



Our Halifax, Our Food: From Charter to Strategy

Between October and November of 2017, the Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA) led a series of public and targeted engagement opportunities with Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) residents and municipal staff to raise awareness of the purpose and benefits for a Food Charter for HRM. These opportunities allowed the HFPA to hear community voices and gather input on actions to include in a Food Strategy.

Our engagement process included 5 parts:

1. Online survey promoted via Facebook, the HFPA website and in-person events
2. Two public engagement events on October 30th held at Halifax Central Library
 - a. A panel, followed by group discussions
 - b. A keynote address by Dr. Wayne Roberts, followed by discussions
3. Targeted community conversations
 - a. “*Food in NS: Our Strengths and Challenges*”, presented by the Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Community Health Board.
 - b. Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) and the Loaded Ladle hosted a conversation with local community members.
 - c. Dartmouth North Community Food Centre hosted a community conversation and meal “*Chili and Charter Chatter*”.
4. Question & Answer “Lunch and Learn” with Municipal Councillors on October 13th, 2017
5. HRM Staff Engagement on November 24th, 2017

What We Heard

The findings from the survey, public, and municipal staff engagement are summarized below:

1. Online Survey

Approximately 55 people participated in an online survey, which included six questions pertaining to general support, content, and interest in a Food Charter for HRM.

- The majority of respondents (94%) said they would **support the vision in the Draft Food Charter**.
- Comments on **suggested improvements** to the Charter were grouped into the following themes:
 - Use and accessibility of Charter language; interpretation of food access and cultural appropriateness of food within the Charter; inclusion of Indigenous food sovereignty; feasibility of achieving the vision.
- Of the **five principles** listed in the Charter, most participants agreed that all principles were important (Community Economic Development – 96%, Social Justice – 96%, Ecological Health – 94%, Individual and Community Health – 96%, Celebration – 78%).

- When asked about **missing principles** in the Charter, most respondents suggested edits to existing principles however the following 3 components surfaced as “missing”.
 - Indigenous Food Sovereignty; Safety; Education
- When asked for **general comments**, participants’ responses were detailed and highly varied. Key comments included:
 - *“The importance of research and best practice should be explicitly stated.”*
 - *“Need to acknowledge Nova Scotian culture in relation to food not just as an aspect of celebration.”*
 - *“Need to simplify the language to ensure understanding among a broad audience.”*
 - *“Need for additional involvement of diverse groups in the process of developing and the Food Charter (i.e. Indigenous and Black Nova Scotians).”*
 - *“Although the Food Charter has a regional focus, it could also benefit from input provided by Provincial organizations.”*
- When asked to describe **interest and/or role** in relation to food, the two most common responses included community members (36%) and community organizations/not for profit (25%).

2. In-Person Engagement Sessions

On October 30th 2018, over 150 people gathered for two events held at the Halifax Central Library. During the afternoon, a guest panel spoke about the benefits of a Food Charter and the potential positive impact for Halifax. This was followed in the evening by a keynote presentation from Dr. Wayne Roberts. Group discussions followed each of these events, guided by the question:

What key actions will be needed to achieve this principle in the Halifax Region?



Group discussions surfaced several high level actions, each of which were further discussed in relation to the 5 principles in the Charter.

Key themes included:

- **Increasing demand for local products/supporting local producers**
 - Ex. Community Economic Development – healthy and local food procurement, tax incentives for businesses purchasing local food
- **Expanding, maintaining and supporting food infrastructure**
 - Ex. Social Justice – Municipality work with corporate sector to address food deserts
- **Empowering/building skills (particularly for youth & children)**
 - Ex. Community Economic Development – empower young people to have careers in farming through curriculum, public education, financial support
- **Building on community assets/existing food initiatives**
 - Ex. Social Justice - scale up projects that work (i.e. Home Blooms)
- **Community-based solutions**
 - Ex. Individual and Community Health - needs assessment research to determine values and interests of different communities related to food: how to make accessible to all groups; cultures, disabilities, minorities, etc.

