CITY OF HAMILTON
COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Social Housing and Homeless Division

TO: Chair and Members
   Emergency & Community Services Committee

WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE

COMMITTEE DATE: April 21, 2010

SUBJECT/REPORT NO:
Ensuring Safe, Healthy and Adequate Food for those in Need (CS10045) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item - “T”)

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SIGNATURE:

RECOMMENDATION

(a) That the Mayor correspond with the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services, to request that the Province implement Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates that reflect the real cost of living and are indexed annually to reflect inflation.

(b) That Item "T", respecting Ensuring Safe, Healthy and Adequate Food for those in Need, be considered complete and removed from the Emergency & Community Services Outstanding Business list.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits (CAWDB) made a presentation to the Board of Health on September 28, 2009, expressing concern about the availability of healthy and safe food to individuals and families with low incomes.
The CAWDB presentation was referred to the Emergency and Community Services Committee and subsequently, Community Services Department staff were directed to:

- Respond to the presentation on a point by point basis;
- Establish a plan of action where applicable;
- Mitigate the concerns outlined by the Food Security Issues Committee of CAWDB; and,
- Forward the response to the Emergency and Community Services Committee.

The Community Services Department and Public Health Service’s staff jointly provided information and prepared this report.

The CAWDB presentation was reviewed on a point-by-point basis and a detailed response is provided in Appendix A – CAWDB Presentation Issues and Responses.

Appendix A provides a description of each proposed change to policy or business practice as outlined by CAWDB and a description of the present situation and procedures related to the operation of Food Banks. It has been determined by staff that the proposed changes are either already in existence or are not feasible.

The CAWDB presentation stated that people who live on social assistance have an inadequate supply of nutritious food. There are numerous studies that have documented the inadequacy of social assistance rates to provide recipients with sufficient income to purchase housing, utilities, food and other necessities of life. It is therefore recommended that the Mayor correspond with the Minister of Community and Social Services to implement Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates that reflect the real cost of living and are indexed annually to reflect inflation.

### FINANCIAL / STAFFING / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

**Financial:**

There are no financial implications associated with Report CS10045.

**Staffing:**

There are no staffing implications associated with Report CS10045.
Legal:

There are no legal implications associated with Report CS10045.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On September 28, 2009 Michelle Hruschka, representing the Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits (CAWDB), made a presentation to the Board of Health respecting the issue of ensuring safe, healthy and adequate food for those in need. Staff were directed to respond to the presentation on a point by point basis to establish a plan of action and where applicable, to mitigate the concerns.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no local policy implications related to the recommendations.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

- Social Housing and Homelessness Division, Community Services Department
- Employment and Income Support Division, Community Services Department
- Healthy Living Division, Public Health Services
- Health Protection Division, Public Health Services

ANALYSIS / RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

People living in poverty in Hamilton do not have the financial means to access even the most fundamental basic needs that serve as the foundation for survival. Access to shelter, food and clothing are precarious at best.

Based on Report BOH09024 -Nutritious Food Basket, presented to the Board of Health Committee, a family of four living in Hamilton and in receipt of Ontario Works assistance is spending 50% of their income on housing and 39% on food. The remaining income of 11% (approximately $200.00) leaves little for other basic needs such as food, clothing, utilities, personal supplies, basic phone, transportation, and school supplies.

If social assistance rates reflected an adequate standard of living then the City and many non profit organizations would not be left struggling to fill the gaps such as nutritious food, as identified in the CAWDB presentation.
ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

There are no alternatives for consideration at this time.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN (Linkage to Desired End Results)


Social Development

- Residents in need have access to adequate support services

Healthy Community

- Adequate access to food, water, shelter and income, safety, work, recreation and support for all (Human Services)

APPENDICES / SCHEDULES

Appendix A to Report CS10045 – CAWDB Presentation Issues and Responses
Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits (CAWDB)

September 28, 2009 Presentation

Issues and Responses

The presentation from the CAWDB detailed a number of issues concerning food banks for which Community Services Department and Public Health Services staff prepared the following responses:

Issue #1: The Separation of Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee and Emergency Food System Planning Committee

The CAWDB detailed concern about the decision to have two separate working groups:

- The Emergency Food System Planning Team led by the Community Services Department and,

- The Food Security Advisory Committee led by Public Health Services (PHS).

