

A photograph of a bustling indoor farmers market. The market is housed in a large, high-ceilinged building with a complex steel truss roof and large windows on the sides. In the foreground, a vendor with a beard and a red shirt is sorting through a large pile of green leafy vegetables, possibly asparagus, in a wooden crate. To his left, another vendor in a green apron is working at a stall. The market is filled with various fresh produce, including leafy greens, broccoli, and other vegetables, displayed in wooden crates and on tables. Handwritten price tags are visible, such as "Asparagus 7.00 per lb" and "Pesto €1.50". In the background, many other people are seen shopping and talking to vendors. The overall atmosphere is lively and community-oriented.

Growing Change

A Roadmap to Orillia's Food
Strategy

The Orillia Food Committee

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Cover photo credit: Mael Balland

Table of Contents

1. Background.....	1
2. Food System Review.....	3
3. Strategy Development.....	10
4. Household Food Insecurity.....	11
5. Policy Integration.....	13
6. Budget Considerations.....	14
7. Food Policy Timeline.....	15
8. Summary.....	16
9. References.....	i

Background



On October 1st, 2018, the City of Orillia passed a resolution to create a Food Committee, on a pilot basis. The group was given the following mandate during the pilot period:

“THAT, further to the report dated October 1st, 2018 from the Orillia Food Council, a Food Committee be established, as a one-year pilot project, to act as an advisory body to Council;

AND THAT the starting mandate for the Committee include:

- making recommendations to Council on topics related to household food insecurity, community food security and the local food system, and
- support the development and implementation of policies, programs and initiatives related to food in our community;

AND THAT the Committee be comprised of the following seven (7) members:

- One Council Representative
- One member from the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
- One member from Georgian College
- One member from Lakehead University
- One member from the Orillia Food Bank, and
- Two members from the public with a background in food sustainability;

AND THAT the staff resource for the Committee be allocated from the Economic Development Department;

AND THAT Council authorize an expenditure of \$8,000 to be funded from Operating Contingency to provide secretarial support for the Committee;

AND THAT Council redirect the budget for the hiring of a consultant to develop a Sustainable Food Action Plan in the amount of \$10,000 for the provision of secretarial support for the Committee;

AND THAT staff submit a budget for ongoing support through the 2019 budget process;

AND THAT the Committee be directed to consult with the County of Simcoe regarding potential participation on the Committee.”(Resolution 2018-205C: Establishment of the Orillia Food Committee, 2018)

The Orillia Food Committee (hereafter referred to as ‘the Committee’) held its first meeting in June, 2019. In keeping with the above mandate, the group elected to use the duration of the pilot period to examine the feasibility of creating an official Food Strategy for Orillia. Budget constraints in 2019 prevented the City of Orillia from hiring a third-party consultant to oversee the production of a Food Strategy, so the Committee endeavoured to create the strategy on a volunteer basis.

Towards the 3rd quarter of the pilot year, emergency measures adopted to respond to COVID-19 put the Committee on hiatus. The Committee resumed meetings in October, 2020, with the pilot period extended to June, 2021.

Food Strategies have become foundational legislative documents in jurisdictions committed to ensuring their citizens have equitable access to food. Across North America, municipalities have taken a leadership role in adopting Food Strategies, which can be thought of as strategic plans for addressing food insecurity. These plans provide mandates and guidelines across government departments on approximately a five-year basis. Effective Food Strategies are informed by evidence-based research and created in close consultation with community stakeholders.

Throughout the pilot period, the Committee discussed the most effective ways to create a Food Strategy appropriate to Orillia's unique geography and demographic makeup. The Committee members felt Orillia's first Food Strategy should address areas of immediate concern and concentrate on food-access issues and activities the City of Orillia currently engages with. Therefore, the group resolved to review existing municipal legislation that affects food insecurity, community food security and the local food system. All areas included in this report are presently impacted by municipal legislation or infrastructure. By limiting the scope of the first Food Strategy to existing City operations, the Committee hopes to identify reasonable actions that The City of Orillia can efficiently and economically carry out within five years.

The unforeseen delay caused by COVID-19 and restrictions on public gatherings has made it impossible for the Committee to conduct the necessary public consultation before the end of the pilot period. Without this consultation, a Food Strategy would risk not addressing issues important to the public it is meant to serve. As such, the Committee has created a framework intended to outline the next steps in creating a Food Strategy. That framework makes up the body of this report.

Photo Credit: The Creative Exchange



Food System Review

Urban municipal leaders may not immediately associate their work with food availability or the broader food system. However, many policy areas under municipal jurisdiction can significantly impact citizens' access to nutritious food. This framework outlines opportunities within the City of Orillia to enhance food production, improve equitable food distribution, increase healthy food consumption and responsibly manage food waste. In each of these areas, the Committee has reviewed the existing municipal policy, identified any barriers to food access, examined best practices in other communities and identified next steps in ensuring greater equity for Orillians.

