

'THERE'S A DREAM TO END FOOD INSECURITY'

PLAN IN THE WORKS TO HELP HALTON FAMILIES WHO USE FOOD BANKS

MELANIE HENNESSEY
mhennessey@metroland.com

Steps are being taken to transform Halton's food security infrastructure, with the vision including a centralized food acquisition and distribution centre that will support food banks across the region.

Regional council recently passed a motion from Oakville Mayor Rob Burton to help further the cause. The resolution directs staff to expedite its work with the Community Safety and Well-Being Food Security Action Table to develop a plan that will improve food acquisition and distribu-

tion in Halton, with a report on the plan due back at council in April.

The aim is to "provide nutritionally balanced and culturally appropriate food baskets to Halton's residents experiencing food insecurity," notes the motion.

"The families who depend on food banks cannot get a balanced, nutritional and culturally appropriate food basket from their local food bank," said Burton during the council meeting, noting he estimates at least 3,000 families across Halton are struggling with food insecurity. "They have to visit several (food banks) to find what they need. Often, they can't find all that they need."

But not all food banks in Halton agree with this sentiment.

In a statement to Metroland Media, Oakville's Fare Share Food Bank president



Graham Paine/Metroland

A proposed Halton food acquisition and distribution centre would support all food banks across the region.

Jennifer Russell said her team's mission to provide nutritious food to their clients has continued to be accomplished, even throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

"Due to the generosity of private citizens, schools, churches and local businesses, we have been fortunate enough to be able to meet the needs of over 500 families on a monthly basis," wrote Russell, noting this includes menu items such as meat (including Halal meat), fish, cheese, eggs

and fresh produce purchased with cash donations, along with non-perishables donated through food drives.

"We have also supported other Halton food banks by sharing our surplus with them. We are very proud of our volunteers who have managed heavier workloads and kept the food bank operating through these difficult times, as well as our donors who have come through for us when we need them."

During the council meeting, Burton detailed six problems that are said to be preventing at least some Halton food banks from meeting the need for appropriate food security support: supply gaps, storage gaps, nutrition gaps, growing cultural gaps, funding gaps, and problems with agency co-ordination.

Burton provided his council colleagues with details of a proposal from the Burlington Food Bank, Kerr Street Mission and others that aims to address these issues with a centralized Halton food acquisition and distribution centre, which would support all food banks and other food relief organizations across the four local municipalities.

The facility would co-ordinate the collection, sorting, storage, refrigeration and distribution of non-perishable products, supplemented by purchased fresh and frozen fruit, vegetables and proteins.

"There's a dream to end

food insecurity and provide food baskets from food banks who know their individual clients and can cater to each family's specific needs from a nutrition and a cultural perspective," said Burton.

The motion notes that the proposal from the food banks "clearly demonstrates the need and the means to solve the problem," and that the municipality of Halton is "uniquely qualified" to provide the necessary support and collaboration to translate their vision into a reality.

Support for the concept was voiced by others around the council table, like Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward, who seconded the motion.

"Food security is not something one municipality can solve on its own, or one food bank or agency," she said. "This is a true reflection of the spirit of partnership that we have throughout our region on this very important issue."



Help us, help you.

Your support ensures our staff and physicians are prepared to provide you with the best care possible.

**Georgetown
Hospital
Foundation**

Living. Giving. Caring.



DONATE TODAY

GeorgetownHospitalFoundation.ca

905 - 873 - 4599

