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Social Action:

**Towards a Municipal Poverty Reduction
Strategy and Food Security Plan**

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Introduction

The City of Ottawa must remain firmly committed to reducing poverty to assist residents in accessing opportunities, provide the support they require to thrive, and eliminate barriers for those facing obstacles to full inclusion and participation. To accomplish this, it is incumbent upon our City to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy. The creation of a Strategy will aim to address the root causes of poverty in Ottawa by identifying key priorities and creating a measurement framework to provide a transparent method to assess the outcomes of the City's poverty reduction initiatives. A Strategy must result in measurable success in reducing poverty and social exclusion.

Creating a Strategy is necessary since the City has been without a plan for the past decade. The development of a plan would affirm the City of Ottawa's key role in breaking down the stigmas concerning poverty and taking action to reduce it. The creation of a Strategy will ensure that the City once again asserts a leadership role in poverty reduction and investment in social infrastructure. A Strategy would also provide valuable coordination and collaboration with community groups and the non-profit sector, encouraging social service providers to act together upon priorities effectively to identify concrete actions to reduce poverty locally. The goal must be to create a multi-year, holistic strategy focused upon outcomes and a vision where all residents can access resources and opportunities to achieve a better quality of life.

After a tremendous amount of advocacy from the community, I am pleased that a Poverty Reduction Strategy and a Food Security Strategy will constitute a significant component of Ottawa's Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan. The Plan is required under the Province's *Safer Ontario Act, 2018*, and must outline strategies and actions to improve safety and well-being for everyone in Ottawa.ⁱ

Issues that impact the safety and well-being of communities are often complex and require collective involvement, effort, and action from multiple partners. The City identified local issues and priorities through public engagement, research, and gap analysis. Through establishing a local CSWB Plan, appropriate multi-sectoral roles and partnerships shall be both clarified and defined. The CSWB Plan aims to help residents feel safe, have an improved sense of belonging, provide opportunities to participate, and help individuals and families meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income, and social and cultural expression.

One of the main priorities of the CSWB Plan approved by Council in October 2020 after public consultation included addressing poverty reduction and food security, which is identified as a critical barrier to well-being and community safety. The creation of the Strategy must incorporate a vision as articulated by the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa which notes that all Ottawa residents should live in dignity and health, in a community that fosters participation and inclusion for all.ⁱⁱ

The City has noted that poverty reduction and financial security have many interlinked components and different meanings. Generally, the concepts are summarized as the peace of mind felt when individuals are not worried about whether their income can cover their expenses. Poverty reduction and financial security also mean enough money is saved to cover emergencies and future financial goals. This priority considers issues, including stability of income, adequacy of income, access to funding (control over one's own funding or the ability to access the funding required), the ability to provide the necessities of life, and the availability of ongoing financial supplements. The City has proposed goals, strategies, and outcomes for both a municipal poverty reduction strategy, along with a food security strategy.

Goals	Strategies	Outcomes
1. Develop priorities and actions to address local poverty	1.1 Develop a municipal poverty reduction strategy for Ottawa	Improved employment opportunities Improved employment supports and services to ensure access to employment and career development Fewer residents of Ottawa living below the Low Income Cut Off Improved school attendance and academic achievement for youth
	1.2 Develop a municipal food security strategy for Ottawa	Fewer residents relying on food banks Ability to access local, culturally appropriate food

A food security strategy would be an essential approach to addressing poverty since the primary cause of food insecurity is low income. When income is constrained or limited, households make difficult decisions that can result in a less-than-adequate food supply. To address the issue of residents relying on long-term emergency food banks, the City needs a comprehensive approach that interweaves the City's rural and urban economic development initiatives, emergency planning, and public health mandate. Such an approach would underline

the necessity to develop frameworks to support local agriculture, whether large scale (commercial farms) or hyper-local (community gardens), and provide frameworks and support for local farmers' markets and community-based affordable food initiatives. Such an approach would have a critical impact on improving the most vulnerable lives in our communities.

Strengthening and improving neighbourhoods require substantive action. Successful action can only be achieved if the City makes a specific commitment to social equity. Social equity is the fair, just, and equitable management of all institutions serving the public directly and the commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity in the formation of public policy.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our City must develop both a Poverty Reduction Strategy and a Food Security Policy based upon the tenets of **social equity** to make our Ward and our City more livable and equitable for all through **social action**.

Defining Poverty

Poverty and social isolation are noted to be complex problems. While there are many causes of poverty, its roots often lie in individuals experiencing a difficult start in life or not accessing available opportunities because of systemic barriers.^{iv}

Poverty is a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living. Poverty means that the income level from employment is so low that basic human needs cannot be met.

Most modern definitions of poverty in advanced industrial countries are relative in the sense that they relate to the living standards of that society.^v The federal government recently defined poverty as the "condition of a person who is deprived of the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic level of living standards and to facilitate integration and participation in society".^{vi}

Poverty is often narrowly defined as the lack of enough income to provide for the necessities of life, consistent with the norms of the society in which one lives.^{vii} However, broader definitions of poverty recognize more than just income deprivation. The definition can also extend to or result from excluding essential goods and services, meaningful employment and decent earnings, adequate and affordable housing, safe neighbourhoods with public amenities, health and well-being, social networks, and basic human rights.^{viii} Personal and structural factors that contribute to poverty range from demographic, socioeconomic trends, household, and individual characteristics, along with community conditions. In addition, complex government policies can create barriers to accessing support and services for people in low-income communities.

Individual-level factors related to being "at-risk" of experiencing poverty include^{ix}:

Unemployment or underemployment: having a low paying or insecure job limits income and isolates people from social networks;

Low levels of education and skills: limiting access to better-paying jobs and fuller participation in society;

Family composition: large families and lone parents face higher costs, lower incomes, and more difficulty in securing better-paying jobs;

Gender: women are more likely to be responsible for unpaid care work or employed in lower-paying industries with fewer benefits such as secure pensions.

Disability: this can lead to higher living costs and limit the ability to access paid employment;

Ethnicity: a member of a minority ethnic group is more likely to experience racism and discrimination, resulting in limited employment opportunities and barriers to accessing essential services; and

Rural/remote residence: living in a rural or remote community could mean that access to services and employment opportunities is lower than in urban centres.

Ultimately, poverty can be defined as the condition of a human being deprived of the resources, means, choices, and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency or facilitate integration and participation in society.^x Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has noted that successful development entails technological advance that culminates in a society's booming economic growth and engender the expansion of substantive human freedoms. According to Sen, development requires the removal of significant sources of "unfreedom" which includes poverty. He notes that the lack of substantive freedoms relates directly to economic poverty, which robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, achieve sufficient nutrition, obtain remedies for treatable illnesses, or the opportunity to be adequately clothed sheltered.^{xi}

Measures of Poverty

Measuring poverty allows us to ascertain its extent, determine the groups affected, identify appropriate responses to poverty, and track progress.

Research shows that poverty costs Canada between \$72 billion to \$84 billion a year. People living with disabilities are twice as likely to live below the poverty line, and of those, 59 percent

are women. Indigenous peoples are overrepresented among the homeless populations in most urban centres. Racialized women are more likely to earn less than others in the workforce. Poverty and food insecurity are connected; those experiencing poverty are more likely to experience food insecurity.^{xii}

In Ottawa, statistics estimated the median household income in 2019 at over \$87,000 a year. The most significant proportion of households earn between \$40,000 and \$79,000 per year. Lone-parent households have increased vulnerability to low income than coupled households. In 2015 across Canada, 34.5 percent of lone mothers and 13.7 percent of lone fathers lived on a low income. As the number of children increases, so do the pressures, including financial pressures, lone parents face.^{xiii}

The unemployment rate in Ottawa in June 2021 was 7.8 percent. Precarious employment is also an issue, and according to the Province of Ontario, the following groups are overrepresented in precarious jobs^{xiv}:

- workers with less than high school diploma;
- single parents with children under 25;
- recent immigrants;
- women;
- visible minorities.

While adopting measurements for poverty equips us with indicators to measure progress, it is an ongoing process that is enhanced and refined over time. In Canada, there is no official standard for measuring poverty. However, having a low income is an essential dimension of poverty, and Statistics Canada uses several indicators to measure low income: the low-income cut-offs (LICO), the low-income measure (LIM), and the market basket measure (MBM).

