

September 11, 2020

***Re: Report C 158/2020– Response to Council Directive Requesting Administration to Report Back to Council with Gap-Filling Opportunities in Community Gardens on Municipal Property Policy- City-Wide***

To Mayor Dilkens and Members of Council,

The Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council (WEFPC) is writing in support of the City of Windsor Administration's recommendations in Report C 158/2020. The recommendations and actions outlined within the *Gap-Filling Opportunities in Community Gardens on Municipal Property Policy* report directly aligns with our vision of a healthy local food system. Community gardens are about more than just growing food. By having a consistent and reliable garden space, families and individuals are able to grow fresh, healthy produce for very little money. Furthermore, these gardens allow for the utilization of green space in underused areas, and build a sense of community as neighbours can work together to enhance the spaces the live and play.

Community garden programs can have significant mental health benefits for participating gardeners. There is a substantial body of evidence that shows that the essential components of a community garden program (growing plants, spending time with others in a safe and supportive environment, being active outdoors and bringing home healthy produce harvested from the garden) can contribute to positive mental health outcomes. In addition, hands-on exposure to community gardens can teach children about the sources of fresh produce, demonstrate community stewardship and introduce the importance of environmental sustainability.

Adopting Administration's recommendation for a City Led community garden structure is important for the health and wellbeing of Windsor residents. Indeed, the past six months have put more strain on community organizations and funding availability to allow for grass roots programming to continue. COVID-19 has challenged all of us in so many ways. Despite this, community gardens, when given stable resources, have continued to thrive. This model of community food production is seen as integral to the COVID-19 response in countries throughout the world, particularly as food prices increase and global food supplies are increasingly uncertain. Having the consistent and sustainable oversight of the City of Windsor allows our local community gardens to expand and thrive during these uncertain times. However, we would strongly encourage Windsor City Council to waive the \$40 garden fee that is currently proposed in the City Led option. This fee will not allow for equitable access to these plots, potentially excluding those community members who could benefit from these gardens the most.

In closing, the WEFPC congratulates the City of Windsor and its Administration for taking a proactive and comprehensive approach to providing sustainable support for community gardens on municipal property. Thank you for receiving this letter in support of the recommendations brought forward by your administration and for considering the perspective, we have outlined above.

Regards,

The Windsor-Essex County Food Policy Council (Enclosed Attachment A)

### **Attachment A: Windsor-Essex County Food Policy Council**

The Windsor-Essex County Food Policy Council (WEFPC) is a network of local food system representatives. Formed in January 2018, the WEFPC strives to educate, promote, support and advocate for the improvement of the local food system and its users.

Members of the WEFPC include representatives from:

- Windsor Essex County Health Unit
- United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County
- VON Windsor-Essex
- City of Windsor Council member
- County of Essex Council member
- Agriculture
- Food processing
- General community members

The WEFPC envisions a food system that is healthy, sustainable and accessible for all. In the fall of 2018, the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council and the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, with support from the WindsorEssex Community Foundation, initiated this Comprehensive Food System Assessment for Windsor and Essex County. This project represents the culmination of many years of work and focus by a wide variety of individuals passionate about food in Windsor and Essex County. The purpose of the assessment was to build a foundation for sustained, ongoing, food system work to come over the next many years in this region. As a comprehensive assessment, it considered all aspects of the food system contained in the current food system framework – production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and waste management. The time is right for food system work with recent Federal and Provincial food policy initiatives, as well as poverty reduction initiatives supporting food security. The full report can be found here: <https://www.wechu.org/reports/windsor-and-essex-county-community-food-system-assessment-2018>