

Report To:	Regional Chair and Members of Regional Council
From:	Alex Sarchuk, Commissioner, Social and Community Services
Date:	July 13, 2022
Report No:	SS-17-22
Re:	Improving Acquisition and Distribution in Halton's Food Security Sector

RECOMMENDATION

1. THAT Regional Council receive the recommendations of the Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Food Security Action Table as outlined in Attachment #2 to Report No. SS-17-22 re: "Improving Acquisition and Distribution in Halton's Food Security Sector".
2. THAT staff provide a progress update to Regional Council in 2023 on achievements related to the Food Security Action Table as per Report No. SS-17-22.
3. THAT a copy of Report No. SS-17-22 be circulated to the CSWB System Leadership group for information.

REPORT

Executive Summary

- In December 2021, Regional Council passed a resolution requesting Staff work with the Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Food Security Action Table to develop a plan to improve food acquisition and distribution in Halton.
- The Food Security Action Table determined that consulting services would aid in the analysis of needs and opportunities in the sector. Value Chain Management International Inc.(VCMi) was contracted to assess gaps and identify opportunities to improve food acquisition and distribution practices in Halton.
- The Food Security Action Table oversaw the consultant's work. Sixteen food security organizations across Halton were invited to participate in surveys and

informant interviews to identify current gaps and opportunities in the sector. Refer to Attachment #3 for a list of participating organizations.

- The Food Security Action Table took receipt of the VCMI report in March 2022 and staff updated Council in the April 2022 Memorandum re: Food Security in Halton Region.
- The Consultant's report found that "the primary need facing the sector is not additional infrastructure; it is a means to improve the utilization of the existing infrastructure and resources" (VCMI, 2022), and provided the following recommendations:
 - continue to share information on their roles in the sector and provide regular strategic updates;
 - create standard benchmarks to improve the performance of Halton's food security sector;
 - adopt a set of simple metrics;
 - engage in centralized purchasing of food and miscellaneous goods where appropriate and savings can be realized;
 - establish or adopt a central client registration system to be used by all food security organizations across Halton;
 - identify opportunities to improve acquisition, storage and distribution in Halton through shared resources, including employees, infrastructure and/or equipment; and
 - work with funders in Halton to align food security funding with the priorities of the Food Security Action Table and encourage collaborative applications.
- In light of the consultant's report, the Food Security Action Table has requested \$150,000 in one-time funding to execute action plan deliverables as outlined in Attachment #2 to Report No. SS-17-22. It is anticipated that the Action Table will complete these actions by 2024.

Background

In September 2020, the CSWB System Leadership Group approved a Food Security Action Table in recognition of the need to strengthen coordination and collaboration among food programs to better meet the needs of food insecure households. Since the formation of the Table, collaboration among Action Table members and sector partners has increased. Collaborative initiatives such as the Ontario Works Food Security Program have contributed to better interagency understanding in the food security sector in Halton. The Action Table continues to work closely to build a better understanding of gaps and opportunities to improve food security for Halton residents.

This report updates Regional Council on work undertaken by the Food Security Action Table to improve food acquisition and distribution in Halton's food security sector in response to the December Regional Council Resolution. On December 15, 2021, Halton Regional Council passed the following Resolution:

THAT Halton Regional Council directs Staff to expedite Staff's work with the CSWB Food Security Action Table to develop a plan to improve food acquisition and distribution in Halton Region to be able [to] provide nutritionally balanced and culturally appropriate food baskets to Halton's residents experiencing food insecurity and report back to Council in April.

At the request of, and in collaboration with the Food Security Action Table, Regional staff initiated an informal Request for Proposals to access food sector expertise to assess gaps and identify opportunities to improve food acquisition and distribution practices in Halton. Value Chain Management International Inc. (VCMI) was the successful proponent, bringing 15 years of industry experience in the food sector.

