

Is York's food bank network becoming an institution?

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

For the first time in its 16-year history, the York Region Food Network is renting an office and hiring employees, leading to concerns the community group has moved from a stop-gap volunteer effort to an institutionalized fixture.

"I think this is going to be permanent," communications director Rosanne Rodgers said.

"It was a difficult decision to make. Up to that point, we had been volunteer. But we realized we couldn't keep that going."

When the network and food banks began, volunteers stressed they were launching a short-term solution to hunger until society and governments tackled the problem.

But Ms Rodgers acknowledged food banks have assumed a permanent role.

"It's too bad in some ways because we're an institution, there's no doubt about it. I think we're going to be part of the landscape for a long time."

The network, which rents an office in the basement of the region's long-term care and health centre on Eagle Street for less than \$200 a month, acts as an umbrella organization for York's five major food banks in Markham, Richmond Hill, Aurora, Newmarket and Georgina. It also supports community kitchen programs and school nutrition projects.

In addition, the network has hired a part-time executive director and a part-time community initiatives coordinator to operate programs such as community gardens, where food bank users grow their own vegetables.

Ms Rodgers said the formal structure is needed not only to handle administrative work, but to lobby governments on behalf of the poor.

"What does that say about the direction we as a society are headed? It's not really all that positive in my mind," she said.

"It means politicians, governments, political groups are not taking responsibility. Grassroots groups have to take responsibility. Not that that is a bad thing, communities should be more involved."

"You can't say, 'We pay our taxes, the government will take care of that.' But should feeding the poor fall entirely on the shoulders of (food bank) volunteers?"

Executive director Lisa DiSera argued the network not only works with food banks, but is focusing its

efforts more on the issue of food security for residents. Food security means ensuring people have adequate food to meet their nutritional and cultural needs.

"If we just supported the food banks, we could have remained a volunteer organization. But we want to look at food security and go beyond the issue of hunger and poverty," she said.

"We really want to move beyond food banks as one part of the puzzle for food security. We're concerned with the big picture."

Last year, 35,186 food packages — three days' supply of food per person — were doled out to hungry residents by York's five major food banks. Half of those needing handouts are children.

Food bank use rose dramatically in the last half of 2001, up 22 per cent over the same time the previous year. Use increased sharply following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, which affected the already struggling economy.

Food bank use peaked in December, when 4,402 packages were handed out.

Numbers fell slowly during the first half of this year, but food banks are still handing out an average of 3,000 food packages every month.

As part of the annual Thanksgiving Food Drive, which runs from today to Oct. 25, residents are being asked to contribute much-needed

non-perishable food items.

This year, brown grocery bags won't be included in newspapers.

Instead, shoppers are encouraged to donate at their grocery store by dropping off food in bins. Food can also be dropped off at local fire halls.

Items most needed include baby formula, powdered milk, canned meat and fish, canned fruit and vegetables, pasta sauce, rice, juice boxes, jam, peanut butter and basic toiletry items.

Visibly damaged and opened items or products that have passed their expiry date will not be accepted.

Residents can make cash donations by sending a cheque to their local food bank or to the network.

Donors who send cheques to the network can designate the money go to the food bank of their choice. They will receive tax receipts for their contributions.

The address is York Region Food Network, 194 Eagle St., Newmarket, Ont. L3Y 1J6. The website is www.yrfn.ca and phone number is 1-866-454-YRFN (9736).

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The Regional Municipality of York
NOTICE OF SPECIAL MEETING
FIVE-YEAR REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN

The Official Plan for the Regional Municipality of York was approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on October 17, 1994. Since that time there have been approximately 27 amendments to the Regional Plan approved.

The *Planning Act* requires that the Regional Official Plan be reviewed at least once every five years. The first five-year review was undertaken in 1998 and resulted in a number of Amendments over the past several years, including changes to the population projections for the Region and area municipalities and the planning horizon of the Regional Official Plan.

In order to proceed with the second five-year review, Council has directed that a Special meeting be held:

November 13, 2002

7:00 p.m.

Committee Room A

York Region Administrative Centre
17250 Yonge Street, Newmarket, Ontario

A copy of the background staff reports (May 1, 2002 and September 4, 2002) are available for inspection at the York Region Planning and Development Services Department from October 3, 2002 between the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on regular business days. As well, copies of the background staff reports, in PDF format, are available for review and downloading from the Region of York website: www.region.york.on.ca

The *Planning Act* requires that Regional Council have regard to any written submissions in respect to the need for a revision to the Plan and shall afford any person who attends the meeting an opportunity to be heard in respect of the need for a revision of the Plan.

If you have questions in regard to this notice, you may contact Barbara Jeffrey in the Regional Planning and Development Services Department at the telephone numbers below. Written submissions regarding revisions to the Regional Official Plan as part of the five-year review should be made to:

Commissioner of Planning and Development Services

York Region Administrative Centre

Box 147, 17250 Yonge Street

Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 6Z1

Telephone: (905) 895-1231

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Date of this notice: October 3, 2002

YorkRegion