Procuring Healthy Food Opportunities for Community Groups

Community Gardens

Orillia has two significant assets community groups could utilize to improve community food security: municipally-managed community gardens and heritage fruit trees on city-owned land. The two community garden sites are High Street Community Garden and Lakehead Community Garden. The Committee has identified that although both gardens have served as vectors for community engagement and food-skills development over the last decade, neither site operates at its full potential. The City of Orillia made important strides in 2016 when it created a community gardening policy and designated a Community Garden Coordinator staff position. Over the past five years, the City of Orillia has invested in infrastructure and succeeded in creating community garden spaces with raised beds, on-site water and manicured pathways. Best practices show that the next phase for these garden sites will be greater community engagement with new or existing community groups. Currently, the sites are managed in an ad-hoc fashion by city employees and loosely-knit collections of citizens, creating an unpredictable pattern of use and placing an administrative burden on the parks division. Other jurisdictions build successful community gardens through solid partnerships with community organizations, where both the

municipality and the gardening groups have clearly defined roles and responsibilities (Ellis, 2017). A review and update of the current community garden policy and an assessment of how best to utilize the parks staff resource could allow the gardens to engage more citizens while reducing the administrative work for the City. By implementing a goal of establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with non-profit organizations, the two sites could increase opportunities to develop gardening skills, serve as sites for municipal recreation programming, and become a point of pride for all citizens.

Community Orchards

Fruit trees are a surprisingly common feature of Orillia's civic landscape. They can be found in City parks and along the municipality's many trails and pathways. An informal assessment by the Committee concludes that many of these trees are heritage fruit trees, likely remnants of former farmsteads. During fruit season, they are often laden with fruit, much of which falls to the ground. The fallen fruit cannot safely be consumed and creates an unsightly mess in public areas. In some cases, these trees may even pose a slipping hazard for pedestrians or increase the likelihood of insect stings. Not only is the fruit unutilized, but it also increases the tasks for park maintenance staff (Betz, 2019). Other municipalities have negated the problems caused by fruit trees in public spaces by embracing them as a community asset.

Procuring Healthy Food

Opportunities for Individuals

Commercial Urban Agriculture

Urban farming has become increasingly attractive in the modern era of skyrocketing land prices. Commercial urban agriculture is one of the fastest-growing agriculture sectors worldwide and holds various positive potential outcomes for cities that welcome it. The Committee examined whether an entrepreneurial individual could feasibly start a farming business within Orillia's city limits and identified multiple barriers. The most significant is the lack of properties zoned for commercial agriculture: there is only a handful throughout the municipality. A second major barrier is the difficulty new business owners face in rezoning a commercial property for agricultural use. These obstacles likely discourage aspiring agricultural entrepreneurs from attempting to locate in Orillia. As such, the citizens of Orillia do not have the opportunity to access potential skills-training and agricultural jobs created by urban agriculture and even miss out on the grocery savings realized through buying from short supply chains (Golden, 2013). Beyond the economic benefits for business owners and citizens, research has identified cost savings for cities with urban agriculture infrastructure. Urban farm operations have saved municipal dollars in U.S. cities by utilizing vacant land, and reducing vandalism and dumping at abandoned building sites (Balmer et al., 2012; Hodgson, 2012). By reviewing and amending zoning and planning policy, the City of Orillia could encourage environmentally friendly economic growth while promoting local food production.

Commercial Urban Agriculture

Over the past decade, the City of Orillia has undertaken two initiatives with implications for residential urban farming: the Backyard Hens

pilot and becoming a designated Bee City. Additionally, city homeowners can plant food gardens for their personal use, including edible landscaping elements, like berry patches and fruit trees. Orillia supports home gardeners by not restricting food-based horticulture on private properties. As long as homeowners comply with bylaws around property maintenance, they are free to grow food for themselves. The Backyard Hens pilot project has had mixed success, evidenced by the limited uptake in the program. While the concerns expressed by community members regarding noise or smell have failed to be an issue, only four households out of a potential twelve currently participate. Identifying program barriers through community consultation, lowering entrance fees, or waiving fees for low-income households could encourage more citizens to participate in the program. The adoption of a Bee City designation from Bee City Canada means Orillia pledged to create and maintain pollinator habitat, engage in community education campaigns on pollinators' importance, and publicly celebrate National Pollinator Week (Bee City Canada, 2021). Despite this, the bylaws restricting agriculture on city properties mentioned in the above section also prohibit beekeeping.[EW1] A review of relevant bylaws could allow small-scale apiary for homeowners that complies with provincial regulations on keeping bees (Bee City Canada, 2021). Residents could benefit from producing their own honey, and food plants would generally benefit from the increase in pollinators. Like community orchards, Orillia could also promote the celebration of Pollinator Week through the Business Development, Culture and Tourism Department, increasing interest in local events.

Fishing

Orillia operates a designated fishing wharf in the Port of Orillia. The port is well-maintained and a feature attraction throughout the year. Orillia could complement its investment in marine infrastructure by promoting fishing opportunities for residents and visitors alike. The Committee reviewed available resources for fishing-skills education and concluded that several non-profit associations offer excellent free or low-cost programming. Partnership with these groups and integration with provincial learn-to-fish programs could increase affordable food options for citizens. For example, the Orillia Public Library has previously participated in an accessible fishing equipment loaner program in partnership with a third-party angler's club. However, the City website does not feature this information. A review of opportunities to leverage Orillia's existing marketing tools and align them with outside resources could have a high impact with minimal extra administrative burden.



Photo Credit: Photoholgic

Food Distribution

The City of Orillia manages the operation of two significant food distribution points that serve the public in very different ways. The first is the Orillia Farmers' Market, and the second is the network of cafeterias, snack stands, and other retail food outlets associated with recreational facilities. It is worth noting that food is also distributed to City staff and members of the public during in-house lunches, special events or public celebrations.

