



**REPORT TO PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2009**

SUBJECT **Report on the Regional Food Policy Council Proposal**

PURPOSE

To consider opportunities for establishing a food policy council in response to the proposal from the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable (CR-FAIR).

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of October 22, 2008, the Planning and Protective Services committee received a report regarding a proposal from the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable (CR-FAIR) regarding the establishment of a Food Policy Council within the Capital Regional District. The CR-FAIR is a community-based consortium of food system representatives with a shared interest in food policy and food security issues. In 2008, they created the *Capital Region Food and Health Action Plan* which contained a recommendation to establish a CRD Food Policy Council constituted as an advisory group to the CRD.

The establishment of a food policy council is being promoted by members of CR-FAIR and others with an interest in food security issues as an opportunity to coordinate efforts and interact more effectively with the elected officials within the region.

The October 22 report was directed back to staff to address the opportunities for establishing a food policy council as well as the potential linkages between the food policy council and the climate change initiatives. This report responds to that request.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Establish a regional food policy council as a new service and direct staff to investigate the appropriate CRD authority and prepare the required bylaws and terms of reference to facilitate its development.
2. Not establish a CRD food policy council, and provide support to a non-CRD food policy council or roundtable.
3. Not establish a CRD food policy council at this time, but consider options for addressing food policy issues through existing programs and services.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Food Policy Councils: Food Policy Councils provide the mechanism to bring together government, community, business, health and emergency management professionals and academic sectors to address food-related issues. They tend to have a broader representation and broader focus than Agricultural Advisory Committees because they deal with all aspects of food, including social and environmental issues, not just farming.

Potential Scope of Work: The scope of work undertaken by a food policy council varies according to the needs of the community or region. Activities within the Capital Region could include:

- Developing policy guidelines and/or model bylaws for issues such as urban agriculture, food security and access, institutional food purchasing, pocket markets, etc.
- Developing communication tools (e.g., discussion papers, workshops, web/wiki sites) for citizens and decisions makers on the links between food security and social well-being; food and climate change; food and community economic development.
- Working to increase collaboration and planning between jurisdictions on emergency preparedness and the food supply.
- Providing technical advice on the design and use of bylaws for edge planning, development permit areas, minimum agricultural lot sizes, tax policy for ecologically sensitive farmland, and other bylaws designed to protect and enhance agriculture in the CRD.
- Undertaking “agricultural inventories” or investigations of public lands suitable for community gardens, boulevard planting, pocket markets, or other agricultural uses.
- Engaging the community in “community green mapping” of farms, farm markets, community gardens, wineries, events, etc. that could be distributed to residents and tourists to promote local business.
- Working with housing and service providers to develop programs to alleviate hunger and improve access for low income people to healthy affordable food.
- Partnering with local economic development groups to promote culinary and agricultural tourism opportunities.
- Undertaking research projects.

Organizational Alternatives: There are a number of options available to the CRD to address food policy issues. These include:

1. Establish a Food Policy Council through a new CRD service
2. Provide financial and/other resource support to a non-CRD Food Policy Council
3. Utilize existing CRD programs and staff resources to address food policy issues

Establish A Food Policy Council Through A New CRD Service:

The proposal suggested by CR-FAIR for the CRD food policy council is modelled loosely on the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC). The TFPC operates as a sub-committee of the Toronto Board of Health with a small staff (planning staff reporting to Public Health department) and a modest budget. The Council is made up of elected officials representing local government, school districts, and first nations as well as volunteer representatives from social, economic, and farming communities. The Council is primarily a political body. The City also has a community-based, volunteer run food organisation that is similar to CR-FAIR that provides input to the Council.

The advantage of establishing a food policy council for the CRD is that it would provide a mechanism to work across departments and jurisdictions on food security issues; many of which have a direct impact on local government. To function effectively, a food policy council would require staff support. However, it could provide a cost effective approach if funded by the region as FPC staff could provide service, support, and information to the participating member municipalities rather than have multiple jurisdictions dedicate several municipal staff to undertake similar research and projects. As many municipalities have policies pertaining to food security in their Official Community Plans, a regional food policy council could assist them in moving forward on many related initiatives.

The Food Policy Council could be established in the same manner as the CRD Climate Change service. A service establishment bylaw would need to be developed and approval sought from all participating municipalities. The service establishment bylaw would need to identify the

scope of the service, the time frame for the service, opting out provisions, and the funding requisition formula. In this model, the CRD would direct the scope and representation of the FPC. Following approval of the bylaw, the CRD could prepare terms of reference for the Council. The funding implications of committing to a new service would be similar to those associated with the Climate Change service, requiring approximately \$200,000 to cover additional staff requirements and project dollars.

Provide Financial and/or Other Resource Support To A Non-CRD Food Policy Council:

Under this alternative, the FPC would be independent of the CRD, but possibly supported by the CRD through in-kind support, start-up funding, and/or an ongoing funding commitment. The type of support could range from project-specific cost-sharing, a longer-term contractual relationship, and/or a dedicated staff representative from the relevant CRD department or service (e.g. regional planning or the climate change service). One of the roles of the staff representative would be to bring region-level policy recommendations to the CRD through the relevant standing committee.