Low-income cut-offs (LICO) are income thresholds below which a family will devote a larger share of its income on the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing than the average family. A family is "low income" if it spends 20 percentage points more on these necessities than the average family. It is a relative measure of low income.^{xv}

The low-income measure (LIM) defines low income as being below a fixed percentage of income. A household is "low-income" if its income is below 50 percent of median household incomes. It is a relative measure of low income.^{xvi}

Market basket measure (MBM) determines whether a family is "low-income" if it does not have enough money to buy specific goods and services in its community. It is an absolute measure of low income.^{xvii}

In Ottawa, 15.2 percent of the population lived in poverty in 2005. On average, individuals and families in Ottawa were living \$7,800 below the Low-Income Cut-off (LICO) in that year. In fact, 31 percent of low-income families lived on incomes at least 50 percent below the LICO in 2005. Unattached individuals face the highest level of poverty in Ottawa, with a staggering 45 percent of single individuals living on low income. Poverty affects the livelihood and the quality of life for many residents of Ottawa, especially children. In 2008, 14 percent of children under 18 and 15 percent of children under six were living in households living below the low-income measure, after-tax.^{xviii}

Although Ottawa is a relatively wealthy city, large segments of the population live in relative poverty due to low income. Statistics show that 12 percent of Ottawa residents depend upon a low-income. In some Ottawa neighbourhoods, more than 30 percent of individuals are living in low-income. Immigrants, Indigenous people, and those living with disabilities are all disproportionately represented in the low-income population. Statistics show that 29 percent of Ottawa's visible minority population lives in low income. Mental health or addiction issues and chronic physical illnesses also increase the risk of living on a low income. In some neighbourhoods, over a quarter of seniors and 50 percent of children live in low-income.^{xix}

While overall median income has risen in Ottawa between 2005 and 2015, analysis of poverty in Ottawa demonstrates that poverty rates have stayed consistent or worsened for the City's most vulnerable groups. There were 115,175 people in Ottawa (12.6 percent of all residents) living below the low-income threshold (low-income measure after-tax) in 2015. Among those still most at risk from poverty include children and youth, lone-parent families, people living alone, new immigrants, racialized groups (visible minority residents), and people with disabilities.

One of the most identifiable groups living in poverty in Ottawa is children. According to a report released by anti-poverty advocacy organization Campaign 2000, three out of every ten children residing in Ottawa-Vanier, the federal riding, including Rideau-Rockcliffe Ward, live in poverty. At 31.3 percent, this was the highest rate of the Ottawa-area federal ridings and the 18th highest rate in the country. The national average is 17 percent. This riding, which contains a high prevalence of child and family poverty, is home to a large proportion of recent immigrants, racialized people, Indigenous people, and lone-parent families, as well as a large proportion of renters in public housing. The riding also has higher levels of youth unemployment and under-education. The report notes that solid correspondence between these socioeconomic characteristics and the prevalence of child poverty provides evidence to suggest that child poverty in Canada continues to be an outcome of social inequality rather than mere bad luck or poor individual choice.^{xx}

In Rideau-Rockcliffe Ward, the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study^{xxi} has outlined high levels of low-income prevalence in several Ward 13 neighborhoods.

Overbrook / McArthur

Indicator	Overbrook – McArthur	Ottawa
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT)</u>	30.6	12.6
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among children (0-14)</u>	54.5	16.3
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among youth (15-24)</u>	40.1	18.8
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among adults (25-64)</u>	25.5	10.7
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among seniors (65+)</u>	14.5	9.4
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among young children (0-5)</u>	54.4	16.3

Manor Park

Indicator	Manor Park	Ottawa
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT)</u>	19.7	12.6
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among children (0-14)</u>	25.3	16.3
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among youth (15-24)</u>	24.2	18.8
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among adults (25-64)</u>	16.2	10.7
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among seniors (65+)</u>	22.6	9.4
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among young children (0-5)</u>	22	16.3

Carson Grove - Carson Meadows

Indicator	Carson Grove – Carson Meadows	Ottawa
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT)</u>	19	12.6
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among children (0-14)</u>	29.9	16.3
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among youth (15-24)</u>	26.6	18.8
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among adults (25-64)</u>	16.8	10.7
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among seniors (65+)</u>	10.6	9.4
<u>Low income prevalence (LIM-AT) among young children (0-5)</u>	32.4	16.3

Contributing Factors to Poverty

A previous study from the Social Planning Council of Ottawa^{xxii} has noted that four factors have contributed to poverty in Ottawa:

- Significant changes in the labour market, with the result that having a job is not a guarantee of rising out of poverty.
- A housing market which cannot meet the needs of low-income households.
- Policies, social programs, and income support programs that have not adequately mitigated market forces and reduced poverty; and
- Factors that mainly affect equity-seeking groups include inadequate accommodations in the labor market for people with disabilities.

These factors have all been made worse with the advent of the novel coronavirus public health crisis in 2020. The closure of non-essential businesses, schools and daycares, and stay-at-home measures in mid-March of last year led to increased unemployment, along with a decrease in job seeking and income loss for some Ottawa residents. Many individuals and businesses applied for emergency response benefits, subsidies, and payment deferrals.^{xxiii}

According to Ottawa Public Health, one in ten (11%) Ottawa residents were not working in April 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 28 percent reported a decrease in income in March 2020.^{xxiv}

One-fifth (19%) of Ottawa residents said they had difficulty paying for either housing, food, or utilities. This scenario was more common among residents with a disability, those with lower household income, and those who had a decrease in income between mid-March and April 2020. Groups that appear to be most impacted by income loss and the ability to pay for basic living costs (housing, food, utilities) include visible minorities and those with a disability.^{xxv}

Physical distancing measures have led to changes in how, when, and where people work. In some cases, they have also contributed to job losses and changes in income. One in ten (11%) Ottawa residents reported not working because of the pandemic. This was like the number of people not working for reasons other than the pandemic (10%). Less than half (45%) of Ottawa residents spent the early period of the pandemic working from home.^{xxvi}

Those working outside of the home without regular face to face interaction with the public were more likely to report a decrease in household income in the period between mid-March 2020 and April 2020 compared with those working outside the home with regular face to face interaction with the public (42% vs. 25%). The majority of those who were retired (81%), not working because of the pandemic (75%) or working from home (66%) said their income stayed the same. Those not working because of the pandemic have experienced a significant change in

income, with 77 percent reporting a decrease in income between mid-March 2020 and April 2020.^{xxvii}

One fifth (19%) of Ottawa residents said they had difficulty paying for either housing, food or utilities between mid-March 2020 and April 2020: 15 percent reported difficulty paying for their food costs, 10% reported difficulty paying for utilities and nine percent reported difficulty paying for housing costs. Eleven percent had difficulty paying for other expenses and one quarter (26%) had difficulty putting money into savings. Residents who reported a decrease in household income since mid-March had more difficulty paying for costs (food 21%; housing 20%; utilities 18%; other expenses 25%) and for putting money away into savings or investments (60%).^{xxviii}

While it is premature to determine how many Ottawa residents will permanently lose employment due to the pandemic, interim analysis has demonstrated that COVID-19 has caused more long-term unemployment nationwide than the 2008 recession. In December 2020, the employment rate fell for the first time since April. By the end of 2020, the number of workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic was at 1.1 million. This includes those who lost their jobs or saw their hours reduced.^{xxix} It is therefore evident that job loss occurrence is directly correlated with enterprises, especially small businesses, adjusting to pandemic-related restrictions.

With COVID-19 cases increasing over the winter period, along with tighter health restrictions such as stay-at-home orders, curfews, and lockdowns, the rate of national economic recovery slowed, thereby impacting the economic activity of both businesses and individuals. Many individuals as a consequence were deterred from spending like they used to prior to the pandemic. Individuals experiencing deep poverty levels were made more vulnerable to homelessness and COVID-19 exposure risk, as evidenced by the expansion of encampments on both private and public property throughout 2020, along with the increased use of respite centres. For businesses that leveraged telework capabilities, many employees transitioned to working from home. Due to increasing financial and economic uncertainty, many larger businesses have put their expansion or growth plans on hold. According to a Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey, only 26 percent of small businesses in Canada reported average sales volumes, leaving the remainder at risk of insolvency. That means that one in seven Canadian small businesses are at risk of closing due to the pandemic.^{xxx} The survey further reported that 63 per cent of small businesses are fully open, and only 39 percent are fully staffed.^{xxxi}

These challenges to economic activity and vitality are negatively impacting the local economy. While Ottawa is generally in a more solid position to withstand the economic impacts of the pandemic than other municipalities due to the stability of the federal government being the City's biggest employer and economic driver, the effect of the pandemic also exacerbates the challenges of vulnerable people continually experience extreme income inequality and housing precariousness.

An adequate supply of affordable housing has primarily been a major continuing challenge in the City, even before the onset of the pandemic. In the City's lower-income neighborhoods, a high proportion of households were spending over 30 percent of their income on shelter before the pandemic. When low-income households spend high proportions of their income on shelter, it can be challenging to afford other necessities, such as food.^{xxxii} Research indicates that households spending 50 percent or more on shelter are at greater risk of becoming homeless. In Ottawa, the average number of social and affordable housing units per 1,000 people in 2013 totaled 24.4. The percent of households living below the low-income measure after-tax totaled 11.6 percent in 2011. The share of households spending 30 percent or more on housing totaled 22.7 percent in 2011. While quality housing is the basis for improving the social determinants of health and quality of life of Ottawa residents, it is clear that the City of Ottawa has not achieved targets as outlined in its provincial mandated Ten Year Housing and Homeless Plan.

The City's own review of its housing plan showed that shelter use increased by 6.5 percent instead of decreasing. Shelters in Ottawa are full and often operate at overcapacity. Over the first four years of the Plan, there was no significant reduction in shelter utilization by singles; overall utilization increased, mainly in family shelters, due to an influx of newcomer families. And despite the implementation of a Housing First program in 2015 and placement of over 700 individuals, since that date, the number of chronic homeless singles declined by only 23 individuals between 2015-18.