Orillia Farmers' Market

The Orillia Farmers' Market has experienced some difficulties in recent years that have inspired decision-makers to institute changes. The Farmers' Market Board, which initially reported directly to Council, has now become the Farmers' Market Advisory Committee, under the direction of the Business Development, Culture and Tourism Department.

This change was made, in part, to allow decision-making to be quicker and more responsive to the seasonal needs of farmers and other vendors. While this shift is not a silver bullet for some of the low attendance issues the market has had in recent years, COVID-19 has made it difficult to gauge the true impacts of the change in governance. The City had only just implemented the new structure in the winter of 2019-2020. Therefore, provincial shutdowns, restrictions on indoor markets and other pandemic-related factors likely play a significant role in the market's present customer turnout. Once COVID-19 regulations have relaxed, there will be more opportunity to measure the effects of the new governance structure.

Some of the most effective farmers' markets exist in municipalities where they are made a feature of the downtown core's design. Although many of the recent discussions regarding the Orillia

Farmers' Market have focused on vehicle parking, best practices point in another direction. Effective transit and walkability are more important indicators of a busy and welcoming market. Research shows cities that treat farmers' markets as engaging, mixed-life spaces – much like parks or waterways – raise the quality of life in urban areas while simultaneously supporting local food producers (Francis & Griffith, 2011). The Orillia Food Committee has been in communication with the Farmers' Market Advisory Committee. Both groups look forward to working collaboratively on food policy that will encourage growth for the market. Some ideas the two groups have discussed have included improving walkability from municipal parking lots, increasing capacity for fundraising, creating partnerships between local restaurateurs and produce vendors and reviewing staffing and volunteer requirements.

Institutional Food Procurement

The municipality has the opportunity to impact the local food economy every time it purchases food for resale. Many governments and public institutions have adopted food procurement policies that set purchasing targets for locally-produced food. Although purchasing contracts at the institutional level can be complex to navigate, it would be instructive to review the municipality's food purchasing policies thoroughly. This process can take time due to the complexity and potential trade obligations under provincial and federal laws. A short-term goal to review all existing policies and explore the feasibility of shifting food purchasing to local suppliers is an appropriate first step for Orillia's initial Food Strategy. Municipalities and other public institutions that have implemented local procurement policies have stimulated significant economic gains for local farmers and distributors (My Sustainable Canada, 2014).

Celebrating Local Food

Food tourism (also referred to as culinary tourism) is defined as “any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional or national cuisine, heritage, culture, tradition or culinary techniques of that region.” (Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, 2010, p.8). The role of local government in achieving tourism development is extremely important. A characteristic example is the Province of Ontario, which managed with the assistance of the Ministries of Tourism and Culture and with the cooperation of the private sector to create an effective tourism development tool. This promotes the region through its gastronomy - Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (OCTA), a non-profit, industry driven organization that leads the implementation of the provincial Culinary Tourism Strategy. Specifically, the municipalities, the Ministry and the enterprises assigned to OCTA developed a comprehensive, Strategic Action Plan 2005-2015 for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism in order to make Ontario, firstly, the primary culinary tourism destination across Canada, and then worldwide. OCTA connects and coordinates successfully all food tourism stakeholders of Ontario.

The Committee examined food/culinary tourism practices in Wellington, Stratford and Muskoka. These jurisdictions have developed strategic food tourism plans that build on their existing local food networks while fostering infrastructure throughout the supply chain. They have identified the importance of consistent branding to help create synergistic relationships between agriculture and tourism. Once in place, these relationships can attract local stakeholders who contribute to a more sustainable economic future. In Simcoe County, several tourism organizations offer resources and opportunities for specific marketing campaigns, training series and project

materials designed to increase food tourism. The County of Simcoe itself also offers resources to municipalities. Identifying opportunities for collaboration with these agencies can maximize Orillia’s marketing power and reduce duplication of services.

In addition to marketing and tourism boards, local restaurateurs may benefit from local food certification. An example of this is the FeastON certification, which several Orillia restaurants have achieved. The certification allows consumers to choose establishments that prioritize local food on their menus. Improved public awareness of this or other local food certification may be possible through the Downtown Orillia Management Board, potentially in tandem with their farm-to-table event. Finally, as discussed above, there is an excellent potential to increase Orillia Farmers’ Market produce sales through a coordinated program with local restaurateurs. The Committee has discovered barriers to having Ontario produce delivered to Orillia, as the City is just outside the range of many GTA-based suppliers. A new facet to the Orillia Farmers’ Market, explicitly directed at restaurateurs, could create a win-win for both producers and buyers, similar to Community Supported Agriculture programs (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017). Implementing this program could also address the move away from in-person shopping brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Market vendors would be less dependent on foot traffic as a stable source of revenue but still see a benefit from attending weekly Saturday markets.

Consumption

The built environment can affect whether or not citizens can access food. Grocery stores, farm stands, emergency food organizations, community kitchens and other facilities are called food access points. Municipalities play an essential role in ensuring residents can equitably reach food access points through city planning, transit and environmental design. Decision-makers may be familiar with the terms ‘food desert’ or ‘food swamp’, which describe urban areas with no nutritious food access points within walking distance (1 km). Food security advocates have pointed out that these terms suggest neighbourhoods with limited food access are somewhat naturally occurring, like arid or boggy landscapes. In fact, when planners, developers and grocery corporations choose to reduce services in low-income neighbourhoods, they intentionally create neighbourhoods without reliable food access points (York University, n.d.). Many advocates now use the term ‘food apartheid’ to more accurately describe the phenomenon of designing barriers to food security between wealthy and low-income populations (Brones, 2018).

