the following steps in developing the Plan, but it is not yet complete:

- Hamilton Food Share submitted a policy document to Housing Division staff outlining key issues in January 2008.
• Hamilton Food Share’s Executive Director and Housing Division staff met in March 2008 to discuss Food Share’s policy document and next steps.
• The Housing Division attempted to hire a staff person to work on this project and several data related initiatives in the spring and summer. Funding was available through the federal Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI), but the recruitment effort was unsuccessful.
• Ontario Works and Housing Division staff have met several times to explore opportunities within Ontario Works benefits to ensure that OW recipients and non-OW recipients have access to food in emergency situations.
• In September 2008, the Community Services Department approved a recommendation from the HPI Community Advisory Board to issue a Call for Applications (CFA) for consulting services to develop the Strategic Plan.
• The CFA was released on October 10, 2008 and closed on October 24, 2008. Applications are currently being reviewed and a consultant will be selected in early November 2008.

It is anticipated that the Plan will be completed by the end of June 2009 and a report will be brought to the Emergency and Community Services Committee in the third quarter of 2009.

**ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:**

There is no legislative authority for the City of Hamilton to manage or fund the emergency food system. At one point, the City of Hamilton supported food banks through an Ontario Works benefit that was cost-shared 80/20 with the Province. This flexibility was removed in 2004. As a result, Hamilton Food Share and its member agencies depend primarily on fundraising and donations from the community.

If the funding request is approved, Hamilton Food Share’s nine hunger relief agencies will be able to provide hampers and meals this holiday season. Christmas Hampers were distributed to more than 20,000 individuals in 2007 at a cost of $675,000. The City of Hamilton’s contribution of $100,000 represented 15% of the total cost.

The food banks provide critical services to those who do not have the financial means to sustain their monthly expenses, and are a valued link in the emergency services sector. Many in our community must turn to food banks and/or meal programs in order to avoid hunger and homelessness. Over the years, agencies have become more reliant on Hamilton Food Share to support them in supplementing their emergency food programs as they are faced with greater need and fewer resources at the agency level.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:**

If Council does not approve this request, it will result in a greater strain on the emergency food resources than currently exists. This would result in fewer disadvantaged people being served by the 2008 Christmas Hamper and Christmas Meal Programs.
FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Financial:
Funds are available within the Social Services Initiative Fund to cover the cost of the request.

Staffing:
There are no staffing implications associated with the recommendation of Report ECS08053.

Legal:
There are no legal implications associated with the recommendation of Report ECS08053.

POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:
None.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION:
- Corporate Services Department, Finance and Budgets Division
- Food Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee

CITY STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:
By evaluating the “Triple Bottom Line”, (community, environment, and economic implications) we can make choices that create value across all three bottom lines, moving us closer to our vision for a sustainable community, and Provincial interests.

Community Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No

Shelter, care and satisfying employment are accessible to all Hamiltonians. Supporting the 2008 Christmas Campaign will ensure that Hamilton families in need will have food over the Holiday Season.

Environmental Well-Being is enhanced. ☐ Yes ☑ No

Economic Well-Being is enhanced. ☐ Yes ☑ No
Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines? ☐ Yes ☑ No

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants? ☐ Yes ☑ No
October 15, 2008

Ms. Joe Anne Priel
General Manager
Community Services Department
1 Hughson Street N.  2nd Floor
Hamilton, ON  L8P 4Y5

Dear Joe-Anne,

I am officially writing to you on behalf of the Emergency Food Action Committee (EFAC). The City of Hamilton has been generous in previous years, and we are requesting financial assistance, again this year, to enable local food banks and hot meal programs in helping provide Christmas Hampers and Christmas Meal Programs, to those in need.

Last year over 9,000 hampers were distributed to people in need assisting over 20,000 individuals through this community initiative. The cost of the food hampers were estimated at $675,000.00, with an average cost of $75.00 each.

Seven of the nine EFAC agencies expect to host 4,000 individuals for a Christmas meal at an estimated cost of $28,480.00 which averages approximately $7.12 per meal.