CAWDB Proposed Solution

To consolidate the two committees and to give a high priority to making practical changes to meet the food bank crisis.

Response

The Emergency Food System Planning Team was established on the direction of the Emergency and Community Services Committee related to Report ECS07101 - Funding for Food Share Member Agencies Christmas Campaign. The Emergency Food System Planning Team was charged with the development of a strategic plan for the emergency food system. The strategic directions developed by this group were approved by Emergency and Community Services Committee in Report CS09072 Emergency Food System Strategic Directions. The vision for the strategic plan is “Hamilton, as the best place to raise a child, has an integrated, sustained, coordinated system of emergency food services that responds effectively to those in need. No one goes hungry.”

The Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee reports to the Board of Health. This committee is working towards a strong, sustainable local food system that is beyond emergency food provision. Priorities include creation of a local food distribution initiative, policy support for community gardens, urban agriculture, and farmer’s markets, and education and outreach for a sustainable local food system.
The mandates for each of the two groups are related but distinct. The Emergency Food Planning committee is project focused and its purpose is to implement a strategic plan for the emergency food sector. The Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee’s purpose is to work towards a sustainable local food system. Its scope is beyond the emergency food service provision. It is recognized there is some overlap in the objectives of the two groups. The committees are comprised of both community members and staff representatives, some of whom are involved in both initiatives.

The Emergency Food System Strategic Plan acknowledges the need to integrate, collaborate and coordinate existing efforts within our community. Integration and coordination is listed as one of the strategic directions within the strategic plan. The Emergency Food Planning Committee is in the process of identifying opportunities for collaboration and coordination. The Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee has been identified as part of a broader food provision network. The Emergency Food Planning Team is in the process of identifying opportunities for collaboration and ensuring that the work of other committees and initiatives is not being duplicated within the Emergency Food System strategic plan.

**Issue #2: Food Safety at Food Banks**

CAWDB is concerned that not all food banks are inspected and that food banks distribute food that is substandard such as expired, mouldy and with no labels on the cans.

**CAWDB Proposed Solution**

- To implement the City’s standard food inspection program that is utilized in other food industries such as restaurants and,

- To post the Public Health Inspection Report for public display at all food banks.

**Response**

The proposed solutions by the CAWDB to address food safety within Food Banks already exists.

Food banks are defined as food premises under the *Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act*. As such, they are inspected in accordance with provincial *Public Health Food Safety Standards and Protocols.*
Currently, PHS has 23 food banks registered in its database. All of these premises are designated as “low risk”. That is, they almost exclusively stock and distribute pre-packaged foods which pose little risk of food borne illness.

Unannounced annual inspections of food banks as well as inspections based on complaints received are conducted by PHS and address the following items:

- General sanitation
- Maintenance of proper storage temperatures where perishable items (e.g. dairy products) are distributed
- Product labelling
- Integrity of product packaging

Inspection results for food banks can be viewed on the City’s Food Safety Zone website (www.foodsafetyzone.ca). The requirement to post the PHS Food Inspection certificate (the Green Card) is linked to the licensing by-law. Food banks are not required to be licensed. However, all of the food bank operators in the PHS food bank registry have agreed to post PHS Food Inspection Certificate in the interests of promoting that they are regulated. The Card indicates to patrons the date of the most recent inspection of the facility and provides contact information for making inquiries or reporting concerns.

Inspectors provide food bank operators with general information about food safety and reinforce the recommendation that expired food products not be distributed.¹ Food safety signage, sourced from Food Banks Canada http://foodbankscanada.ca/main.cfm, is also provided. Operators are requested to prominently post this signage so that it may also serve to promote safe food practices among food bank patrons.

The inspections described above have revealed a high level of compliance with safe food practices. As in any food premises, occasional non-compliance issues arise. However, these are largely isolated, unintentional and quickly rectified by operators.