Most of the affordable-housing supply in Ottawa is rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units within not-for-profit developments that are specifically built and operated to support affordability. Affordable housing can also be provided by the private sector or be under cooperative ownership. The RGI waiting list includes those whose current housing is unaffordable or inadequate, and those who are homeless. That waitlist for affordable housing has grown to 12,000 households and there are currently 600 families cramped in motel rooms throughout the City. And there are many more Ottawa households living in unaffordable or inadequate housing (too small or in need of major repair) that have not registered on the RGI waiting list. In 2016 in Ottawa, 23.2% of single-parent families, 29.3% of Inuit, and 31.8% of recent immigrants lived in unaffordable or inadequate housing.^{xxxiii}

Renter households in core need increased substantially from 27,200 to 35,600 in 2016, a 30% increase over those five years. The incidence of core need is much higher for renters. Almost one in every three (29%) renters is in core need, up from one in four (25% in 2011). By far the most pervasive issue is housing affordability, with almost 32,000 core need renter households facing an affordability challenge. Almost half of these (16,300) face a severe shelter cost burden and pay more than 50 percent of income for rent. Ottawa's low vacancy rate also contributes to affordability challenges.^{xxxiv}

Due to these challenges, City Council unanimously declared a housing and homeless emergency in January 2020 to emphasize the need to preserve and increase the affordable housing supply in the City, increase access to housing affordability, prevent the occurrence of homelessness

and eliminate chronic homelessness; and ensure people are supported to achieve housing stability and long-term housing retention.^{xxxv}

Council, in response in February 2021, advanced a long-range financial plan that promises funding to support the objectives of the City's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.^{xxxvi}

The financial plan commits \$198.4 million over the next ten years to fully fund the City's share of between 5,700 to 8,500 new affordable housing options and ensure Housing Services has the funding it needs to deliver its programs and services. Housing Services will focus on maintaining service levels and supporting select strategic growth, working on approved strategies to address funding gaps, including advocating for enhanced support from the provincial and federal governments.^{xxxvii}

Council also approved a two-year work plan for the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan that outlines 42 actions the City will take to create and preserve affordable housing, increase housing affordability, expand homelessness programs, integrate services and better meet the needs of the Indigenous community and equity groups. This plan puts the City on track to deliver 694 new affordable housing units before the end of 2022.^{xxxviii}

While a financial and work plan is necessary, continued improvements above and beyond these initiatives are required, especially concerning the funding of permanent housing solutions over transitional housing and the need to allocate a more maximal amount to immediately address and resolve chronic homelessness in the City.

Programmatic Response to Poverty

While City Council will instruct staff to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy to improve employment opportunities and supports, along with enhancing access to employment and career development, and working with stakeholders to improve youth achievement with a target of reducing the number of Ottawa residents living below the Low Income Cut Off, the reality is that any poverty reduction efforts will be dependent on the effective deployment of existing and additional resources by the City through a myriad of existing and new low-income support programs, rapid mental health response, and increased affordable housing capacity. This will require increased investment from senior levels of government. Many organizations acknowledge that the underlying root causes of poverty must be addressed through senior governments re-evaluating the adequacy of income supports and protections for low-income residents and governments designing programs and policies in methods that ensure that vulnerable, low-income households have sufficient funds to meet daily needs.

In the aggregate, many of the challenges posed by poverty require the programmatic response of senior orders of government due to their jurisdiction and their fiscal capacity to meaningfully address the issue. Both the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario have begun undertaking a response by creating poverty reduction strategies.

In 2018, the Government of Canada released the report: Opportunity for All: Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy. The strategy is based upon extensive consultations with Canadians across the country and introduces concrete poverty reduction targets relative to 2015 levels. The targets include a 20 percent reduction in poverty by 2020 and a 50 percent reduction by 2030. The strategy also introduces a new "Poverty Line" mechanism to measure poverty and progress towards achieving national poverty reduction targets. This mechanism is meant to create a new, national measurement standard. The national strategy is an amalgam of federal investments through the Government of Canada's existing programs, which include: the Canada Child Benefit: a tax-free monthly payment that helps low- to middle-income families with the cost of raising children; Canada Workers Benefit: a refundable tax credit that helps supplement the earnings of low-income workers; the Guaranteed Income Supplement top-up benefit: designed to improve the financial security of close to 900,000 vulnerable seniors; and Canada's first National Housing Strategy.^{xxxix}

In 2019, the Ontario Government began the legislatively mandated process of updating its Poverty Reduction Strategy. Every five years, the province consults on and develops a new Poverty Reduction Strategy to identify opportunities for action and collaboration with partners and to measure and report on progress more effectively, as prescribed by the *Poverty Reduction Act, 2009*.^{xl} The goal of the provincial consultation, which was launched in December 2019 and closed in April 2020, is to help drive actions to reduce poverty by setting a specific and realistic target, as well as prioritizing actions and initiatives across sectors and at all government levels to help lift Ontarians out of poverty.^{xli} The primary focus of the consultation process was to examine the encouragement of job creation and connecting people to employment, providing people with the right support and services, and lowering the cost of living to make life more affordable. The province notes that its consultation is designed to complement its investments, which include: the Low-income Individuals and Families Tax Credit, which will result in Ontario Personal Income Tax (PIT) being reduced or eliminated for about 1.1 million people; the Ontario Child Benefit; and a dental care benefit provided to low-income seniors.

While these programmatic approaches are designed to reduce poverty, research institutes that monitor poverty reductions efforts have noted that senior orders of government must implement more policy measures to improve results. In Ontario, one in seven people in Ontario live in poverty, and the province is the only provincial jurisdiction that has not yet experienced a decrease in child poverty. Numerous social policy advocates have recommended that higher orders of government implement several initiatives to achieve substantial poverty reduction, including basic income, committing to ending child and family poverty, addressing inequities faced by marginalized groups, encouraging job creation, and connecting people to employment, investing in universal childcare and support for early learning, and committing to real income security.

As a municipal elected official, I support these recommendations and believe the City needs to advocate for such supports and encourage their expansion.

Basic Income

According to recommendations from the Ontario Basic Income Network^{xliii}, senior orders of government should consider the provision of basic income to ensure that everyone has enough income to meet their needs and live with dignity, regardless of work or family status. A basic income program can reduce poverty, enhance economic equality, and help build a more just society and sustainable economy through the efficient and regular provision of benefits (e.g., on a bi-weekly or monthly basis) that are legislated. Basic income should provide adequacy in benefit levels indexed to cost-of-living increases and work in conjunction with other income security programs and health and social services. Such programs must provide a secure income floor for everyone, so no one receiving a basic income will be worse off than they currently are with existing income security programs.^{xliii}

Basic income can be delivered as an income-tested program (directed to those whose income falls below a predetermined level of adequacy). In this approach:

The determination of eligibility and benefit level must be simple, transparent, and non-stigmatizing. This determination must strictly avoid traditional "means-testing" which involves the necessity of disposal of fixed assets or savings to become eligible or submit to unnecessarily intrusive or degrading application procedures.

The basic income benefit must be provided when needed and adjusted quickly when income from other sources rises or falls.

The basic income payment is not reduced dollar-for-dollar when a recipient engages in paid employment, but at a rate that allows the recipient to benefit from paid work when possible and desirable.

Basic income is not a substitute for social and health programs that serve Canadians. Such programs should provide a dependable income floor that complements – but does not replace – public services such as universal health care, affordable housing, child care, and in-kind support for persons who live with disabilities.^{xliv}

Basic income is also not a substitute for measures to ensure fairness in the labour market. These measures include an adequate minimum wage, strong employment standards, pay and employment equity, and the right to organize unions and to bargain collectively with employers. Basic income provides a secure economic floor that enables Canadians to undertake paid employment in more fair, flexible, and fulfilling ways.^{xlv}

Recommendations from Campaign 2000^{xlvi} also outlined a vision to eliminate child and family poverty, which I endorse. Actions recommended to the Government of Ontario include:

Commit to Ending Child and Family Poverty

The province should commit to reducing child poverty in Ontario by 50 percent by 2025, ensuring that the child poverty rate for children under six is also reduced by 50 percent by 2025, measured by the Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT).^{xlvii}

Address Inequities Faced by Marginalized Groups

The province should restore and appropriately fund the Office of the Child Advocate and appropriately fund services for diverse women and children fleeing violence, including social and affordable housing, women's shelters, counseling and transitional services and sexual support centres, as well as prevention programs. Work must also be undertaken to ensure continuity of care for all children and youth living with developmental disabilities. The province should also work to close the gender pay gap, invest in the province's Anti-Racism Directorate, and support the development and implementation of employment equity strategies, along with supporting the collection and reportage of disaggregated data for all equity-seeking groups.^{xlviii}

Encourage Job Creation and Connect People to Employment

The province should improve working conditions for all workers, especially the most vulnerable, by increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour immediately with no exemptions for sector or age; re-introducing seven paid personal emergency leave (PEL) days, stable scheduling, and ensuring equal pay for equal work. The province must also improve access to the workforce for those on the edges by developing and implementing employment equity strategies funded and connected to legislative change; and implementing universal childcare.^{xlix}