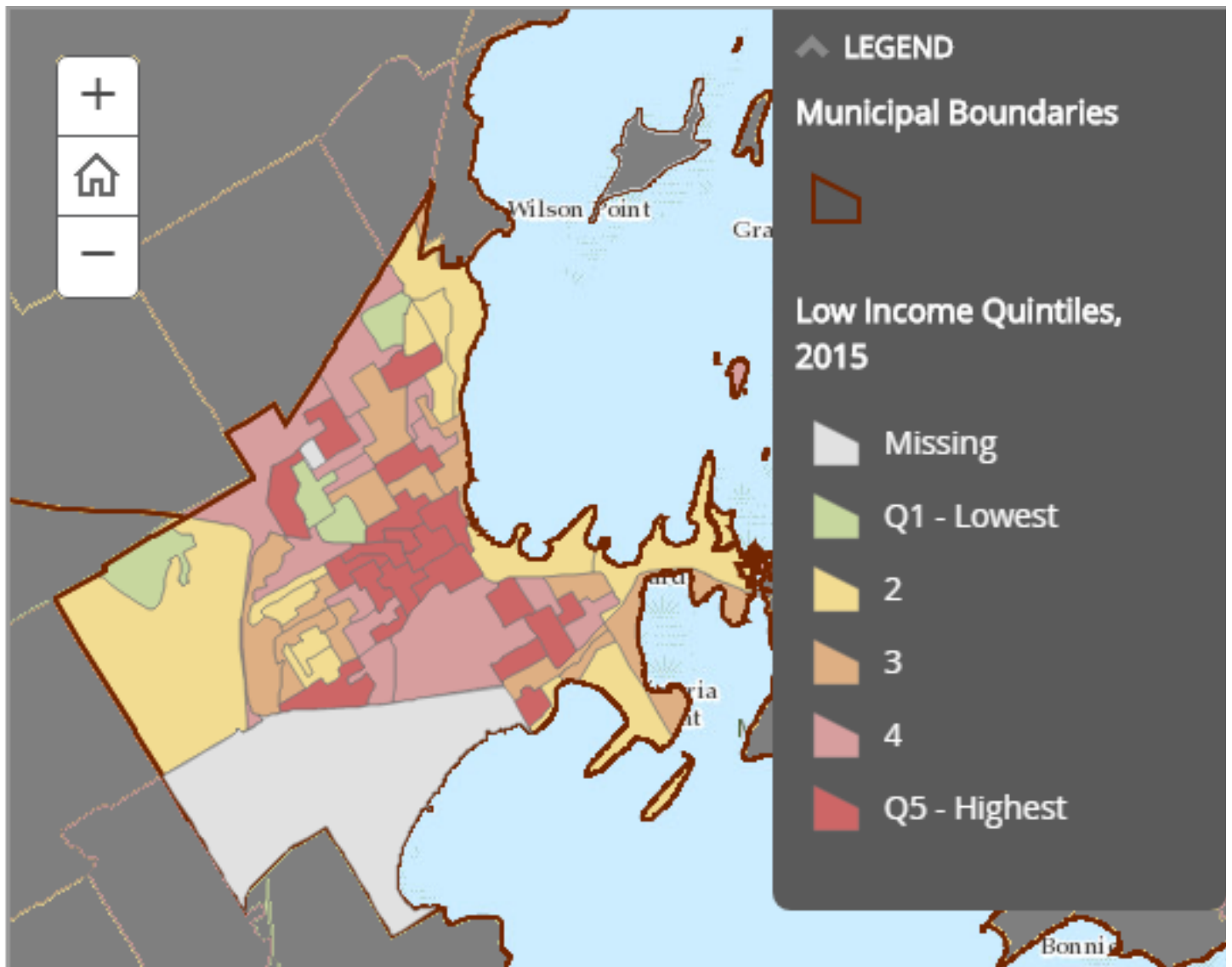
Walkability

There are a variety of food access points throughout Orillia, including grocery stores, a farmers’ market, emergency food organizations, farm stands, community organizations, schools and community gardens. Research shows that individuals generally rely on a mixture of food access points to access food for their households. Low-income households are more likely to be innovative and resourceful in mapping food access points, for example, combining purchasing food at a retail grocery store with attending a weekly playtime program that offers lunches and accessing a food bank when money is tight. This resilience is admirable, but it also points to a disproportionate burden placed on low-income

to find nutritious food. Whereas middle- and high-income households can reliably purchase healthy foods at grocery stores, low-income families must devote significant time, money and energy to sourcing food at alternate food access points, many of which are seasonable or unreliable. Research has shown grocery store location is not the only important factor in food access (Sadler et al., 2013). However, it is indisputable that residents of a neighbourhood without a full-service grocery store experience a discrepancy compared with those living in other areas. Since equity is a crucial part of community food security, residents of areas under food apartheid clearly experience discrimination based on their income status.

Orillia has several geographical areas that can be considered food apartheid zones. These regions correspond with low-income neighbourhoods identified by the Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit. Analysis of Orillia’s demographics shows that the lowest-income households are less likely to own a car or easily afford taxi fare. Low-income citizens, therefore, experience multiple barriers to purchasing healthy food (Wilson, 2020) in Orillia.

