

Backgrounder: *Halifax Food Charter*

What is a Food Charter?

A food charter is a shared statement of values and principles used to guide the governance of a municipality's food system.¹ Governance of the food system—from production through processing and distribution to consumption and waste management of food—is complex, involving the work and collaboration of many people, organizations, governments and communities in creating strategies, policies, programs and laws to ensure that the system is sustainable and flourishing. Food charters sometimes contain broad outcomes or priorities, but they are generally intended as a starting point and as a guide for developing the actions necessary for good food system governance.

Why does Halifax need a Food Charter?

Municipal governments and local communities have taken on a growing role in governing modern food systems, especially in areas such as land use planning, urban agriculture, economic development, emergency food distribution, access to food retail, community health, and waste management.² But because food systems are so complicated, coordinating all of the planning, implementation and monitoring necessary for governing that system requires a strong, clear vision of what “good governance” means—one that is shared and supported by all participants.

Who is responsible for creating a Food Charter?

Food charters have been adopted in several municipalities across Canada, but there is no one model for how those charters were developed. In some cases, a leading organization or a specialized body—sometimes called a “food council”—is tasked with designing the food charter in consultation with citizens and community groups. In other municipalities, citizens themselves have taken the lead. In others, municipal governments or certain agencies, such as the public health department, have been mainly responsible for developing their food charter. Most importantly, the process of developing a food charter involves community and stakeholder engagement, resulting in a statement that is broadly endorsed by those who participate in governing the food system and widely regarded as an accurate reflection of their shared vision.

How was the *Draft Halifax Food Charter* developed?

Beginning in 2013, the former Halifax Regional Municipality Food Strategy Group (now the Halifax Food Policy Alliance), identified a need for a food charter to guide the development of a more comprehensive food strategy for the Halifax Region. After completing a scan of food charters in other Canadian cities, members of the strategy group compiled an initial draft of the Halifax Food Charter and hosted a public consultation to review the draft in February 2014. At this event, participants were shown six food charters from across Canada and asked for their feedback in comparison to the working draft. Input from this consultation was then incorporated into a revised version of the Halifax Food Charter to produce the current draft. The Halifax Food Policy Alliance is currently collecting additional public feedback on this draft.

¹ “Food Charter Backgrounder” Waterloo Region Food System Roundtable
http://www.wrfoodsystem.ca/files/www/Food_Charter_Backgrounder_formatted.pdf.

² “Vancouver Food Charter: Contexts and Background”, City of Vancouver (2007)
http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/Van_Food_Charter_Bgrnd.pdf