

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

For consideration at the Standing Committee meeting of City Council on July 24, 2024

3. Closing the Gap: Investing in the City of Vancouver's Food System to Increase Food Access and Support a Resilient, Equitable, and Sustainable Food System for All

Submitted by: Councillor Carr

WHEREAS

1. Household food insecurity¹ is when a household worries about or lacks the financial means to buy nutritious, safe, and personally acceptable foods;
2. While food insecurity and income/poverty largely remain the jurisdiction of senior levels of government, municipal government nonetheless has an important role to play in supporting a resilient, equitable, accessible, and sustainable food system for all Vancouver residents;
3. Food insecurity remains a persistent and growing problem in the region with the 2023 estimates for British Columbia (BC) being the highest in almost 20 years of monitoring. In 2023, 21.8% of people are living in food insecure households in BC² (6.2% marginally food insecure, 9.8% moderately food insecure, 5.8% severely food insecure). This represents a significant increase in food insecurity from 16.8% of BC households in 2022. Rising pressures have contributed to increasing food insecurity, including housing affordability, inflation, and climate-related impacts to our food supply;
4. Food insecurity is closely tied to structural inequities, racism, discrimination, and colonialism, and certain populations are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity:
 - Indigenous population aged 15 years and over in BC: **39.2%**
 - Recent immigrants (10 years or less) aged 15 years and over in BC: **24.9%**
 - Children under the age of 18 in BC: **28.8%**;
5. The 2023 Metro Vancouver Living Wage for Families BC³ report outlined that a third of two-parent families in Metro Vancouver have total family incomes below the living wage family income (32%). In addition, food is the second-most expensive item in the living wage family budget and one of the fastest growing, dwarfed only by the costs of shelter. Food prices in BC are increasing nearly twice as fast as general inflation, as indicated by the Consumer Price Index for food. Food costs rose by 6.1% since last year, adding an extra \$68 per month to the family budget;

¹ [2023-10-05_HouseholdFoodInsecurityReport.pdf \(bccdc.ca\)](#)

² [In 2023, 21.8% of people are living in food insecure households in BC](#)

³ [2023 Metro Vancouver Living Wage for Families BC](#)

6. The negative impacts of food insecurity on people's physical and social well-being have been well documented. Research findings demonstrate the associations between food insecurity and adverse health and well-being outcomes in child, youth, adult, and senior populations. Children in food insecure households have an increased likelihood of various adverse physical health, development, social, and academic outcomes. Among adults and seniors, household food insecurity is linked with poorer dietary intake, diabetes management, cognitive health, and mental health outcomes;
7. We have a rising food insecurity problem; and we also have a broken food system. In Canada, 58% of the food produced⁴ (35.5 million tonnes) is lost and wasted annually; and 32% of this food (valued at about \$49.46 billion) is edible and could be redirected to support people in our communities. In Canada, only 4% of surplus edible food is rescued⁵ and redistributed. In addition, food waste represents a critical environmental challenge: 6-8% of global greenhouse gas emissions are the result of food loss and waste; and 56.5 million tonnes of CO₂eq emissions are created annually in Canada due to food loss and waste;
8. While food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints (an income/poverty problem), community and social service organizations in Vancouver have nonetheless been instrumental in addressing complex food systems challenges and rising food insecurity in the city, demonstrating remarkable resilience and innovation in expanding food access and sustainability initiatives amidst increasing demand for food systems support. Many organizations have pivoted or expanded their food services (especially during COVID-19) to meet community needs; but most of the emergency funding has decreased/ended, even though the demand for food programs remains elevated. In this context, food donations from businesses have played a crucial role in mitigating food insecurity (and reducing food waste), allowing organizations with limited budgets and capacity to meet the rising demand for food program and services. As outlined in the City of Vancouver Map of Free and Low-Cost Food Programs⁶, **79 food programs are currently available to Vancouver residents** in need of food services, and the City of Vancouver gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support provided by these organizations;
9. This mismatch between community needs and nonprofits' capacity to meet those needs has been documented. Findings from the 2024 State of BC's Non-Profit Sector report⁷ outlined that 76% of BC nonprofits surveyed reported an increased demand for overall services, but 31% reported their capacity to respond to community needs had decreased;
10. An array of community-led and nonprofit organizations are advancing food security, addressing the impacts of food insecurity, and reclaiming Indigenous food sovereignty. A selection of the food systems initiatives in the City of Vancouver include:

⁴ [58% of the food produced](#)

⁵ [only 4% of surplus edible food is rescued](#)

⁶ [City of Vancouver Map of Free and Low-Cost Food Programs](#)

⁷ [2024 State of BC's Non-Profit Sector report](#)

- The **Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks (VNFN)**⁸ are a network of community organizations committed to promoting food security in neighbourhoods across the City of Vancouver (15 networks now exist in Vancouver). VNFN is committed to food equity and access, education, skill building, and advocacy, particularly for community members who are struggling economically. This work is based on the principle that all members of society have the right to quality food. VNFN provides a space for networks to collaborate, share best practices and advocate for food equity and justice, ecologically and culturally sustainable food systems, and community food resilience with a unified voice. In 2023, the VNFN served 47,668 people, distributed 81,693 food boxes and 156,693 meals, and hosted 1,097 food and garden workshops;
- Several **urban Indigenous food projects** are aiming to reclaim Indigenous food sovereignty and restore Indigenous food systems in the City of Vancouver, including the V6A Garden at the Astoria Hotel, which provides a critical reconnection with land and traditional practice for many living in the Downtown Eastside. Dawn Morrison’s work with the Ancestral Foodways Project in Strathcona Park provides a reconceptualization framework for traditional food growing that transcends the scope and scale of the dominant agricultural narrative; and Leona Brown’s work with the Vancouver Urban Food Forest Foundation provides another form of ancestral food growing and land stewardship used by Indigenous and Coast Salish Nations since time immemorial;
- The informal **Vancouver Food Recovery Network** provides essential food donations to over 150 community-serving organizations providing food programming, allowing these organizations to tackle the City’s most pressing issues: homelessness, substance use, mental health challenges, domestic violence, and systemic racism. Most of these partner organizations specialize in serving low-income people and equity-seeking groups and are challenged with funding and capacity limits; and the Vancouver Food Recovery Network supports their food-related programming, which is part of a broader holistic approach to community development. In 2023, the four largest food recovery organizations in the city (Food Stash Foundation, Vancouver Food Runners, Quest Nonprofit Grocery Markets, and CityReach Care Society) collected and distributed 4.47 million pounds of healthy, edible surplus food (3.72 million equivalent meals) (in-kind value: \$15.72 million), and this mitigated approximately 7.55 million pounds of CO₂e from the environment. This work also saves the City of Vancouver and businesses money by rerouting their surplus food to the best possible end use;

11. The unique economic, geographic, and demographic characteristics of Vancouver necessitates multi-sector, place-based, and tailored local responses to these challenges, including municipal investments in food systems programming and services. Importantly, place-based initiatives help to increase

⁸ [Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks \(VNFN\)](#)

collaboration across organizations, build trust between communities and organizations, use local strengths to build essential assets, and connect grassroots efforts to the public policy sector. Unfortunately, local organizations are currently stretched beyond capacity to meet the demand from residents experiencing food insecurity and needing food services. In Vancouver Food Runners' 2023 Nonprofit Partner Feedback Survey (completed by 41 organizations operating food programs and providing wraparound social services), the top two challenges to operate their food programs were funding and lack of infrastructure (fridges/freezers);

12. Given rising food insecurity in Vancouver and the pressures on nonprofit organizations to meet community needs, the Vancouver Food Policy Council (with data provided by City of Vancouver staff) has identified several concerning trends in municipal funding for food systems work:

- **Limited funding:** Within the \$2.2 billion City of Vancouver 2024 Operating Budget, only \$700,826 is earmarked for food-focused operating grants. Regular access to food is foundational for good health, mental well-being, and a thriving community, but the City of Vancouver only allocated 0.03% of the 2024 Operating Budget towards food systems initiatives;
- **No increase to food funding over time:** Funding for food systems has remained stagnant, with no increases to address inflation nor rising community demand: total food systems funding has remained under \$950,000 for the last four years. The \$950,000 represents combined funding for food systems work across Operating and Capital budgets and includes investments through ACCS (Social Policy and Projects) and PDS (Sustainability and Strategic and Long-Range Planning) Most of this funding is variable year to year. The only sources of dedicated food systems funding are the Sustainable Food Systems an school Food grants, which are nested under the Social Policy Grants Operating Budget and totalled \$680,000 in 2024;
- **Demand for food funding is growing:** the Sustainable Food Systems Grant is oversubscribed. In 2022, \$413,588 was requested from organizations, but only \$202,516 was allocated; and many organizations that need funding do not even apply to this grant because they know their chance of receiving funding is so low;
- **No funding for certain initiatives:** Within the current funding parameters, certain projects remain underfunded or unfunded at the municipal level, particularly Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives and food recovery programs (e.g. Food Stash, Vancouver Food Runners, Quest Nonprofit Grocery Markets, and CityReach Care Society);

13. The City of Vancouver recognizes the importance of regular food access for residents and a sustainable and resilient food system, as several City of Vancouver strategies and action plans highlight the importance of food. As outlined in the City of Vancouver Healthy City Strategy (2015-2018), food plays a

powerful role in connecting people, in building strong and resilient communities, and in preventing and managing chronic illnesses;

14. The Vancouver Food Strategy (2013) includes supporting and enabling community food assets; empowering residents to be involved in community food programming (e.g., volunteering, job skills training, working); and improving Vancouver residents' regular access to healthy food;
15. With respect to the recent Park Board Local Food Action Plan (2023), objectives include increasing food assets; advancing sustainable local food economies; and engaging and increasing the capacity of Vancouver food networks;
16. The Vancouver Plan (2022) also highlighted that food is a basic human right and a defining element of day-to-day life for residents, and that food insecurity is higher among equity-denied groups, such as racialized and Indigenous community members. In the Plan, the City of Vancouver has committed to ensuring a just and sustainable food system, with a focus on multiple core elements: improving food access, supporting and strengthening Vancouver's food supply chain, leveraging new development and community infrastructure for food systems work, and addressing climate change. The Vancouver Plan also outlines that the food system is also a major climate change driver, contributing up to one third of global GHG emissions;
17. Investing in food systems is also aligned with City Council's current strategic priorities (2023 – 2026);
 - With respect to “**healthy, inclusive, and equitable**,” improving food access directly puts Vancouverites' physical and mental health front and centre and alleviates barriers to residents' well-being and sense of belonging;
 - Directly supporting Indigenous food systems will support **Reconciliation**, advance Indigenous food sovereignty, and nurture a mutually respectful relationship with the local Indigenous Nations (this is also a Call to Action in the City of Vancouver's UNDRIP Strategy);
 - Supporting initiatives that help to prevent food waste addresses the **climate emergency** and advances circular practices in the food sector. This work also **supports businesses** with reducing their food and hauling costs and helps them to become more sustainable;
 - Investing in a food system that is **vibrant and diverse** also allows for innovation, job creation, and ensures that Vancouver remains a dynamic and engaging city for all;
18. Despite recent 2023 contributions through the BC government (\$200 million to increase food security [including \$30 million for Indigenous food sovereignty], and \$214 million for the Feeding Futures Fund to improve food access for children at school), these funds remain insufficient to achieve universal food access in Vancouver and bridge gaps across socioeconomic backgrounds,

underscoring the urgent need for enhanced municipal investment to achieve physical well-being, mental health, emotional resilience, and equity goals;

19. An increase in municipal funding for local food assets and programs would allow the City of Vancouver to align its efforts with the province and improve resource efficiency, service delivery, policy consistency, community well-being, cross-jurisdictional legislative support, and enhanced accountability.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT Council direct City of Vancouver staff to explore and develop a food systems funding strategy that is in line with City Council's strategic priorities; examines an increase to Social Operating Grants; and will address the gap between current municipal food systems funding and the need for financial investments that will create a resilient, equitable, sustainable, innovative, and vibrant food system for all Vancouver residents, with particular attention given to:

- Increasing funding for the Sustainable Food Systems Grant;
- Creating an Indigenous Food Systems Grant;
- Creating a funding or contract mechanism specifically for initiatives that recover and redirect food from waste.

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