

WECHU Board of Health – Resolution Summary Document

City and County CAO Meeting – June 12, 2025

Endorsing the Windsor-Essex Food Strategy (June 2024)

PURPOSE

Ensuring all residents in our community have dignified access to sufficient, affordable, healthy, safe, and culturally appropriate food is a cost-effective form of disease prevention. To achieve this, our community must consider all aspects of the food system including production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and management of food waste. The development of a local food strategy is another step in the creation of a just and sustainable food system for our region. The Windsor-Essex Food Strategy builds on decades' worth of effort in food-related work in Windsor and Essex County. This work has provided a strong foundation on which to build, and yielded important lessons about what makes for progress and what can stand in the way. Taking a coordinated approach to all that the region can do in relation to food, we can transform the local food system and provide significant opportunities to elevate the health, economy, and the food environment for all.

BACKGROUND

History of Food System Work in Windsor-Essex

As heavily detailed in the [Windsor-Essex Community Food Assessment \(CFA\)](#), the beginnings of the current iteration of food system work in Windsor and Essex County began in 2009. The following highlights the key milestones throughout the years:

- 2009 - Hungry for Change report released, which explored sustainable food systems in Windsor-Essex
- 2011 - Food Matters Windsor Essex County is formed, funded by Trillium
- 2014 - Good Food Charter launched, and endorsed by the WECHU board of health. United Way Food Security Planning Table is convened.
- 2016 - Food Security Planning Table recommends Food Policy Council. WECHU commits to support a local Food Policy Council.
- 2017 - Recruitment begins for Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council
- 2018 - First meeting of the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council. Community Food System Assessment begins.
- 2019 - Community Food System Assessment released.

The goal of 2019 was to use the CFA findings to set priorities and goals for the next five years and beyond. Although some of that work had begun, momentum slowed as the pandemic emerged in 2020. As a result, the need for intersectoral work around food insecurity and food became more apparent, and in 2023, the WEFPC began the process of building a local food strategy.

What can the Food Strategy do for Windsor-Essex?

The Windsor-Essex Food Strategy is a tool to guide the direction of food system work across Windsor and Essex County. It:

- Provides a roadmap for food system action
- Integrates food system issues within a single framework
- Aligns food system approaches within broad sustainability goals
- Identifies gaps and prioritizes action
- Allows food system work to operate at site-specific, neighbourhood, municipal and regional scales

Food Strategy Goals

Food systems are complex. They include all activities involved in the production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and waste management of food. Often, issues of equity, sustainability, and security are overlooked as the current food system approach frames food as a commodity, and not a human right. The following four goals help to set the direction of the local food strategy, with each recommendation tying back to at least one goal.

- **Goal 1:** Increase access to local, nourishing, traditional, and culturally diverse foods for all residents, by supporting food friendly neighbourhoods.
- **Goal 2:** Empower all residents to take action in community, and personal, food decisions.
- **Goal 3:** Make food a centerpiece of Windsor-Essex's Economy.
- **Goal 4:** Establish a healthy, sustainable, and just food system with partners and at all levels of government.

Through the CFA's community engagement process, a total of 79 food system recommendations were determined. Lead by WECHU's CDIP Public Health Nutritionist, members of the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council took the information from the CFA and were able to group common themes and determine 17 recommendations with 30 action items for the Windsor-Essex Food Strategy. In addition, food system stakeholders and community partners reviewed these recommendations to ensure relevance.

However, this work is not to be done exclusively by the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council. While the Windsor-Essex Food Policy Council will use the Food Strategy to drive their work, changes in the food system require thoughtful and intentional work by all community members, organizations, institutions, business, and levels of government. The idea is that each sector will identify the levers they can pull to ignite change within their capacity.

PROPOSED MOTION

WHEREAS ensuring all residents in our community have dignified access to sufficient, affordable, healthy, safe, and culturally appropriate food is a cost-effective form of disease prevention.

WHEREAS a healthy and just food system promotes health and dignity for the entire population.

WHEREAS changes in the food system require thoughtful and intentional work by all community members, organizations, institutions, businesses, and levels of government.

WHEREAS multiple community partners have committed to food system work across Windsor and Essex County, but require coordinated action to continue forward.

WHEREAS the Board of the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit has passed previous resolutions to endorse the Good Food Charter for Windsor-Essex (2014) and support the creation of a local food policy council (2017) committing to the advancement of food system work in our community.

WHEREAS 681 community members provided input into the 2019 Community Food Assessment, determining the recommendations for future local food system work.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Windsor-Essex County Board of Health endorse the goals, and recommendations in the Windsor-Essex Food Strategy

AND FURTHER that the WECHU engage community agencies like municipalities and other stakeholders within and outside of the existing Food Policy Council to lead Food Strategy implementation,

AND FURTHER that the WECHU initiate the following Food Strategy Priority Actions to structure the community's efforts toward improving the overall food system:

1. The creation of a comprehensive food system assessment tool to determine the impacts of policies and community endeavors on the local food system.
2. Assess the availability of community spaces where people can learn food skills in neighbourhoods with limited resources.
3. Develop and/or enhance policies and procedures to support local food purchasing in publicly funded spaces.
4. Pilot evidenced informed programs that improve physical access to food in neighbourhoods with limited retail options.

Key References:

Windsor and Essex County Community Food System Assessment (2018). <https://wefpc.ca/resource-library>

Food Matters Windsor Essex County (October 2014). [The Good Food Charter of Windsor Essex County](#).

Food Security Planning Table (2016). Food Security in Windsor-Essex County: Design Table Backgrounder. Unpublished manuscript.

National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. (2024). *Determining Health: Food systems issue brief*. Antigonish, NS: NCCDH, St. Francis Xavier University.