**Issue #3: Nutritional Value of Food at Food Banks**

The CAWDB stated that the food available in food banks does not provide adequate nutrition for optimal health. The majority of food is high in sugar, fat and salt. Those with health conditions are left with no choices. Additionally, tuna is

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¹ With the exception of infant formula and special meal supplements, it is not illegal to sell or distribute food that has exceeded its expiry or “best before” date. Such food is safe to eat, but may not be of optimal quality and nutritional value.
provided in unlimited amounts and concern was expressed regarding the potential high levels of mercury in this seafood. Food banks do not give out warnings that eating too much tuna can cause serious health problems.

**CAWDB Proposed Solution**

- Food Banks should give out warnings that eating too much tuna can cause serious health problems,

- It would be advantageous to distribute food stamps or debit cards where people can go and buy their own food specific to their needs,

- Implementing more community gardens so that people can have the opportunity to grow their own fruits and vegetables all year round,

- More local foods should be distributed at the food banks. This will also help local farmers who struggle to make ends meet.

**Response**

**Nutritious Food**

It is agreed that people who live on social assistance have an inadequate supply of nutritious food. Numerous studies have documented the inadequacy of social assistance rates to provide recipients with sufficient income to purchase food, housing, utilities, and other necessities of life.

PHS has used the annual Nutritious Food Basket Reports to advocate to the provincial government for adequate income, so people can afford to buy nutritious food, and rely less on food banks for nutrition.

Studies support the concern that the food available through food banks does not meet all nutritional requirements. This is due, in large part, to the fact that most food provided through food banks is donated by individuals and corporations in the form of mostly non-perishable items, rather than monetary donations. Food banks recognize this issue and endeavour to provide a wide range of nutritious foods through cash donations when possible. Given their reliance on donations of food, they do not have the capacity to ensure that this is always the case.

Food banks try their best to provide a balanced diet, but are really designed to distribute a limited supply of donated, mostly non-perishable food as a supplement, or form of acute hunger relief. Research has shown that the food

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acquired at a food bank does not meet the nutrient requirements for adults, nor is it intended to be the solution for food insecurity. Food banks do not have the capacity to regularly stock foods for people with special dietary needs, but do strive to meet these needs when clients identify a food restriction.

**Tuna Safety**

Tuna is a very nutritious food with high quality protein and many other nutrients. Canada’s Food Guide recommends that Canadians eat two servings of fish each week.  

Tuna has been noted to contain high levels of mercury however, different varieties of tuna have different levels of mercury. Canned light tuna (skipjack, tongol, yellowfin) is considered to be a low mercury fish and is safe to eat often. Light tuna, one of the most popular types of fish for many Canadians, tends to be lower in cost than other forms of tuna and is most often the type distributed by food banks.  

Canned white tuna (albacore) is considered by Health Canada as safe to eat sometimes. Men, teenage boys and women over age 50 can safely eat four servings a week. Children can safely eat one to two servings a month, and teenage girls and women under age 50 can safely consume two to four servings a month. Most food banks supply only three days worth of food, and some food banks limit patrons to two cans of tuna each month. Even if white tuna was the

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8. www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
10. Jan. 14, 2010 visit to Neighbour to Neighbour Food Bank found 878 cans of light tuna on the shelf and in cases, compared with 10 cans of white tuna. Tuna in the warehouse was not counted, but a similar proportion was expected.
only variety available, the amount distributed would not exceed the Health Canada recommendations.

For optimal health, Registered Dietitians encourage people to eat more fish. Warnings in food banks to reduce intake of white tuna might unnecessarily alarm people and reduce their intake of nutritious light tuna. We therefore do not recommend that warnings be posted for white tuna, a food that is safe to eat sometimes and is not widely available in food banks.

**Food Vouchers**

In the fall of 2009, The City of Hamilton’s Ontario Works (OW) program conducted a pilot project to purchase $200,000 in food vouchers for distribution to OW clients and applicants who needed assistance.

The cost of the pilot project was covered through Employment Assistance funding (100% provincial dollars). Currently there is no sustainable funding to continue providing food vouchers to Ontario Works recipients on an ongoing basis. The pilot has ended and is being evaluated to determine the potential for replication in the future.