The Committee has identified several policy interventions that could increase access to grocery stores for low-income citizens. Short-term solutions include mandating transit routes so that planners consider whether low-income residents can efficiently access grocery stores on public transit. The City can offer economic incentives to developers, including property tax breaks or granting streams, to encourage retail grocery in low-income areas. Finally, Orillia by-laws currently limit fresh produce stands and mobile grocery or food trucks. Review and amendment of these policies could encourage entrepreneurs to offer affordable food options in underserved areas.



Orillia Neighbourhoods, mapped by household income
 Image Source: Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit

Emergency Food Organizations

As discussed above, several organizations operating within the City provide emergency food for those in need. Food centres, food banks, soup kitchens and meal programs operate independently from federal and provincial social service departments. Although these agencies may receive some funding through government grants, most of their revenue comes from donations. Provincial social assistance spending has become dependent on the existence of the charitable emergency food sector, creating an unsustainable situation with chronic underfunding of OW and ODSP rates (PROOF, 2014). Municipalities do not have the jurisdiction over provincial social services spending, but they can recognize the vital role food charities play in providing food to their citizens. The Committee advocates for municipal support of these organizations by establishing granting streams, reducing property taxes, waiving administrative fees, or other economic levers.

Soil Management

Commercial, institutional, and household food waste can represent both an environmental hazard and a valuable resource. Organic waste management is a critical component of a healthy food system, particularly in areas of rapid residential growth, like Simcoe County. Without attention to soil management, regions risk losing valuable soil nutrients and creating areas unsuitable for agriculture. The Orillia Food Committee has been in correspondence with the Waste Management Advisory Committee to discuss potential collaboration on soil management issues. The two groups look forward to working together in the future by identifying common policy areas. The Food Committee has discussed some potential avenues for good municipal soil management: education around household backyard composting, streamlining access to compost for community gardening groups and removing barriers for restaurants that produce high levels of organic waste.



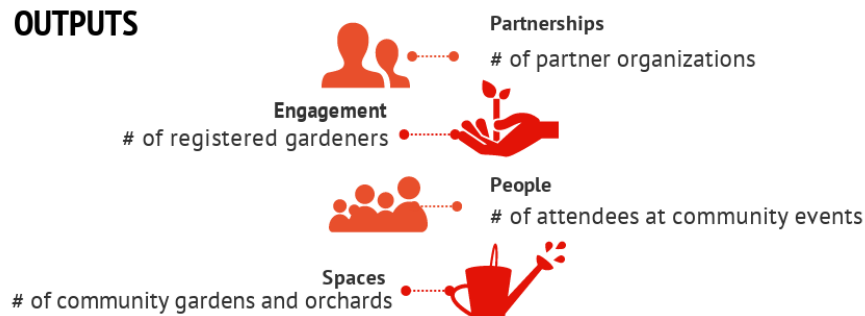
Photo Credit: Markus Spiske

Community Gardening & Orchards

ACTIVITIES

- Review and update Orillia Bylaw 7.1.9.3 – Community Gardens
- Create and maintain partnerships with community stakeholders, including garden associations, child and elder care organizations, emergency food organizations, education institutions
- Engage in community urban agriculture policy development and advocacy

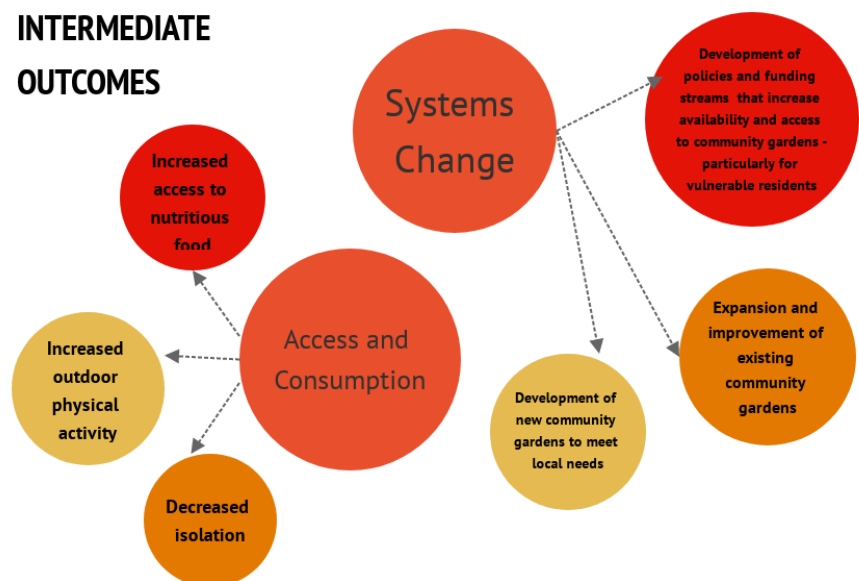
OUTPUTS



SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Awareness	Partnerships	Knowledge/Skills	Food Availability/Accessibility
Greater awareness among decisionmakers of community gardening needs	Formation and strengthening of multi-sector partnerships between the City of Orillia and food/education/care organizations	Improved coping skills in managing food insecurity	Increased affordability of food through supplementation with garden produce
Greater community awareness of community gardening opportunities	Partners are active, invested & committed	Increased awareness of the local food system	Increased production/distribution of food
	Champions emerge & become active in the partnership	Increased knowledge and skills in food production and environmental stewardship	Increased availability of food through location of gardens in high-needs or food apartheid regions

