



Hamilton Board of Health

Report for Consideration

To: Chair and Members
Hamilton Board of Health

Date: April 27, 2026

Report No: BOH26011

Subject/Title: Food Advisory Committee Transition

Ward(s) Affected: (City Wide)

Recommendations

- a) That the Food Advisory Committee **BE DISBANDED**.

Key Facts

- Report BOH26011 provides an overview of the steps taken by Hamilton Public Health in response to City Council direction from its meeting on March 5, 2025 concerning the creation of Community Liaison Groups to replace previously supported Advisory Committees of Council;
- The inception of a Semi-Autonomous Board of Health for the city of Hamilton has resulted in a governance framework whereby Hamilton Public Health no longer supports Advisory Committees nor Community Liaison Groups for the purpose of advising City Council;

- Hamilton Public Health staff engaged in community consultation and a review of current community engagement models utilized by the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Public Health to inform this report;
- Hamilton Public Health staff previously served as liaison to the Food Advisory Committee of the Board of Health;
- The last official meeting of the Food Advisory Committee was September 20, 2022. The committee has not been operating since that time. The Committee has no active members;
- Hamilton Public Health utilizes several community engagement models to inform its programs and services through consideration and incorporation of networks, working groups, coalitions, and panels, as examples;
- Efforts to renew the City of Hamilton Food Strategy are presently underway, including targeted community engagement and the establishment of a food systems community table that will bring together “key” community stakeholders and partners to strengthen this collective effort; and,
- Given the current context and past history of the Advisory Committee model, the creation and installation of a Community Liaison Group is not warranted at this time.

Financial Considerations

Not Applicable.

Background

At its meeting on March 5, 2025, City Council approved General Issues Committee Minutes GIC 25-003, which provided the following direction to staff:

8.3 CM23025(b) Volunteer Advisory Committee Review (City Wide)

- (a) That, based on municipal best practices, a new civic engagement model be applied that uses resident-led, staff facilitated community liaison groups of

volunteers with a clear ability to make their voice heard by Council, with each Division reporting back with tailored solutions, within one year, and that:

- (xii) Public Health staff report back to the Public Health Committee on the creation of a community liaison group to replace the Food Advisory Committee to identify and inform, where appropriate, innovative community food security policies and programs that align with the vision and goals of the Hamilton Food Strategy, Hamilton Food Charter, and other City of Hamilton strategies; and that the 2024 approved budget currently assigned to the Food Advisory Committee be transferred to this Division to support this working group.

Analysis

Historical Background

On August 11, 2016, Hamilton City Council endorsed the [Hamilton Food Strategy: Healthy, Sustainable, and Just Food for All](https://hamilton.ca/foodstrategy) (<https://hamilton.ca/foodstrategy>). The Hamilton Food Strategy is a 10-year strategy with a vision of “a city with a sustainable food system where all people at all times have economic and physical access to enough safe, nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences.” The Strategy is comprised of four goals, 14 recommendations and 46 actions across all food system elements (production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, and waste).

As part of the Hamilton Food Strategy 2016-2026, a Food Advisory Committee was established in 2016 with the mandate to “support and advise on the implementation of Hamilton’s Food Strategy, and the development of inclusive and comprehensive food-related policies and programs at the individual, household, and community/population level.” The Food Advisory Committee, a volunteer Advisory Committee to the Board of Health and City Council, was comprised of 13 to 18 voting volunteer members from across all components of the food system, as well as non-voting City Councillors (a maximum of two). The Advisory Committee was further supported by a Staff Liaison

from Hamilton Public Health who functioned as a system expert and supported member orientation, preparation of reports and correspondence, preparation and review of agendas and minutes, as well as provision of background information, advice, and context for implementation of priorities.

In September 2023, Report CM23025 was brought to the Audit, Finance and Administration Committee and a motion passed, to conduct a review of the existing 14 volunteer Advisory Committees. The motion included a pause on select existing volunteer Advisory Committees, the Food Advisory Committee being among that group.

In February 2025, Report CM23025(b) was brought to the General Issues Committee of City Council by staff in the Government Relations and Community Engagement Division that detailed the review process, findings, and recommended:

“That, based on municipal best practices, a new civic engagement model be applied that uses resident-led, staff facilitated community liaison groups of volunteers with a clear ability to make their voice heard by Council, with each Division reporting back with tailored solutions, within one year.”

Report CM23035(b) by the Government Relations and Community Engagement Division highlighted that the proposed alternative model employing Community Liaison Groups helped “to eliminate procedural challenges that may deter volunteer involvement, and [provided] a better opportunity for civic engagement”. The review also noted that other municipalities are adopting a range of civic engagement methods including task forces, working groups, and experts’ panels.

Community Engagement in Public Health

Community engagement is one of the foundational principles that guides the work of public health. This is outlined explicitly in the Ontario Public Health Standards, which list public engagement as a requirement within the Effective Public Health Practice Foundational Standard. Given the importance of community engagement, Hamilton Public Health recently released two resources to support community engagement work – Foundations of Community Engagement which outlines the framework and principles guiding this work and the Equity-Driven Engagement Toolkit which provides tools and

strategies to conduct community engagement and complements resources available through the City of Hamilton.