Discussion

Findings and Recommendations

VCMI completed a literature review, primary research, and data analysis of food volume including supply shortages/surpluses, operational needs, and food distribution. This research included consulting with 16 food security agencies across Halton to assess acquisition, distribution and storage practices. The approach included surveys, interviews and a facilitated group session. The surveys captured data on food volume and management systems. The work also assessed the capacity of the agencies to meet community demand. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture suggestions for improving sector performance and factors affecting proposed solutions. The facilitated group session was used to validate and report back on the research findings. VCMI consolidated findings and recommendations in a final report received by the Action Table at the end of March 2022.

The VCMI report identified key recommendations for the Food Security Action Table, specifically that the sector:

- continue to share information on their roles in the sector and provide regular strategic updates;
- create standard benchmarks to improve the performance of Halton's food security sector;
- adopt a set of simple performance metrics;
- engage in centralized purchasing of food and miscellaneous goods where appropriate and savings can be realized;
- establish or adopt a central client registration system to be used by all food security organizations across Halton;

- identify opportunities to improve acquisition, storage and distribution in Halton through shared resources, including employees, infrastructure and/or equipment; and
- work with funders in Halton to align food security funding with the priorities of the Food Security Action Table and encourage collaborative applications.

Please see Attachment #1 to Report No. SS-17-22 for the full VCMI Report.

In summary, VCMI found that “the primary need facing the sector is not additional infrastructure; it is a means to improve the utilization of the existing infrastructure and resources that currently exist by addressing the barriers that lead to strategic and operational misalignments between the organizations that together form the sector” (VCMI, 2022). VCMI went further to suggest that “addressing these misalignments would enable more informed investment decisions than are presently possible” (VCMI, 2022). VCMI acknowledges that “the findings do not negate the fact that additional refrigeration/freezer and ambient storage facilities may be required to improve the performance of the sector by enabling improvements in the acquisition, storage and distribution of food to address Halton region’s food security needs” (VCMI, 2022). The report highlights that current sector performance issues need to be addressed in order to optimize future investments in infrastructure.

Action Table members accepted VCMI report recommendations. Utilizing their sector knowledge the Action Table has developed specific actions for implementation as outlined in Attachment #2.

Proposed Investment in the Food Security Action Table

In order to effectively respond to the VCMI findings and recommendations, the Action Table has requested one-time funding of \$150,000 to secure expertise in system coordination and business analytics for 12 months to execute the action plan deliverables (refer to Attachment #2). The expert resources will be hired by and report to a representative lead agency from the Food Security Action Table, and will be accountable to the Food Security Action Table.

The Food Security Action Table will continue to work collaboratively, through Halton’s Community Safety and Well-Being Initiative, to implement the actions identified through the consultation and discussion process. The Action Table will report back and leverage guidance from the System Leadership Group.

Increased demand on the food security sector in Halton means that it is essential to ensure the sector is sustainable and coordinated in a way that maximizes the use of resources and better serves those in need. The investments and actions identified by the Food Security Action Table are a critical milestone and will enable optimization of current and future resources in the sector to better support food insecure clients in Halton.

FINANCIAL/PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

There is sufficient funding in the Employment and Social Services division's 2022 approved food security program budget to provide one-time funding of up to \$150,000 to the Food Security Action Table to support the proposed investment opportunity to improve acquisition and distribution in the food security sector.

Respectfully submitted,



Alex Sarchuk
Commissioner, Social and Community
Services

Approved by



Jane MacCaskill
Chief Administrative Officer

If you have any questions on the content of this report,
please contact:

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Attachments: Attachment #1 - Consulting Services to Improve System Coordination and Capacity for Acquisition, Storage and Distribution in the Halton Food Security Sector
Attachment #2 - Improving Acquisition and Distribution in Halton's Food Security Sector: Identified Outcomes and Actions
Attachment #3 - List of organizations consulted to assess food security acquisition, distribution and storage practices in Halton