It is also worth noting that providing food vouchers to Ontario Works recipients is only one way to address food insecurity in Hamilton. There are also individuals and families living in poverty who are not in receipt of social assistance. The cost of providing food vouchers to every Hamiltonian accessing the food banks would not be financially feasible for the City of Hamilton. Often times, food banks will purchase large quantities of food in bulk to receive more food for each dollar spent.

**Community Gardens**

The City is currently exploring the option of local community gardens and ways in which to make them more accessible to people with low incomes, so that they are able to grow their own food. Given the climate and unpredictability of yields, growing food would only be a supplement to other sources. It is important, however, as a means to bring community members together and connect them with local food systems. A staff working group is currently developing a Community Gardens Policy which will be provided to Council for their consideration.

The following City Housing Hamilton (CHH) properties have been identified as potential properties for establishing community gardens:

1. 181 Jackson St. W. and 95 Hess Street South
2. 155 Park St. S
3. 1884 and 1900 Main St. W
4. 801 Upper Gage Ave  
5. 45 Montcalm Dr (Includes Elgar, Limeridge Rd. W and Kendale)  
6. 245 Kenora Ave

It is agreed that many diverse initiatives are needed to help address food insecurity. A recent research study of Toronto families experiencing food insecurity\(^\text{12}\) reported that only one in five used food banks in the past 12 months, one-third participated in children’s food programs, one in 20 families used a community kitchen, and participation in community gardens was even lower. No one solution meets the needs of all.

In Hamilton, advocacy for more local foods to support our agricultural sector is currently underway:

- The City financially supports and helps to distribute the Hamilton Farm Map and Directory to promote local farm products to consumers.
- Expansion of the downtown farmers’ market is currently underway, along with work on a policy to enable more farm stands in more neighbourhoods.
- City staff is consulting on the feasibility of a local food distribution initiative for Hamilton and Niagara.

**Issue #4: Inadequate Social Assistance Rates**

The CAWDB are concerned that special diet funding has been cut which inhibits the ability for people to purchase food items they need to maintain their health.

**CAWDB Proposed Solution**

Local politicians should be doing more to push both the Federal and Provincial governments, on policies that would cover living wages and liveable amounts for those on social assistance as this would lessen the health costs in the years to come.

**Response**

The Mayor and City Council have made a number of requests to the Ministry of Community and Social Services to review and increase social assistance rates. The Province of Ontario has formed a Social Assistance Review Advisory Council. The Advisory Council will conduct a review of Ontario’s social

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Food Insecurity and Participation in Community Food Programs among Low-income Toronto Families  
Sharon I. Kirkpatrick, PhD, RD Valerie Tarasuk, PhD
assistance system and will submit recommendations for changes to social assistance rates and rules.

On April 8th, 2010 a member of the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council will be meeting with the Director of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR). The HRPR and community members will be advocating for an evidence-based system to establish Ontario’s social assistance rates.

The Special Diet Allowance through the Ontario Works program is currently under review by the government of Ontario. It was announced in the 2010 Ontario Budget that the Special Diet Allowance will be eliminated and replaced by the new “Nutritional Supplement Program”. The nutritional supplement program will be administered by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term care. It is unknown at this point how it will affect Ontario Works participants; however, the allowance will continue to be medically based and will assist those on social assistance with severe medical needs.

**Issue #5: Accountability for Funding**

Concerns were expressed in the CAWDB presentation regarding the accountability of food banks for funding from the City.

**CAWDB proposed solution**

The City should enforce more stringent controls to ensure that food is provided only to the most vulnerable in our city.

**Response**

The Community Services Department is partnering with Hamilton Food Share, food banks and hot meal programs to implement *No one Goes Hungry: Strategic Directions for Emergency Food System*. One of the strategic directions includes the development of standards which will include policies and business practices relating to operational controls and accountability measures. These standards will serve as a guide for service delivery in food banks. A working group has been convened to develop the standards and is expected to provide Council with an update in the October 2010. These standards will be completed by the end of this year and the implementation phase will begin in 2011.