Invest in Universal Childcare & Support Early Learning

The province should develop a universal, publicly delivered, affordable, accessible, flexible, inclusive, and high-quality childcare system and develop and implement an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce strategy. It must also ensure inclusive and culturally appropriate childcare for Indigenous children.^l

Commit to Real Income Security

The province must commit to income adequacy to ensure all people live free from poverty, with good health, dignity, and respect. This would encompass implementing immediate and significant increases to OW and ODSP rates, at least to the CFLIM threshold. The province should also commit to immediately increasing the Ontario Child Benefit by \$200, and work with the federal government to ensure all children have access to Canada Child Benefit and Ontario Child.^{li}

Senior Poverty and Inequality

The number of Canadians over 65 is set to double by 2036, according to Statistics Canada. Canadians are living longer than ever before: the life expectancy for both men and women is now 80.2 years (77.8 years for men, 82.6 for women). The number of seniors is also growing faster than any other segment of the population: by 2041 it is estimated that 25 percent of Canadians will be seniors, with those over 85 the fastest-growing segment. As Canadians age, more will head into senior years financially ill-equipped to support themselves adequately. Without the safety net of hefty private savings or a stable pension income, an increasing number of Canadians will struggle to meet their basic living needs when they can no longer work. As the number of low-income seniors increases, so does the number of Canadians who are vulnerable to poverty and unable to meet their basic living needs.^{lii}

According to Statistics Canada, 12.5% of Canadian seniors now live in poverty and, between 2014 and 2015, 75,000 more seniors became low-income.^{liii} Seniors are also becoming low-income at a much faster rate than the rest of the population. While the low-income rate has declined among Canadians under 65, it has spiked for seniors, reversing a 20-year trend that saw senior poverty rates declined from the 1970s to an all-time low of 3.9 percent in 1995.^{liiv} Single seniors and women are particularly vulnerable simply because they need to cover their basic living costs without any income from a spouse: 28 percent of single women seniors live in poverty in Canada versus 24 percent for single males.^{liiv} It will be crucial to ensure that the federal government facilitates access to income replacement vehicles through workplace pension plan members based upon a percentage of pre-retirement earnings. Defined benefit models are designed to achieve that objective, and such a model should be extended across all types of workplace pension plans. Workplace pension savings plans must also be mandatory. Employers must offer them, and employees must join and make automatic contributions at realistic levels. Ideally, such pensions should be pooled in a large fund and invested by professionals, thereby ensuring that investment risk is shared and costs are reduced.^{livi}

Poverty reduction is impacted by senior-level government intervention. Provincial and federal governments must continue to invest in a myriad of programs and services to seriously address affordability.

Local & Holistic Approach to Poverty Reduction

Levels of persistent poverty indicate the need for the City of Ottawa to develop a long-term strategy to address immediate needs, coordinate efforts among governments and social service stakeholders, and drive systemic change for those living in poverty in order to create pathways to prosperity.

There are strong moral grounds for reducing poverty.^{liivii} In a country as prosperous as Canada, the number of people living in poverty should be fewer every year. Yet, there are sound socio-economic reasons to reduce poverty as well. There are high costs to government and society when people live in poverty. These costs lie primarily in increased health care costs, increased

spending in the criminal justice system, and lower levels of productive economic activity. People with lower incomes are often in poorer health. The result is higher costs for the public health care system. There is also a relationship between lower levels of education, literacy, and success in school (conditions strongly correlated with living in poverty), and the likelihood of coming into conflict with the law. Finally, when people are in a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty, have low education and skills levels, and depend on income support benefits, they are not engaged in productive activities that contribute to economic growth and prosperity.^{lviii}

To address these challenges, the City should have a comprehensive plan. Coincidentally, the City of Ottawa is in the process of developing Ottawa's first Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan as required by the Safer Ontario Act, 2018. The CSWB Plan will outline strategies and actions to improve safety and well-being for everyone in Ottawa. The CSWB Plan is a way to work together to address common objectives to ensure Ottawa is a safe, healthy, and vibrant community. The vision is to work together to achieve sustainable communities where everyone feels safe, has a sense of belonging and opportunities to participate, and where individuals and families are able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income, and social and cultural expression.

As identified by its steering group, a key element of the CSWB Plan is **poverty reduction and financial security**. While there are no financial or human resources currently allocated to implement the Plan, it is evident that both a financial plan and work plan will be necessary to address many of its specific elements, especially concerning poverty reduction. It would be my recommendation that the City develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy in the context of the CSWB Plan to outline specific targets concerning substantive poverty reduction.

To achieve success, substantive investment at the municipal level needs to occur to improve i) food security, ii) housing to improve quality of life, iii) economic development and iv) support for community-driven initiatives. The City should create a Poverty Reduction Strategy that targets explicitly these concerns.

Comprehensive Food Plan

As noted previously, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many inequalities in our society, including food insecurity. To address underlying issues to improve social determinants of health, the City of Ottawa needs a Comprehensive Food Plan, formulated and led by the City, in conjunction with our community partners to dramatically shift focus within our community to food access, resilience, and security, along with considering food education and awareness.

The Comprehensive Food Plan would provide leadership from the municipality to the sector and work to bridge the work already being undertaken by community partners and bolster their efforts.

The Ottawa Food Action Plan in 2012 did not develop into a full municipal plan because it was only community-led and was not adopted by the City as a blueprint plan writ large. Nevertheless, the 2012 Plan had broad participation across the City, institutions, academia and multiple neighbourhoods and continues to be implemented at the community level. It contained many ideas, goals which are still relevant and useful. If it was renewed and adopted by the City of Ottawa as a blueprint, it has the potential in a jointly led initiative to be at the forefront of food policy in Canada.

There are several broad models of municipal food policy development, but food strategies have been most successful in Canadian municipalities in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. The success in these cities have been due to investment of staff, resources and leadership with the same investment within the community for joint leadership. This dual model where there is a co-leadership within the City and the community helps frame and guide the initiatives.

Ultimately, a Comprehensive Food Plan takes a food systems lens and would encompass everything in the City to do with food, from rural agriculture, bolstering urban food production, economic development, bolstering farmers markets, grocers, restaurants and food access programs such as school breakfast and snack programs, food banking, community kitchens, hot meal delivery and nutrition. It would be the blueprint for our work as a City and would act as a key document for us to seek funding for some of the more expensive elements of the Plan from higher levels of government or other funding sources.

The primary factor however will be to address food insecurity, which has only become more heightened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ottawa Food Bank saw 15 percent of new users in April 2020 alone.^{lix} In Ward 13, the food bank saw a 19 percent increase in new users from March to June compared to the same time in 2019. FoodSecure Canada estimates that food insecurity is expected to double by the end of the year.^{lx} Despite these startling statistics on food bank use, this is just the tip of the iceberg. We know that only one fifth of food-insecure households access a food bank.^{lxi}

So worryingly, food bank usage does not encapsulate all the problem with food insecurity in Ottawa. Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that food-insecure households are interwoven in a complex web of other social determinants of health and that low income is the number one predictor of household food insecurity.^{lxii}

Further, the province mandates that public health units research and produce information about a Nutritious Food Basket. The value of that basket has risen 22 percent since 2009. A single person on ODSP is left with negative \$119 a month if the only thing they do is pay for rent and eat nutritious food. They still don't have any hydro, no way to pay for medication, no transportation.^{lxiii} The Human Needs Task Force, established to address the social impact of COVID-19, recognized the acute issues of food security and convened a separate food security sub-group.

Funding food banks through the City's community funding envelope is vital because emergency food provision is important and there will always be a need for it. But, if the definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly expecting change, food banking is not working.

Continuing to provide emergency food provision is essential because the economic downturn has meant that people are hungry now. Stopping this emergency food provision would be cruel and unproductive. Bolstering funding to those organizations is critical. However, rather than continue to have the same organizations fight over the same bucket of money that has grown at less than the rate of inflation (and certainly not by the 22 percent since 2009 that the cost of food has increased), we should advocate for more ongoing provincial funding to grow the amount of money available to our social service organizations.

In conjunction, there should be a comprehensive plan to move out of reliance on food banking. Not doing so would do a disservice and only further entrenches us in a vicious cycle. Food banks do not provide enough food to survive on – it was always only meant to be emergency food provision. That plan to move away from food banking would be part of this comprehensive strategy which would encompass taking a food systems lens rooted in removing barriers to access to food.

Suggestions for a Comprehensive Food Strategy

Neighbourhood Food Centres & Food Access

Local food banks should be incentivized to transform and become neighbourhood food centres. Food centres are one-stop shops that are neighbourhood based and provide other critical programming aside, in addition, to emergency food provision. Some of these would include nutrition programs, hot and frozen fresh meals, and cooking programs. Ideally, each food centre would have a kitchen, cold storage, a greenhouse and a garden. Critically, proper programming within these spaces would provide a sense of belonging which is often sorely lacking for those living in poverty.^{lxiv}

The most notable example within Ottawa is the Parkdale Food Centre, where programming has expanded dramatically beyond emergency food provision. However, the reliance on a grant economy doesn't provide certainty, requires a lot of resources to be diverted to fundraising and grant seeking, and does not afford organizations the capital tools they need to expand to provide better services.