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES



LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Reduced stigma and greater dignity in relation to food access
- Improved overall health and well-being
- Increased community engagement



Food Strategy Development

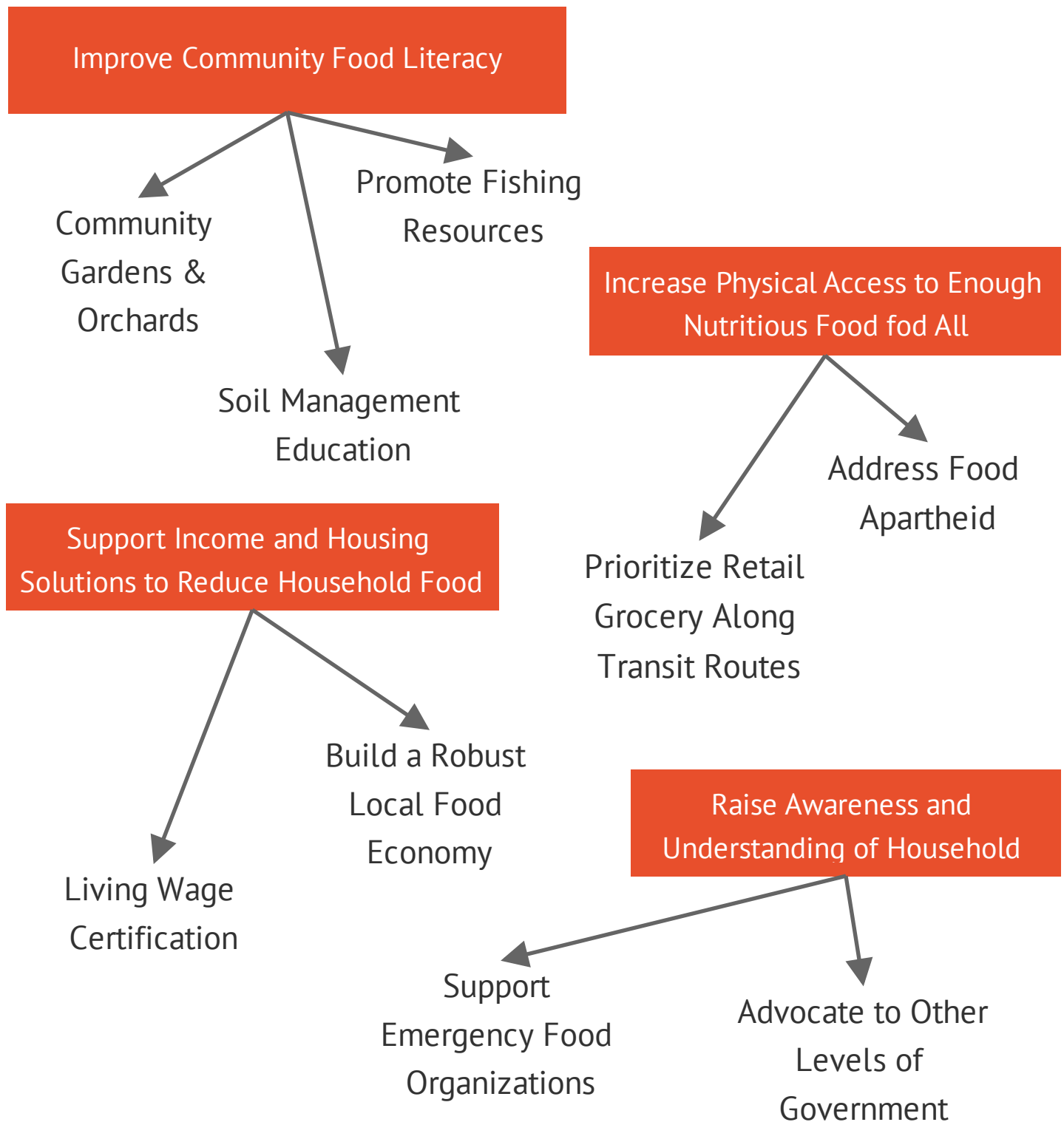
Creating an actionable Food Strategy requires setting practical goals for each food system area presented in the previous section. The Food Committee has created a framework template, a modified version of the Public Health Agency of Canada's food security programming evaluation tool (Newberry & Taylor, 2012).

Image 1, at left, demonstrates the Committee's proposed method for reviewing and amending relevant policies, fostering partnerships and setting program targets. The sample image shows the process that would be undertaken for community gardens and orchards, featured in the first section of this report's food systems review. Other facets of the food system will be evaluated using the same methodology.

Policy Integration



The Food Committee has worked closely with the Simcoe County Food Council since its inception in 2020. At present, two Committee members sit on the Simcoe County Food Council, and constant dialogue is maintained to leverage the two groups' assets and reduce duplication. The diagram below highlights the four strategic priorities of the Simcoe County Food Security Framework and illustrates how they align with the issues identified in this report (Ecoethonomics, 2019).