As stated in Foundations of Community Engagement, “in practice, community engagement can take many forms, depending on the goals, context, and populations involved. Broad-based engagement reaches out to the general public to raise awareness, gather input, or share information. Tailored engagement focuses on outreach to individuals and groups most directly affected by the decisions being made. This can include individuals experiencing or at risk of health inequities, current clients of Hamilton Public Health, and those facing barriers to accessing programs and services. Partnered or indirect engagement works through trusted community organizations and/or service providers who already have strong relationships with specific populations. This approach helps build trust, reduce barriers, and reach those who might otherwise be left out.”

Examples of Existing Community Engagement in Public Health

Within Hamilton Public Health, there are numerous examples of groups that Public Health convenes that include community representatives with the purpose of community engagement. These groups are each unique in terms of their purpose, membership, meeting frequency, and outcomes, but ultimately, each helps to inform and shape the work of Public Health, ensuring that programs, services and initiatives meet the needs of the community members impacted. In some cases, these groups work collaboratively to achieve shared goals and outcomes. Below are some examples:

- **Extreme Heat Working Group**

This group, led by Hamilton Public Health, includes members of the Community Heat Response Committee, additional community groups, individuals representing equity deserving groups, environmental groups, and other entities with interest in this work. This working group meets twice annually to share updates, coordinate actions, and advise on the implementation of the Community Heat Response Strategy and extreme heat actions within the City’s Climate Change Impact Adaptation Plan.

- **Hamilton Breastfeeding Coalition**

This well-established group includes a variety of members and healthcare organizations who work collaboratively to plan, implement, and evaluate infant feeding initiatives for families in Hamilton. While many members are community or healthcare organizations, individuals with lived experience may also join the group.

Community Engagement and Hamilton's Food Strategy

As outlined above, community engagement is central to the work of Hamilton Public Health. As such, Hamilton Public Health has several community engagement and collaborative models that it undertakes to inform its work and related strategies. Given this, the renewal efforts associated with the Hamilton Food Strategy does not warrant a unique approach, such as the creation of a Community Liaison Group.

As Hamilton Public Health engages in a revision and renewal of the Hamilton Food Strategy, it will develop a fulsome community engagement plan that includes members of the public as well as community organizations invested in the food system. This plan will be developed with support from staff from the City's Public Engagement team while aligning with Public Health's Foundations of Community Engagement and Equity-Driven Engagement Toolkit.

Given strong community support, Public Health intends to establish a food systems community table that will bring together community organizations from across the food system in Hamilton, on an on-going basis, to strengthen collaborative partnerships, share updates, and identify opportunities to enhance Hamilton's food system. This group would also serve to inform the renewal and implementation of the Hamilton Food Strategy.

Consultations and Results

The information within this report was supported by external community consultation in the form of a survey, focus group, and written feedback. Hamilton Public Health staff solicited input from 26 participants representing community organizations who were participating in a workshop related to the renewal of the Hamilton Food Strategy via a

survey. In addition, a focus group with participants from four community organizations and one written response, informed this report.

Feedback from the community confirmed the need for a community table related to Hamilton's food system. Currently, there exists a very limited number of community groups that bring together players from across the food system. One of these is the Greater Hamilton Food Collective that is focused on food insecurity, food equity, and advocacy. In the past, the Hamilton Food Literacy Network also existed for those organizations delivering food literacy programs in the community. However, this group has not convened consistently for the past two years due to lack of participants. There are also groups that are focused specifically on agriculture such as the Hamilton-Wentworth Federation of Agriculture and the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, the latter which serves a broader geography than just Hamilton.

Community members highlighted the need to bring together a diverse group of representatives from across the food system to focus on broader issues, share ideas, expand networks, and identify opportunities for collaboration. There was strong support for advising Hamilton Public Health on policies and programs that impact the food system as well as identifying gaps and emerging issues within the food system. Specific to the Hamilton Food Strategy, there was support for advising on the development and implementation of the Food Strategy.

Internally, the Food Strategy Interdepartmental Steering Team, Community Initiatives staff, and Legislative Coordinators were consulted.

Alternatives

An alternative recommendation is that Hamilton Public Health **BE DIRECTED** to convene a Food System Community Liaison Group.

This approach is not recommended as it does not align with Hamilton Public Health's existing community engagement and collaborative models that inform its work and allow for creation of a diversity of groups for engagement purposes based on individual

project need. Furthermore, with the inception of a semi-autonomous Board of Health for the City of Hamilton, this has resulted in a governance framework whereby Hamilton Public Health no longer supports Advisory Committees nor Community Liaison Groups for the distinct purpose of advising City Council.

Previous Reports Submitted

- [CM23025](#) – Voluntary Advisory Committee Review
- [CM23025\(b\)](#) – Voluntary Advisory Committee Review

Consultation

- Community Engagement, City Manager's Office
- Community Inclusion and Equity, City Manager's Office
- Legislative Services, Corporate Services
- Food Strategy Interdepartmental Steering Team members, City of Hamilton
- Affiliated Services for Children and Youth
- Growcer
- Greater Hamilton Food Share
- Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Not Applicable.

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