Some examples of this approach include the “Just Food” FPC in Ottawa which receives in-kind support from the City and a Foundation, and the Kamloops FPC receives in-kind support from the City of Kamloops and Interior Health Authority.

Some jurisdictions have established food policy coordinator positions (Vancouver) or Agricultural Liaison positions (Kelowna) to provide the link between industry and community groups and the local government decision-makers. In some jurisdictions, food security issues are addressed through the sustainability office or by the sustainability/climate change coordinator position.

Utilize Existing CRD Programs and Staff Resources To Address Food Policy Issues:

In the absence of support to a dedicated FPC, the CRD could utilize existing committees and plans to address some aspects of regional food security. The CRD could continue to work with the CR-FAIR, the relevant sub-committee of the Round Table on the Environment (RTE) and other municipal and sub-regional Agricultural Advisory committees. Policy ideas and recommendations could come from the RTE to the Board through existing reporting mechanisms. In addition, the CRD could reflect appropriate policy directions through regional district plans and strategies (e.g. the RGS or a future RGS food policy sub-strategy) and/or existing services (e.g. the Climate Change service).

GROWTH MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The RGS currently includes a number of policy directions supportive of agriculture. These include:

- protection of ALR land
- support for urban growth containment to reduce development pressure on farmlands
- an action item to undertake a review of long term resource needs in the Capital Region, including food
- support for a regional economic development strategy that includes actions to support agriculture and to promote the economic potential of expanded local and export markets for farm products

The scheduled five-year review of the RGS provides an opportunity to address many regional-level food policy and food security issues, including the link between food policy and social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability. The RGS could also address the need for enhancing food security as a climate change adaptation strategy.

The possibility also exists to develop a food-related sub-strategy of the RGS, as was done with the Regional Housing Affordability Strategy and the Travel Choices Strategy. A sub-strategy could be developed in collaboration with CR-FAIR, the RTE, farming industry representatives, and municipal planners, to address regional food security, land protection, ag-tourism, food access (e.g., pocket markets, community gardens, community kitchens). Work could include research, inventories, development of model bylaws, best practices and indicators. Relevant policies could then be incorporated into the RGS and local Official Community Plans. Under this arrangement, the CR-FAIR or RTE sub-committee on Food and Agriculture could function as a key advisory committee for the development of the sub-strategy and any subsequent indicators.

Funding would be required to cover the costs to produce a sub-strategy. These include costs associated with research, consultants, public consultation and report production. Funding requirements would vary depending on scope of the sub-strategy and would need to be addressed in a future budget proposal.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of a FPC would depend on the organizational arrangement chosen.

If a new CRD service was established to oversee the Council, it would require funding for administrative support and possibly a FPC coordinator position. Order-of magnitude costs could range from approximately \$60,000 to \$200,000. The lower end of the range would provide part time administrative support and meeting expenses. The higher end of the range would support a level of effort comparable to the climate change service (1.5 FTE).

If the CRD were to support a non-CRD FPC, it could provide in-kind or financial support estimated in the range of \$10,000 to \$60,000. Costs associated with a full or part-time coordinator would likely range from \$30,000 to \$65,000.

Some of the food security issues could be addressed through existing channels, particularly the RGS and the Climate Change service, with a modest increase to existing budget requisitions in the future to fund specific projects or research. However, without additional, dedicated project and/or staffing resources, the ability to assume additional responsibilities and undertake new projects is limited.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

The CR-FAIR has proposed the idea of a FPC as a means to address food security issues and establish a more formal connection to the region's decision makers.

Many of the recently developed municipal Official Community Plans (OCPs) contain policy direction on improving access to locally grown food and improving food security. This issue has taken on increasing importance due to concerns around climate change, the health implications of imported and processed foods, and the increasing cost of fuel to transport foods long distances.

The dedication of staff and associated financial resources (for administrative support, meeting expenses, etc.) could provide value to the member municipalities and electoral areas if there was a shared commitment to address food security issues throughout the region. Having a dedicated coordinator and the policy council members available to work with the local communities could provide an opportunity to streamline/or coordinate policy development, relevant zoning regulations, inventory development, mapping projects, and grant applications.

However, there are significant ongoing financial implications associated with the establishment of a new service, funding a non-CRD Council and/or providing a staff liaison position that may not be possible to consider at this time due to financial constraints. As such, the opportunities to address food security issues using existing CRD resources should be pursued before a dedicated food policy council is established.

Opportunities to address limited aspects of the food security issues exist through the RGS, the newly created climate change service, and the work of the RTE. The RGS review process also presents an opportunity to strengthen and clarify existing policy directions pertaining to land use and land use protection, servicing, transportation and sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning and Transportation Committee recommends to the CRD Board:

Not establish a CRD food policy council at this time, but consider options for addressing food policy issues through existing programs and services.

Tracy Corbett, MCIP
Senior Manager, Regional Planning

Robert Lapham, MCIP
General Manager, Planning and Protective
Services

Kelly Daniels
CAO
Concurrence

Comments