Household Food Insecurity



"Imagine month after month not having enough money to put food on the table and to pay for rent and other basics like clothing, school supplies, transportation and phone bills. This situation is known as 'food insecurity' – not enough money for food." (Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit, 2017, para. 1)

Orillia's Food System from a Income Perspective

The aspects of the local food environment covered in the above review represent opportunities for the City of Orillia to strengthen its food system. But in a wealthy nation like Canada, the single most immediate barrier to food access is income. Even in a municipality with the most resilient food system, citizens will experience poor health outcomes if they cannot afford to buy food. Therefore, the Committee recognizes that any recommendations included in a Food Strategy prioritize income solutions to food insecurity. In a wage-earning society, job creation means increased income, and many of the topics discussed above could result in more jobs for Orillians. For example, some of the economic benefits mentioned in the section on urban agriculture included increased opportunities for skills development, training and employment. Support of local food businesses has significant economic impacts due to what is known as the 'multiplier effect.' This phenomenon occurs when dollars circulate in the local economy, increasing the region's value with every transaction. To illustrate this, researchers estimate that if every household in Ontario switched just \$10 of their weekly grocery budget to local food, the provincial economy would increase by \$2.4 billion and 10,000 new jobs would be created after one year (Avalon, 2012). Particular attention must be paid to creating food economies with high-quality, full-time jobs to

avoid precarious employment.

Living Wage Cities

Apart from supporting job creation, municipal leaders can act as vital advocates for income equality. The City of Orillia recently stood up for low-income citizens when legislators petitioned the provincial government to become a test site for the Ontario Basic Income Pilot. Along with being a strong voice for income solutions when working with other levels of government, cities can also lead by example. Many Canadian jurisdictions have adopted "living wage designations" to raise employment standards in their region.

The Committee identified several Ontario cities, including Cambridge, Perth and Kingston, that have become certified living wage cities. These municipalities have partnered with non-profit certifying boards to pledge that all civic employees, contractors and affiliated workers will receive fair employee compensation. Unlike a minimum wage, living wage standards are specific to the cost of living in the region, and indexed to inflation. Although these cities cannot dictate what private companies pay their workers, their living wage campaigns have significant impacts on the community. The public service, including contractors, is one of the largest single employers at any level of government. When municipalities pay living wages to all workers, the standard of living for those individuals increases and baseline wages in the region are effectively "brought up."

Budget Considerations

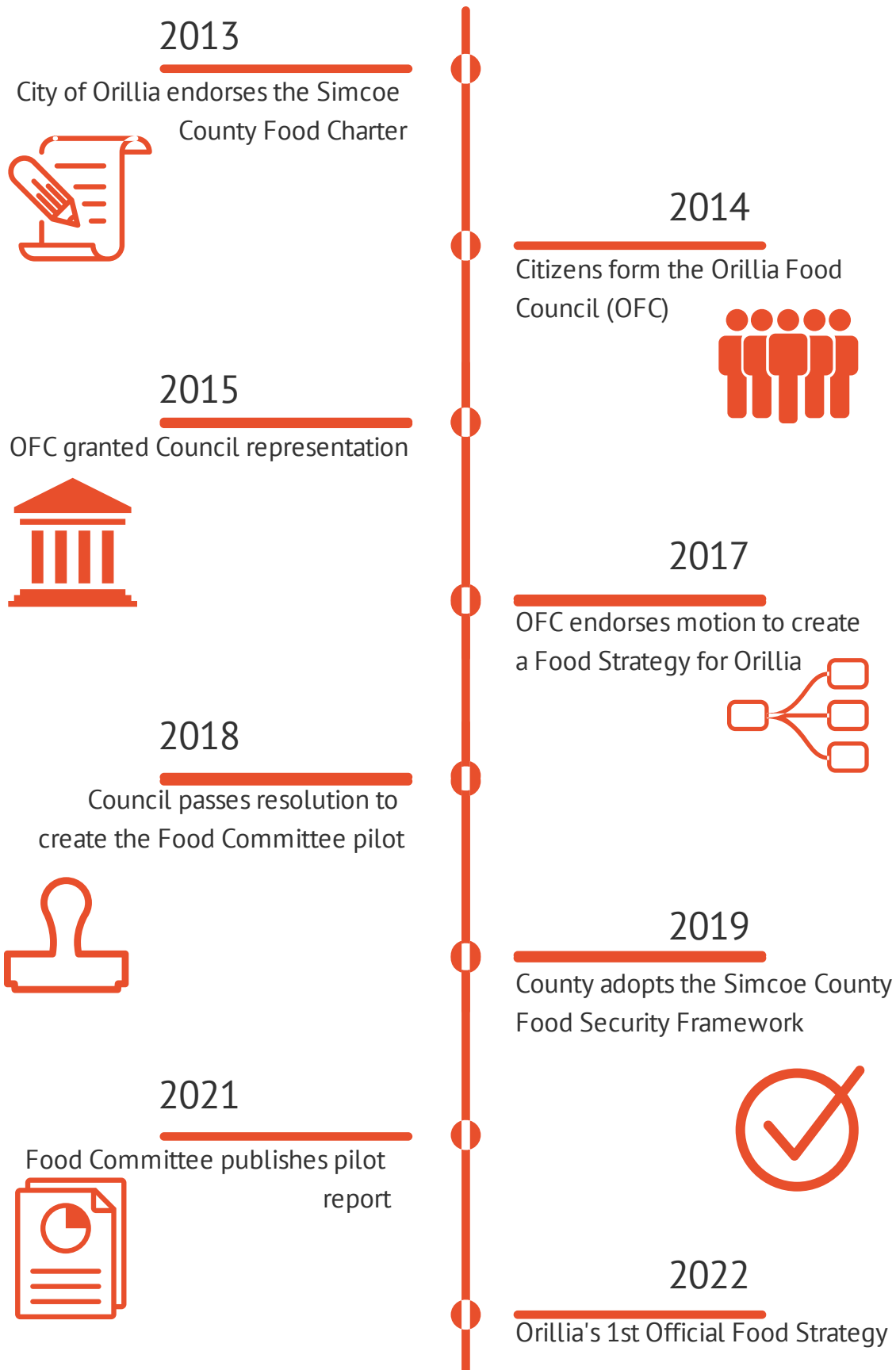
Creating Orillia's first Food Strategy will require a level of investment from the municipality. The Food Committee received invaluable assistance from staff within the Business Development, Culture and Tourism Department throughout the pilot period, and a similar level of support will be necessary to develop further policy. The Committee will need to consult with other City Committees throughout the development process and potentially arrange working tables outside regular committee meetings, and there are minimal staff costs associated with organizing these discussions.