- **Raised awareness of food issues**
 - Ex. Ecological Health - improve visibility and transparency of environmental “costs” of big food, promote sustainable diets
- **Addressing poverty**
 - Ex. Social Justice – address inadequate income through living wage or basic income policies
- **Land use for food production**
 - Ex. Community Economic Development - more mixed land use development to increase access to food opportunities
- **Food as a way to build community**
 - Ex. Celebration - using food and food celebrations to strengthen communities and connect people

3. Municipal Staff Engagement

On November 24th, 2018, small group discussions were held around the theme “HRM for Food” and “Food for HRM”. Participants discussed how HRM’s current work has potential to improve community food security, as well as how addressing food issues can act as a policy lever to help address other social/economic issues in HRM’s priorities. Key actions and opportunities arising from the discussion are described below:

Examples of Key Actions:

- Promote systems where people can grow food and facilitate opportunities for surplus
- Require development of community gardens near new, big development
- Set up times to meet with community partners engaged in food work
- Use food system diagram to map current and planned connections to HRM’s work to facilitate planning
- Provide “roadshow” presentations on Food Charters or Strategies to different municipal departments
- Reinvestigate sustainable procurement policy for HRM

Examples of Key Opportunities:

- Remove zoning barriers to promote urban agriculture
- Change purchasing practices to support healthy, local options in municipal facilities
- Schedule year round opportunities to connect around food and support outside initiatives
- Explore food as an opportunity for economic, sustainable growth

Next Steps

- Survey feedback was used to inform high-level **changes to the [Draft HRM Food Charter](#)**.
- HFGPA plans to create a **plain language video** further explaining the role of Food Charters and the potential to improve community food security in HRM.
- Engagement findings will be used to inform a **staff report** for HRM’s Community Planning and Economic Development Committee that explores the possibility of creating an HRM Food Strategy. A Food Strategy will provide a framework to coordinate food initiatives and build on the actions identified through engagement.

Development of a Food Strategy for HRM would involve further engagement with diverse communities and an opportunity to further revise the Charter.

Appendix - HRM Food Charter (March 2018)

CURRENT SITUATION

The strength of our local food system is directly linked to quality of life, the vibrancy of our communities, and the sustainability of our urban and rural landscapes. Across Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), the unceded traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq, there is growing awareness of, and concern about, our food system and our collective ability to ensure that all people, at all times, have an adequate supply of nutritious and sustainably produced food. These concerns are reflected in high rates of chronic disease and food insecurity, lack of food sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples, environmental degradation and challenges preventing many local farmers and fishers from earning a living. Despite this, we are also a region with immense natural resources, a rich cultural fabric and a long history of fishing, farming and community self-reliance. Creating a food system that will serve everyone – where all residents can access foods that enhance health, where individual dignity and community self-reliance are assured, and where our agricultural and fishing communities thrive – will require leadership and coordination across sectors, organizations and governments. Our health and the health of future generations depends on it.

The HRM Food Charter presents a vision for a food system that will strengthen the health of our people, our communities, and our land and water ecosystems. It is a declaration, and a call to action, for a coordinated effort to revitalize and strengthen a locally-based, sustainable food system for HRM.

VISION

A just and sustainable food system in HRM is rooted in healthy and resilient communities where no one is hungry and everyone can access nutritious and culturally preferred food. It is an economically viable, diverse, and ecologically sustainable system for growing, catching, harvesting, processing, distributing, accessing and preparing food.

PRINCIPLES

To create a just and sustainable food system, we commit to:

Community Economic Development

Actively supporting locally based food systems which are pillars of sustainable and resilient economies be they urban, suburban, rural or coastal. Promoting entrepreneurship in food and ensuring farmers, fishers, harvesters, distributors and processors are able to generate adequate incomes and create employment opportunities.

Social Justice

Upholding food as a basic human right and ensuring that food is obtained in a manner that maintains dignity, reflects cultural diversity and challenges inequities experienced by systemically disadvantaged communities, including those who work in food production regardless of the nature of their residency in Canada. A just food system ensures that residents have opportunities to produce their own food and the resources to participate fully in the food system.

Ecological Health

Adopting a whole-systems approach to food that protects and enhances our natural resources, reduces and re-integrates food waste and builds resilient ecosystems. This approach supports the natural integrity of farmlands, fisheries and watersheds and the species diversity of animals, fish, plants and seed stocks.

Individual and Community Health

We recognize that nutritious and safe food is a fundamental component of health and well-being at every age. We value supportive environments that promote adequate access, education, and community agency in all aspects of the food system from production to consumption.

Celebration

Encouraging the sharing and celebratory nature of food, which is a fundamental human experience. Food brings people together, in a celebration of community, culture and diversity.

We therefore declare our commitment and intent to work in partnership with individuals, communities, organizations, businesses, institutions and governments towards achieving a just and sustainable food system across HRM. We recognize that this commitment has real implications for our policies, programs and practices and we commit to realizing the vision and principles set out in this document by supporting the development of a coordinated food strategy.

Signature: _____