Another organization that has transformed toward a neighbourhood food centre model is Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre. The move to a new space allowed them to recalibrate and offer more services and change their model of emergency food provision from a

hamper model to a shopping model. They have expanded youth and social enterprise programming. Still, they could do much more with more resources, as the geographic area they cover is large and issues with access to the site without a vehicle remain challenging for people. Additional funding would provide certainty by having staff expand programming, provide better and more food, and do more community outreach.

For organizations that don't have the space, it would mean finding new space for them, potentially through City facilities or other means. An excellent example of an organization that is doing the best that they can with the space but needs a bigger space and has done so successfully is the Gloucester Emergency Food Cupboard. Through the partnership with upcoming affordable housing to be built in their vicinity, they have secured a new space, but this has taken many years. This process needs to be accelerated throughout the City for the many organizations not currently in facilities that allow for growth. There are many smaller food banks and cupboards throughout Ottawa that operate in conditions that are not accessible for people and simply cannot run these programs in the space they are in. Any food cupboard that is still in a community house basement is a prime example and organizations that are still renting space, like the Dalhousie Emergency Food Cupboard. A dedicated physical space allows for the transformation from a place where people stop once a month to a place that allows them to gather.

A comprehensive neighbourhood food centre model would also seek to fund those organizations to have backup generators and ensure that the neighbourhood food centre becomes integral to the emergency planning operations of the City. It ensures that in a situation like the tornado in September 2019, that food provision is maintained, and there is a space where hot meals can be prepared and served.

Developing the infrastructure to do meal and food delivery is also important. While some organizations have various degrees of delivery capability, issues that were always there (such as people becoming shut-in during the winter) occurred to huge swathes of people throughout the pandemic where many isolated seniors or people with chronic health issues could not get to the food bank. Even without the physical or financial access to get food, there should still be a mechanism to be connected, and this should be universal, not dependent upon whether an organization has enough volunteers.

In the East End, OttawaCares started delivery for Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre and Partage Vanier throughout the pandemic. However, this relies on volunteers which doesn't provide certainty or reliability. Every organization should be assisted to build this capacity and recognize its importance as a critical function rather than a "nice to have". Proper infrastructure to maintain this would involve purchasing of vehicles and hiring of staff.

The Good Food Box and MarketMobile pivoted to "Good Food at your Doorstep" and delivered 5,600 fresh fruits and vegetables boxes at lower cost and donated 200 boxes free to vulnerable residents. It is this kind of program that should be expanded to be another option for many more residents. It would simultaneously bolster nutrition and drive demand for more local food (see below.)

Targets for local food production and consumption

If the City of Ottawa placed emphasis on local food, it would incentivize rural local food production. Starting with the City's own facilities such as daycares and long-term care homes, serious consideration should be given to increasing the percentage of food sourced from local farms and producers. This would also be in line with the province's own goals within the *Local Food Act*.

Setting this target for local food production and consumption is another key pillar within a comprehensive food strategy. If the City led the way in ensuring that where it provided food in its own facilities and leveraged the power of collective buying, it would be able to assist the aforementioned neighbourhood food centres in establishing at cost, non-profit grocery coops within the food centres to purchase local food from growers and producers.

The City could also dramatically increase local urban food production through expanding community gardening on vacant lots. These could be done in conjunction with the neighbourhood food centres, but funding should be expanded to support and incentivize residents everywhere throughout the City to produce food for personal consumption and to be shared with their local neighbourhood food centres.

In this way, the City could also utilize more City parkland to plant all kinds of edible plants and fruit and nut trees, providing free, nutritious food to residents while simultaneously revitalizing the urban canopy. While the City already plants and has some edible trees, we could significantly expand this, along with public information campaigns to encourage residents to utilize those options.

For example, City Council in Victoria, BC directed parks staff to grow food to increase food security for residents.^{lxv} While the climate is different, food can still be produced in Ottawa, and should be done so on public land, wherever possible. This is a good example of food production being done in many ways – by the City on public land, providing it to private households, providing to organizations to provide food, helping with community gardens and orchards, encouraging rooftop greenhouses and by-laws that facilitate and encourage beekeeping and hens.

Food access can be achieved in other ways other than through the charitable sector. A comprehensive food strategy could also implement smaller grocery models where at-cost, non-profit models linked with local food producers. This would be an expansion of the MarketMobile concept by targeting neighbourhoods that are food deserts as defined by being more than a kilometre away from a grocery store.

A pay what you can model could also be applied to hot and frozen meal delivery. Two different programs, Food for Thought Café and Cooking for a Cause, partnered with local restaurant businesses that shut down to customers to provide hot meals for vulnerable people during the pandemic. However, both programs are only funded through charitable donations and thus are not sustainable and scalable. In a time when restaurants will not return to pre-pandemic levels of business for a long time, expanding this model long-term will provide good, nutritious food to people and bolster the local economy.

Spending money now to save money later

Building resiliency within the food sector and bolstering the local food system will help everyone save us money long term. How?

- Healthy eating habits have been associated with better performance at school in standardized testing
- Poor performance at school leads to sub-optimal post-secondary education options and subsequent employment
- Lack of employment leads to increased dependence on welfare services, much of which is funded in part by the City.

We know that food insecurity is associated with higher health care use and costs amongst Canadian adults, and better health outcomes are well documented when diet improves. This also helps employment outcomes and reduces dependency on other things that the City also pays for, such as Para Transpo, and community passes for transit. In the long term, the City really cannot afford not to undertake a wholesale change for how we look at food insecurity.

The municipality cannot dramatically increase taxes to support all the things that are needed in a comprehensive food strategy or poverty reduction strategy. But if we take the time now to lead, with community partners, for a comprehensive plan then we can lobby for additional funding in the future. Without a plan, we cannot go to higher levels of government to simply ask for funds. Whereas, if we have a clear plan with goals and targets, we can make a strong case.

I propose that the City begin expanding the work currently undertaken by Ottawa Public Health with food security to begin formulating a food strategy in partnership with key local

organizations. Investment into a City-level Policy Specialist position and a lead Community Facilitator would formulate a joint, City and Community-led strategy with clear actions, budget asks, and timelines. With an action plan in place, the City could seek funding to expand and innovate upon some of the suggestions above.

Food security occurs *"When all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life"* (Source: Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security, 2009).

On the face of it, food security may seem like a simple thing to understand – food security means having enough to eat. But when you start looking deeper, food security is not so simple. Hunger occurs when need is greater than availability. But explaining why need exceeds availability means understanding that the reasons are complex, linked to the supply of food in a region, a household's ability to obtain food and an individual's ability to prepare, serve and consume the food, and any combination of these. Food security matters because of its impact on health.

Recreation opportunities for all children, youth, and their families are another critical area of municipal investment. These are activities that promote inclusion. Recreation is crucial. Not just for healthy individuals and families, but for solid neighbourhoods. Participation in sports, recreation and other leisure activities promotes inclusion and are associated with an enhanced quality of life by acquiring new skills and improved physical and psychological well-being.

Recreation and arts and cultural programs help build self-esteem for children and young people. These activities have been found to reduce negative social behaviour in youth and particularly effectively reduce crime among young offenders.

Local recreational policy is a policy response intervention to poverty. Municipalities can make their facilities and programs available at little or no cost to the public and can offer subsidies to families.

In conjunction with a food strategy, a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that focuses on tangible ways the municipality can ameliorate income inequality is critical to have enough money to meet their basic needs.

Community Involvement: A Holistic Approach to Reduce Poverty in Ward 13 & Vanier

One of the most important components of any municipal poverty strategy will be the need for community input and engagement.

Levels of persistent poverty indicate the need for the City of Ottawa to develop a long-term strategy to address immediate needs, coordinate efforts among governments and social service stakeholders, and drive systemic change for those living in poverty to create pathways to prosperity.

Such an approach needs to be a holistic one, rooted in community. Consequently, the community associations in Ward 13, including Cardinal Glen, Lindenlea, New Edinburgh, Manor Park, Overbrook and Rockcliffe Park came together with Vanier to author the following working paper that has been included in its entirety into this proposal.

I am very proud that the community associations in Rideau-Rockcliffe Ward have been working together to advocate for the creation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy and Food Security Plan.

The working paper developed by the “Community Collective” posits that the City of Ottawa needs to develop a holistic approach to reduce poverty in Rideau-Rockcliffe and Vanier specifically. Principles contained within the community collective working paper entitled “A Holistic Approach to Reduce Poverty in Ward 13 & Vanier” can be applied to the City at large.



Overview

Ottawa has ignored poverty for too long and now the ranks of the poor are expanding as many of the 70% of workers in Canada who cannot work at home find themselves without a job.