Public consultation will require new money be allocated to the group. Expenses related to holding public meetings, including advertising events, securing appropriate meeting spaces, providing coffee or refreshments and keeping records of the topics discussed all fall under this category. The number of public consultations needed is flexible: the City will benefit from a thorough understanding of food security issues among the population, so it is advisable not to cut corners in this process. However, the Committee is sensitive to budget constraints caused by COVID-19, so is committed to only holding necessary public events.

The Committee entirely took on policy advising and consulting in the pilot period. This was possible because COVID-19 shutdowns resulted in greater availability from some of our members. This report was provided to the city at no charge by Emily Wilson with the help from the committee members with an estimated value of \$4,900+. Please note in subsequent years, the availability of these services will change, and so it is possible that a third-party consultant may need to be considered. Depending on the firm, costs for this type of service run between \$15,000 and \$25,000 over a two-year period. If this amount is prohibitive to the Food Strategy moving forward, the Committee recommends exploring partnerships with Ontario post-secondary institutions with food security departments. Additionally, the Committee recommends strategic make-up of the group's membership, building on some of the lessons learned in the pilot year. With careful planning, the right mix of professionals, academics, and community stakeholders should be able to collaborate with food-security studies faculty and students to produce a Food Strategy at a low cost to the City of Orillia.

A Food Strategy will be a genuine asset for the municipality, as the potential for savings and increased revenues will accompany bringing action to its mandates. As outlined above, this jurisdiction can realize substantial economic benefits through building a solid local food economy. Perhaps more significant are the returns that come from having a healthier population with an increased sense of well-being. Improved mental and physical health outcomes mean lower policing costs, a more productive population and more vibrant public spaces throughout the city. By raising the standard of living in Orillia, the community becomes more valuable to real estate investors and prospective businesses.

Orillia's Food Policy Timeline



Since 2013, the City of Orillia has shown remarkable leadership within Simcoe County by taking a progressive stance on food security. Orillia was the first municipality to have a Food Council, and our current food policy work sets standards for other jurisdictions in the region. The City's investment in the Food Committee pilot has successfully allowed local stakeholders to develop this roadmap toward better outcomes for Orillians. The next step, a Food Strategy, will be a decisive commitment to the health and well-being of all citizens.

Summary

The City of Orillia pledged its continued support to food security and community wellbeing in 2018 when Council passed a motion to undertake a pilot Food Committee project. The committee, made up of academics, public health and non-profit representatives and food-system experts, conducted a review of food security policies and programs currently existing in the City of Orillia. The group identified critical issues that represented either opportunities or barriers to citizens' access to food in the following areas:

- Urban agriculture, including community gardening, public orchards, beekeeping and backyard poultry-keeping
- Fishing on municipal docks and waterways
- Food distribution, focusing on farmers' markets and municipal food procurement
- Local food economy, promoting food tourism and supporting sustainable restaurateurs
- Planning for neighborhoods that contain various food access points accessible on foot
- Responsible soil management that respects the environment and retains valuable agricultural nutrients

Each of these areas was assessed to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. The Committee developed an evaluation framework that can be applied to each policy area to establish key performance indicators and measurable outcomes. Finally, the Committee also assessed the entire municipal food system to determine how best the City of Orilla can support income solutions to household food insecurity.

The pilot research was done on a volunteer basis, with the understanding that the extraordinary public health and economic implications of COVID-19 made contracting a consultant and conducting community consultations impossible. As such, this report serves as a roadmap to a final Food Strategy that would include crucial input from the citizens and other community stakeholders. Orillia's next step in creating a healthy, food-secure population is to establish a permanent Food Committee, which will bring action to the recommendations in this report.

The City of Orillia has both a rich agricultural heritage and an exciting food future. Changing demographics and an ever-expanding population mean that plans laid today will shape the community of tomorrow. The Committee urges Council to continue the trajectory this jurisdiction initiated in 2013, with the signing of the Simcoe County Food and Agricultural Charter. The momentum that was instigated almost a decade ago has never waned, and Orillia has become a food policy leader in Simcoe County and across the province. Establishing a permanent Food Committee which will finalize a Food Strategy will demonstrate a commitment to food security, and to increasing health, equity and prosperity for all citizens.

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