

Peterborough Food Action Network

April 16, 2020

Yvette Peplinskie, Deputy Treasurer and Manager of Financial Services

Richard Freymond, Treasurer and Commissioner of Corporate and Legislative Services

City of Peterborough

500 George St. N.

Peterborough, ON

K9H 3R9

Dear Ms. Peplinskie and Mr. Freymond,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit recommendations for the 2021 budget. We are writing on behalf of the Peterborough Food Action Network (PFAN). As you may know, PFAN's vision is for everyone in Peterborough City and County to have enough healthy food to eat as part of a long-term food security strategy.

We understand that in these days of COVID-19, much has become uncertain and it is difficult for anyone, including municipalities, to plan forward. However, even before the pandemic, 4.4 million people in Canada were experiencing food insecurity.ⁱ In Peterborough: one half of single mothers already could not afford adequate food to feed their families;ⁱⁱ 67% of Trent students living away from home for the first time were food insecure;ⁱⁱⁱ and a one-person household relying on Ontario Works had a monthly *deficit* of \$224 after paying for only food and shelter costs.^{iv} It is well-established that the causes of food insecurity are income-related. Inadequate and unpredictable earnings, a lack of financial equity and savings, and the costs associated with rental housing can all lead to people compromising on the quantity and quality of their food intake. With the current pandemic crisis, our residents face added challenges of illness, lost employment and income, lack of access to regular food sources, and disruptions to the food supply. With all of this in mind, we make the following recommendations.

Income: Adequate and stable incomes allow households to pay for all their essential needs so that their food intake is not compromised. The City of Peterborough has endorsed the idea of engaging in conversation about a Basic Income. Although Basic Income itself would usually fall under provincial or federal jurisdiction, **we urge the City to become certified as a living wage employer with Ontario Living Wage Network at the leader or champion level. We also recommend that the City demonstrate its commitment to adequate incomes by leading a living wage campaign that encourages all employers to pay a living wage, currently calculated as \$17.63 per hour.^v Furthermore, we ask that the City give priority in procurement to those employers who pay a living wage.**

Housing: Housing is an inflexible household cost that often must take precedence when there is insufficient income for both housing and food. Across Canada, rental housing tenants are at substantially increased risk of food insecurity compared to home owners.^{vi} More locally,

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Peterborough has the highest percentage nationally of renters with unaffordable rents.^{vii} **We ask the City to increase investment in the 10-year Housing and Homelessness plan and specifically increase supports for tenants to increase rental affordability and stability.**

Community food and resilience: The current crisis is bringing to the forefront, the need to build our food system's resilience and address structural inequities. As we are writing this letter, we anticipate significant disruptions in the food system throughout the 2020 growing season. Currently, for instance, community gardens are closed. Yet we know that they provide significant nutritional benefits to many residents. In fact, as illustrated by Nourish, a food collaborative developed out of PFAN which supports the extensive network of community gardens in Peterborough City and County, our region is home to more community gardens per capita than any other region in Canada. We currently are hearing more and more stories about disruption in the food system and fear that this access to food is going to be significantly undermined in the coming year, leading to greater food insecurity.

Clearly we need to become more resilient. **We ask the City to establish an official food resiliency committee.** The committee would focus on ways to strengthen the approaches that will have emerged in the course of the pandemic-affected 2020 growing season by addressing some of the vulnerabilities to food insecurity, food access, local food supply, and community connection.

Water: Accessible, free water is critical for the health and well-being of residents and the urban production of food. **We recommend that the City allocate more funds for water, both for fountains and refill stations, and also for community gardens to be able to grow healthy local food.** We recognize that community gardens are currently closed, as they have not yet been recognized as an essential service. However, we know that community gardens provide significant nutritional and mental health benefits to many residents.

Vulnerable populations: Feedback from residents living with disabilities in a low-income neighbourhood indicated that going for groceries during the winter is challenging for them. They use transit but find themselves unable to get dropped off at their bus stops when snow accumulates or is not cleared off thoroughly. Transit drivers either try to find places where they can safely drop off riders or sometimes stop and shovel the bus stop areas. Still, residents report that it becomes a significant barrier for them in accessing food or going around the city to meet their basic needs. **We encourage the City to provide snow clearing at bus stops so that residents with mobility needs can go grocery shopping and/or engage in activities safely and unconditionally. This would ideally be complemented with greater distribution of food stores in low-income areas and along transit routes.**

COVID-19 along with all its ripple effects is taking a terrible toll on communities. However, it is also revealing what we need to do to become more resilient. We appeal to the City of Peterborough to use its budgetary process to strengthen the resilience of our food system. In

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doing so, the City can support nutrition and disease prevention, advance economic development, and build a stronger community.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. We would be happy to provide any additional information or clarification that you require.

Sincerely,

The Peterborough Food Action Network

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ⁱ Tarasuk V, Mitchell A. (2020). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18.

ⁱⁱ Peterborough Public Health. (2018). Food Insecurity in Peterborough.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dasné, A.S. & Furgal, C. (2017). Food security at Trent University: Key results from the 2016-2017 food access survey.

^{iv} Peterborough Public Health. (2019). 2019 Limited Incomes report.

^v Peterborough and District United Way. (2019). 2019 Living Wage Report.

<https://www.uwpeterborough.ca/2019/11/04/2019-living-wage-report/>

^{vi} Tarasuk V, Mitchell A. (2020). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18.

^{vii} United Way Peterborough and District. (2019). Housing is Fundamental.