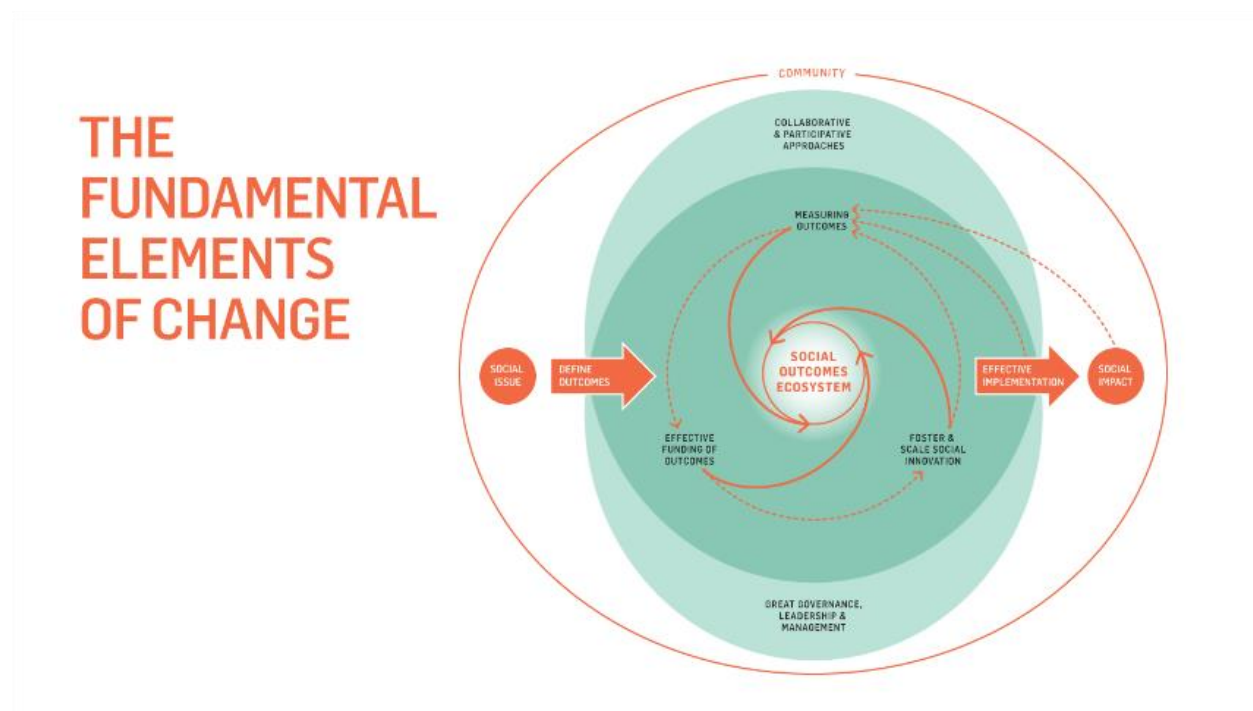
Yet COVID-19 offers an excellent opportunity for the City to learn the lessons of just who is essential and how poorly we compensate most essential workers who work as care givers, grocery store workers and health care workers. The cost of being of the front line can be life itself as we see deaths of personal care workers and those in the health sector.

It is time for Ottawa to recognize the costs of poverty to our communities and to rethink how it delivers social services. Ottawa needs to reboot its social and economic policy if it wants to recover and be better off than before the COVID19 Pandemic hit.

1. The City must start with a clear understanding of the nature of the poverty problem and the forces that drive high levels of poverty.
2. Then we must develop a strategic plan with a systems focus: a high-level vision, a compelling mission and carefully selected mutual reinforcing strategic objectives.
 - a. Each element of the plan needs a few key performance targets and measureable indicators for their achievement.
3. A results-based action plan informed by best practices elsewhere is developed next that knits together effective, co-ordinated delivery channels for the social and economic services called for by the plan.
 - a. As we go along we need to assess the results of our collective delivery of those services in terms of progress towards the outcomes from the perspective of clients served.

None of this can be accomplished without a new framework of collaboration among all partners who share the common desire to achieve agreed-upon outcomes.

The Centre for Social Impact in Australia has developed a Social Impact Framework to achieve a vision through connecting actions to defined outcomes. Their focus, as must be ours, is on the whole social system and contributing to systems change rather than single issue activities and programs.



In trying to address and reduce poverty, we are preoccupied with a messy, multi-faceted issue – a “wicked” problem – for which there is no singular sector-based or program response. To succeed, we must not shy away from finding the most effective solutions and we must relentlessly pursue those solutions with the most effective outcomes as our goal.

CSI tells us that we need to foster and scale a pipeline of social innovations. CSI emphasizes that innovation requires investment and those investors, like private sector innovation investors, need to focus on priority needs, be tolerant of risk and ready to support a focus on outcomes. Inherent in CSI success was participatory social design and collaborative delivery.

1 <https://www.csi.edu.au/about-social/social-impact-framework/>

Dedicated City-Wide Poverty Reduction Strategy

Eight Community Associations in Ward 13 and Vanier and a broad array of Ottawa - based non-profit organizations are calling for a dedicated city-wide poverty reduction strategy.

A strategy that would:

1. Use existing resources for better results and devote new sources of funding to fill gaps.
2. Be driven by outcomes, not just outputs
3. Be visibly led by City leadership.

The Community Association Presidents in my ward have called for the City to hold itself accountable for poverty reduction outcomes in its own funding and with respect to funds it can leverage through wide partnerships. In line with Canada's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals they have asked for commitment to achieve a **30 percent reduction in poverty in Ottawa by 2030**. That's less than the 50% reduction in poverty that Canada has committed to within the international community to be achieved in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. A more modest goal of 3% per year - a sustained 3% that breaks cycles of poverty by 2030. We will aim to reduce Child Poverty in my Ward and Vanier by 30% from 31% to approximately 20%. If we cannot do that, what kind of City do we live in?

Understanding the Cost of Poverty

Poverty is expensive. It is expensive for any city. Ottawa is no exception. No city can prosper if it has high levels of poverty. Poverty in Ottawa has high economic social, physical and mental health costs for families and individuals whose potential to be participating members of society is not being realized. Poverty is isolating and disempowering for many of our community residents. If resources are available to help them achieve their goals and they are able to locate those resources, they also too often find long waiting lists and truncated services. When people at the margins find work, it is often a minimum wage job which is not a living wage ¹for Ottawa (\$18.42/hour). Jobs available for immigrants, people of colour and those with only Grade 12 education qualifications tend to be part-time and without benefits. Poverty is isolating for the old and those with disabilities when their ability to contribute is limited but who have earned and deserve the right to enjoy an engaged life.

¹ [Living Wage Ontario](#) : A livable wage in Ontario is calculated by region and city for two adult income earners and two children. It includes food, housing (two bedroom apartment), clothes, medical expenses, recreation and modest vacations. It does not include retirement or education savings, home ownership, debt, or anything other than the smallest savings for emergencies or hard times.

Our Community Associations do not want better poor they want fewer poor. They want a city that works with determination to enable all citizens to participate in all facets of everyday life – in employment, social, cultural and political activities.

What are we doing now?

A number of our Presidents have attended city-wide events like the December Ottawa Food Bank panel. Speakers, those with lived experience and community development experts, called for a city-wide poverty reduction strategy. After that meeting Community Associations Presidents noted that other Ottawa communities and organizations spoke to the same barriers as those that Ward 13 and Vanier have been bumping up against in trying to engage elected officials to support a collective federal, provincial and city poverty reduction strategy for the past three years and more!

We realize that there are good initiatives being undertaken by dedicated city staff and social sector organizations, but are they working collaboratively in common purpose? City departments act as silos often working at cross purposes instead of aligning with city strategic objectives and working across mandates to contribute to environmental, anti-poverty, social, cultural and economic goals

Indeed, current foundation and government funding structures that fund projects and not organizations (non-core versus core funding) create incentives that cause organizations to compete against each other for small, short-term grants to no real eventual outcome. This “grant economy” limits our community resource centers and NGO leadership’s ability to align their resources with their and city strategic goals and to stay the course as they innovate and learn to improve and adapt quickly to changing circumstances. A learning approach where all actors acknowledge and learn from mistakes made in program design and/or services delivery is highly limited by fractured funding. The costs of managing multiple project proposals and reporting to different donors whose reporting formats are not harmonized is very expensive - not a cost effective use of limited resources.

Meanwhile, poverty keeps growing Ottawa

Ottawa’s financial investment in addressing poverty is significant. More than a third of the 2019 City budget was devoted directly to Community Service, Housing and Policing. (Figure 1). Other services like transportation, parks and recreation and certainly planning also have intended and unintended impacts on the poor, women, the racialized population and those with mental and physical disabilities. Each should be responsible for measuring positive as well as adverse impacts on the rights of these populations in program design and delivery.