Cost incurred for the Christmas programs are financed entirely through fundraising efforts and gifts in kind contributions raised at the agency level. Last year, the contribution from the City of Hamilton of $100,000.00 assisted greatly in covering approx 15% of the total collective costs to provide this service.

Much has changed in the emergency food sector since last year. Food supplies are not as plentiful both from the food industry and through food drives. The cost of utilities (heat/hydro/gas) has gone up, as well as the price of food. These increases put additional pressure on low income households who are already struggling, and who will then turn to a food bank and/or hot meal program for help this Christmas season. Hunger relief agencies are not immune to the effects of these trends and consequently have already experienced a very difficult time in servicing the need.

I have received your October 2nd letter today on October 14th, 2008, stipulating that no assistance will be made possible this year for the emergency food providers unless accompanied by a strategic plan. Can you please clarify for me the report “ECS07101
Funding for Food Share Agencies Christmas Campaign”, as I have no knowledge of it nor have I received a copy. The Emergency Food Sector has been poised to begin the establishment of a strategic plan with the City as early as of February 2008. Hamilton Food Share was asked to submit a discussion paper on emergency food services as a starting point for outlining the relevant issues for the express purpose of entering into a strategic plan. Hamilton Food Share submitted this document in late January 2008, entitled “Relieving Hunger and Reducing Poverty, Towards a Strategic Plan for the Emergency Food Sector.”

I am aware that there are a number of pressing issues and projects currently keeping City staff very busy. The unsuccessful attempt in hiring a Senior Policy Analyst set us back again in getting started with this process. The project of developing the emergency food strategic plan has been in the queue for quite some time and emergency food providers remain committed to this process. I am sure that Hamilton’s City Councillors understand that a plan has not been produced to date through not fault of its project partners. I am also sure that their intent with the “stipulation” is that we begin to move forward together, informed, with a common understanding toward the development of a community based plan. That outcome is our intention as well. The call for applications to hire a consultant for this project was released to the public last week (October 8th 2008) and I thank you and Brian Kreps for beginning the process at this time.

I was invited to a meeting with Chris Murray in December 2007, along with Brian Kreps and Dave Brodati, where I spoke on the issues currently experienced in the emergency food system. I indicated that the gaps in the system will only get worse as we approach the summer and especially going into the winter and Christmas 2008 season. As you may be aware this past summer emergency food providers experienced food severe shortages so critical that a press conference was organized by the EFAC Members in order to send out an SOS to the community for help. I also spoke about the external trends affecting service delivery such as the uncertain economy, increase costs in energy, gas and food that would play a significant role in making the current difficulties experienced by emergency food programs even worse, as we made our way further into the year of 2008. I also spoke about a poverty reduction plan document from food banks. In my work on the provincial level, I have supported The Ontario Association of Food Banks to research and produce two documents that assist in clarifying these issues, and provide a broader food bank perspective on poverty reduction. They are entitled “A Gathering Storm” and “Our Choice”. These documents have been submitted to City staff to further clarify/support the pressures experienced by emergency food providers and could also provide a framework for a strategic plan.

Submitting the three reports was our commitment to inform and begin the process and the City has also attempted to jump start it much earlier in the year by trying to hire a staff person that could lead the process. I am pleased to note that at the FS&H meeting held in September 2008, Hamilton Food Share was asked to attend a meeting with Brian Kreps on behalf of the EFAC members, to assist in the development of a frame work for hiring
a facilitator for the emergency food sector systems plan. We are finally there and we look forward to participating in this collaborative process.

Jo-Anne, your support has made a big difference in the years when a contribution has been received from the City. Your partnership is important to us and it is our greatest hope that the City can assist these front line agencies this approaching holiday season in order to maintain their level of support to families and individuals who may otherwise go without.

I look forward to your timely reply and I thank you for your consideration in the matter.

Yours truly,

Joanne Santucci
Executive Director
Hamilton Food Share
Committee Chairman, Emergency Food Action Committee.

cc: Chris Murray
    Brian Kreps
    Dave Brodati
    Ron Sharegan, Committee Chairman; Food, Shelter and Housing Advisory Committee