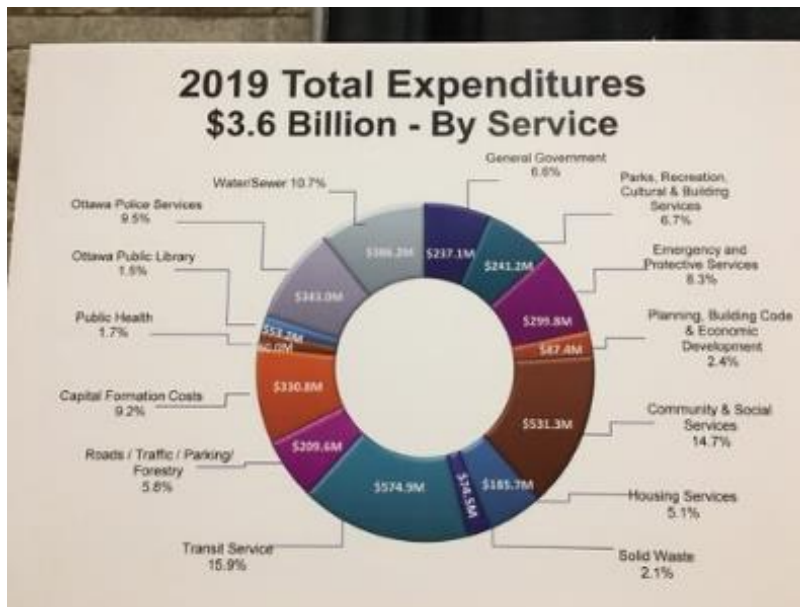


Figure 1 2019 Total City Expenditure

Provincial and Federal governments are also contributing directly, at times co-ordinated with other levels of government efforts, sometimes less so. Local foundations and community fund raising supports many good but too often, individual projects.

We don't need more evidence such as a comprehensive list of these efforts, nor a summation of total funds allocated, since most observers agree that the net impact of these investments has been, at best, to slow the growth of poverty within the Wards. We all realise that more of the same won't bring different results.

Towards a Better Understanding of What's Needed

We are committed to facts-based recommendations based on sound analysis.

We commissioned a special Stats Canada data report for Manor Park in 2019. We are now working on the equivalent for other areas of Ward 13 and Vanier. This socio-economic and demographic data paints an all too clear picture of the scale and scope of the poverty issue in the Ward.

We have started with the Ottawa Community Foundation initiative to develop a better coordinated effort among our Community Associations within the Ward and to engage those within the area who can contribute to our understanding of this issue, both stakeholders and those with "lived experience".

We have launched a research project in collaboration with RRCRC, funded by CMHC, to examine the pathways that lead families into emergency housing in hotels or motels for extended periods of time often with only a beer fridge and microwave for meals preparation.

We also plan to examine the pathways out of these emergency housing situations in the hope of discovering critical elements that can lead to appropriate action to reduce or eliminate this phenomenon.

Thinking differently about poverty in all its complexity and doing differently in delivering social and other city services to reduce poverty is where this paper starts. The dimensions of poverty in Ottawa tell us that we need to and can do better. Other North American cities have reduced poverty and have prevented crime through social, health and economic innovation, why can't we?

This paper brings forward the voice of people who actually live in poverty...what does it mean to be poor in Ottawa?

We are examining Best Practices in several jurisdictions to learn what services are effective and how collaborative models work.

We have learned that there are several examples of successful poverty reduction out there, in Canada, the USA, and Europe and we intend to advocate hard to see these strategies adapted to the realities of the needs within our Wards.

A Holistic Strategic Plan

Many cities take an outcomes focus and collaboration models seriously. They are looking for the first causes of poverty in order to adapt their ways of working to achieve quality of life changes for their clients

For example, the Tamarac Institute² is working with a number of cities across Canada to change the mindset from services for specific needs to collaboration to attack the causes of exclusion and of poverty. They have moved beyond each organization being focussed on its own outputs to a radical reappraisal of what can be achieved and the means by which transformation of communities can be achieved. They focus on the results wanted but also on the *institutional changes* needed to support new interventions

They start with 5 principles for Vibrant Communities:

1. Reduce poverty rather than alleviate it.
2. Comprehensive thinking and action about the root causes of poverty rather than isolated systems.
3. Multi-sector approach to collaboration rather than working in silos.
4. Build on local assets rather than deficits.

² See: Born, Paul (editor): **Creating Vibrant Communities**: How Individuals and Organizations from Delivery Sectors are Coming Together to Reduce Poverty in Canada.

5. Emphasize a process of ongoing innovation, learning and change rather than a process of short term quick wins.³ This is also called adaptive management.

The great news is that there are now many examples of cities in Canada and elsewhere where municipalities, social sector actors and the private sector are coming together in multisector, collaborative initiatives. They focus on achieving shared outcomes. They have launched multi-year initiatives to reduce poverty. They speak to the importance of being learning oriented and adaptive which means adopting a higher risk tolerance for failure as long as it contributes to innovation and learning.

Hamilton has participated in the Vibrant Communities initiative with a resulting reduction in poverty of over 20%. They are a model of collective action among city, community and business leaders who listen to those with lived experience.

The Purpose Based Communities program in the USA is another successful example worthy of further study to determine which elements of its approach might prove useful here.

Delivering the Services

There is also a growing recognition of the need for more collaboration and synchronization among services in Ottawa.

The challenge is that no one organization or sector can meet its desired outcomes alone. There are interlinkages everywhere. Health outcomes depend on good educational systems. Housing outcomes require collaboration with developers on the design of housing that creates healthy communities, with clients, with agencies who can deliver social interventions. Crime is reduced not just by more police but increased access to sports and the arts for kids, mentors, and an education system and parents who want and know how to keep kids in school. And when those interventions are available, they prove to be effective - Canadians *net* almost \$1.2 million per child averted from the justice system⁴.

Partnerships

Outcomes take place at the level of partnership. It takes collaboration across City Departments, across jurisdictions and sectors to address the complexity of the many cause and effect chains that lead a child, a family, and/or an individual into or out of poverty.

The Integrated Neighbourhood Services Team is ferreting out opportunities for City services to be mutually reinforcing - to support each other's goals. The City's Community Fund is working with our community resource centers to build capacity in each to manage for outcomes⁵. Their

³ Ibid

⁴ Public Safety Canada See: <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsracs/pblctns/2016-r005/index-en.aspx>

⁵ It is a healthy exercise for individual organizations to lift their focus to outcomes up from outputs. For example, from how many kids graduated to intermediate outcomes (% of trained kids who get jobs because of the training)

funding model is moving to fund organizations not idiosyncratic grants for short term projects. Grants are expensive to compete for and manage and less effective than longer term strategies that have sufficient organizational funding. A final step will be for the city to fund multiple organizations to achieve common outcomes on the path to reducing poverty,

The Rideau Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre is leading the way by defining its objectives in outcome terms and by refocusing its efforts on poverty reduction and community resilience.

Adaptive Management

Current government tendering processes, most social purpose funding models and much of our policy infrastructure is the antithesis of innovation. There is little research and development for new models, practices, products and services for social purpose. There is little incentive to take risk, and almost no incentive for collaboration.

Rewarding certainty alone does not encourage innovative thinking, and political short-termism stands in the way of a sufficient runway for ideas to take flight with government. We need sufficient resources, the right minds, and an appetite for risk in both entrepreneurs and investors. We need to measure what works and what doesn't, where there are failures, we must regroup and learn from the mistakes. And where there are successes, we need to enable them to flourish, expand and continue.⁵

Adaptive management means that program managers have the authority to change processes and outputs as justified by the evidence. Devolution of authority and decentralization underpin managing for results. Responsibility and needed authorities for decisions are placed with those best placed to make them in order to ensure results fit client needs while achieve overarching public policy objectives.

Leaders change routines from monitoring results to reflecting on results and pushing middle managers who monitor results to provide meaning to the next level up about what results imply for needed organizational change. What does this mean for how we operate? Institutions who adapt interventions for better client results must also adapt routines, processes, regulations to support new interventions- new ways of working.

to % get jobs who like their jobs to the final outcome of employers satisfied with the quality of the recruit. This change in indicators transformed the Community College system BC. It led to strong partnerships with local private sector who helped colleges to modernize their curriculum in real time. Community Colleges guaranteed students retraining those who were not meeting standards. This example like many others demonstrates the transformation change of an evidence-based outcome focus.

Leaders and Managers Will Ask Different Questions to Accelerate SO achievement

QUESTIONS	ANSWERS	WHO ASKS?
Did you execute the plan?	Administrative	Operations Management
What happened?	Descriptive	Operations Management
What do you think happened?	Diagnostic	Operations Management
What Alternatives are there?	Creative	Strategic Leadership
What do you think would happen?	Predictive	Strategic Leadership
Which is the best choice?	Evaluative	Strategic Leadership

“The intent is to move discussions from administrative and descriptive to “predictive” and “evaluative” interventions. The shift moves the leadership from “making lists and taking names” to executive problem solving and strategic learning.”

Pallidium Group...Kaplan and Norton Balanced Score Card Bootcamp

Outcomes oriented leaders shift from mechanistic management to systemic, holistic approaches. They need to manage the tension between needed flexibility and the efficiency of mechanistic management. They move from being rules directed to being mission/goal directed. New leadership skills are required when they shift from managing hierarchical silos to leading teamwork and collaboration. Learning feedback from external partners to improve policy gives external partners a seat at the policy development table.

Accountability becomes positive being based on the notion of continuous feedback and learning. Staff and external organizations funded by the City are measured on their adaptation and learning and their sharing of lessons learned from failure not whether they accurately predicted the future or met output measures.

Assessment

The Community Funds Project is helping Resource Centers to transform to an outcomes orientation.

This shifts organizational focus from increasing activities, or the number of services and products produced (outputs) to starting with what they want to achieve in terms of quality of life changes for the clients (outcomes) and working backwards to rethink what combinations of cause and effects achieve outcomes like kids graduating from high school or housing that supports families with better networks for employment and more cultural and sports opportunities for kids.

One resource center leader remarked that he now wanted to focus not just on making more food available but on learning how to increase the percentage of their clients who no longer need food banks.

This resource center leader's shift in focus is the vital difference. This type of transformative change in mindset is at the center of outcomes-based strategies. Rather than targeting more food, shelters and housing and counting people fed, shelter beds available and or housing units produced, an outcomes-based strategy starts with what change in the quality of life is important to reduce poverty? In the food bank example: the center leader is lifting his sights to breaking dependence on food banks. And asking what do we need to do increase individual and family food security independence?

Housing: Is more housing an outcome? No. More affordable housing is an output. The research⁶ shows that the quality of housing and community that surrounds are linked to quality-of-life outcomes in child development, health, safety, family stability, crime, employment and labour market access and more.

Building and maintaining housing to achieve higher order outcomes would build Ottawa's human capital while being cost effective. Evidence is available on the size of units, access to green space, and crowding and their links to mental health. Evidence points to how concentrating low-income populations together has links to low employment prospects and higher crime.

Looking at how to improve desired quality of life outcomes by *how* we create more affordable housing can lower overall social costs that are created by poor community housing.

Client-based Performance Measurement

Most importantly in outcomes-based strategies is the shift from what is best for institution to what is best for the client. *Performance is measured by the end users.* Do people living in poverty think their quality of life has changed for the better? Do they experience healthier and safer living conditions? Do they have confidence that their children will be equipped to be productive citizens? Are investments in their living conditions and economic opportunities paying off? Do they have a better chance of living their best life?

Looking back to the diagram of the cycle of activities, it is the information gathered in this last step, through client assessment of outcomes that feeds into understanding and improves performance in the next cycle of effort.

Conclusion

This paper calls for a shift in focus from a disjointed treating of the symptoms of poverty to a co-ordinated focus on the root causes with the aim of reducing poverty levels by an average of 3% per year for the next decade. It calls for a holistic strategy and for substantial change in the way that social services are managed, delivered and evaluated.

It starts from the shared recognition that what is being done now isn't working and that more of the same cannot possibly generate more positive results.

Concerted action of the type called for in this paper calls for strong political will, a commitment to a longer-term action plan based on in-depth analysis, innovative services design and delivery, and client-based performance assessment.

Ambitious? Yes. *Possible?* Yes, - as other cities in Canada and abroad have already demonstrated.

Complex? Yes – this won't be quick, and it won't be easy, but it appears to be the only possible way out of this crisis and the sooner we get started, the better off we will be.

5 <https://www.csi.edu.au/about-social/social-impact-framework/scaling-innovation>

Economic Development

A successful Poverty Reduction Strategy, with an incorporated Food Strategy, must have at its core measures to promote rapid sustained economic growth in various sectors.

To enhance economic development, policies promoting growth must be combined with programmatic investments that address income inequity from senior levels of government. Such policies should consider making labour markets work better, removing gender and racial inequalities and increasing financial inclusion. The policy challenge is to combine growth promoting policies with policies that allow the poor to participate fully in opportunities that will contribute to new growth. Such policy approaches must involve local governments. Municipal governments, including the City of Ottawa, have a role to play in economic development, although major economic policies concerning prosperity and competitiveness are mainly

undertaken by senior levels of government, municipal governments have a role to play as well, reflecting the locally driven dimensions of prosperity and competitiveness.

Special consideration must also be given to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon small business. On April 29, 2020, my office held a virtual business roundtable which brought together representative range of local business stakeholders to examine the best path forward to address the crisis. Originally conceived in Autumn 2019, several months prior to the coronavirus outbreak, the Rideau-Rockcliffe Economic Development Roundtable sought to gather valuable firsthand data on the experiences, challenges and aspirations of local businesses and business community stakeholders. This would also help inform the ongoing work on a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy with implications for a better economic climate across the City of Ottawa. During the Roundtable, the most urgent concern expressed by businesses were access to funds or government instruments, such as rebates, that would help equip their capacity to pay commercial property rent. There were accounts concerning the difficulty of dealing with property owners and management. The federal and provincial governments had announced a range of measures that provided some rent relief, wage subsidies and other financing that would support relevant businesses. However, many businesses that are completely closed during the crisis would not qualify. Next to the reported difficulties of accessing government support measures was broad concern over the access to capital from private banking institutions. RBC assistant branch manager Jabez Arkaifie outlined some of the ways banks are trying to help. This ranges from offering lower interest rates, to providing critical small business services throughout the crisis and maintaining deferral options for pre-existing debt. However, around the table, concern remained as to whether the road to economic recovery would be made increasingly difficult by mounting deferrals and personal financial challenges for business owners. The COVID-19 dynamics have also forced a few businesses to endeavor to “go it alone” in deploying fragmented solutions. But as pointed out by Dr. Colbran Marjerrison of Beechwood Naturopathy during the Roundtable, the notion of “going it alone” is an uncertain proposition for many small businesses. In-person transactions for goods and services, foot traffic or drawing people in numbers at a specific location are fundamental components of many business operations. Quarter Vanier BIA Executive Director Nathalie Carrier noted there are two type of businesses – one with the reliance to adapt to COVID-19 dynamics such as social distancing; and others with more conventional interactive business practices. For example, businesses like pizza parlors, restaurants and storefronts are better able to adapt to a more product delivery focused model supported by robust online presence. On the other hand, hair salons and fitness centres, which all involve some form of close human or equipment contact have limited capacity to adapt.

The Roundtable also brought forth some important mid- to long-term expectations of local small business owners. This included recognition of how important it is for businesses to provide input so that the planning and development of city economic infrastructure is also amenable to small businesses. Dr. Bruce Firestone reflected that the City of Ottawa should

consider a range of options. For example, the Barcelona Model is a standard benchmark for urban development and bridging local governance to local democracy. This includes self-sufficiency approaches for local industry, which examines how to balance a thriving local economy with urban growth.

The key findings of the Roundtable were that:

1. The most pressing challenges reported by Rideau-Rockcliffe business stakeholders are largely a result of the unprecedented impact brought on by COVID-19. This includes access to capital to cover key operational costs like rent or salaries; and the ability to adapt or innovate in line with evolving market forces.
2. In the short term, the City of Ottawa needs to ensure that policy decisions consider the important foundational role that small businesses play in the local economy.
3. Business stakeholders are paying close attention to the reopening approach as directed by the Province and how it balances the business needs with the critical need to protect and preserve public safety. Businesses understand the importance of taking steps, in line with public health and workplace safety guidelines, to limit potential spread of the virus, but are particularly concerned about the data and decision-making concerning lockdown, and also about the availability of emergency government financing for business.

Indeed, the Roundtable dialogue conveyed a strong awareness around the table of the rapid pace at which the senior levels of government were working to develop, coordinate and roll out several programs and measures to help businesses deal with the challenges. This included:

- the federal Canada Emergency Business Assistance (CEBA) program providing emergency loans to family businesses, contractors and owner-operated businesses;
- the joint federal-provincial Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) for small businesses and commercial landlords experiencing financial difficulties.
- FedDev Ontario's Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF) providing interest-free loans to help support fixed operating costs of business with disrupted revenues; and
- the Innovation Assistance Program (IAP) to assist innovative small businesses unable to secure funding under the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS).

Before hosting the Roundtable, my office commissioned a survey in Rideau-Rockcliffe to engage a diverse and representative range of local small and mid-sized business. The online survey was promoted through the Rideau-Rockcliffe website and especially targeted businesses and business stakeholders in Ward 13.

The survey results were collated and distilled into several core questions that would guide Roundtable discussions. Overall, the feedback provided a comparative snapshot of the state of local businesses prior to the crisis versus the evolving economic climate because of the

pandemic. Respondents reported mixed impact and maintained the optimistic expectation that most local businesses may come out of the crisis reasonably intact. The findings therefore conveyed a sense of business community resilience. When asked how best to describe their current business reality, three-quarters of respondents along major corridors responded as being a 'mildly profitable/steady employer'. When asked how many people they currently employed, the average answer was seven, indicating a degree of moderate job stability among local small and medium sized businesses. From this we inferred the perception of a relatively positive outlook for some local businesses within the short-to-medium-term. Some respondents indicated they were already adjusting or making a transition to virtual business operations. This demonstrated the willingness and capacity of some local businesses to adapt to the challenges presented by COVID-19.

The survey also found that businesses being led by women were doing marginally better than other respondents. However, when reviewing other demographic variables such as ethnicity, responses were in line with common responses, citing a lack of capital for overhead expenses and challenges coping with tax burdens. Consequently, it will benefit our municipal government if we especially develop economic supports for racialized women, who are at greater risk of financial precariousness. Such work, ideally focused on the creation of such supports, will be examined by the Anti-Racism Secretariat, the City's new Anti-Racism office. It would also be beneficial to pursue social procurement strategies at the City, designed to provide Black, racialized and Indigenous entrepreneurs better access to City contracts.

Conclusion

Since election to office, I have been working to address multifaceted issues in my community. Equity and public safety are two big issues, but neither of these problems will be resolved without addressing poverty. It is up to us, as residents of this City, to undertake reform to transform our City into a place that is more equitable for all.

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