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To: "Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"

Date: 7/31/2026 11:16:28 AM

Subject: Memo – Closing the Gap - Food Systems Funding - RTS 17887 (2026-07-31)

Attachments: ACCS - GM - Memo (Council) - Closing the Gap Food Systems Fundin g - RTS 17887 (2026-07-31).pdf

Dear Mayor and Council,

The attached memo responds to the Council Motion Closing the Gap: Investing in the City of Vancouver's Food System to Increase Food Access and Support a Resilient, Equitable, and Sustainable Food System for [ARTS 17887](#)).

A summary of the key points in the memo are as follows:

- Vancouver's food system is facing challenges, including rising food insecurity, funding and space constraints, and pressures on food recovery initiatives.
- The City currently provides food-related funding through Sustainable Food Systems Grants, School Food Grants, and Social Innovation Food Grants.
- The City also supports 20 non-profit organizations delivering food programming in City-owned spaces.
- Staff are exploring opportunities to strengthen this support including changes to grant program allocations, eligibility, and scope, and piloting an Indigenous Food Sovereignty grant stream.
- Staff will seek direction from Council in early 2027 to confirm prioritization of food systems grants within the overall Community Services grants program.

If you have any further questions, please email me directly and I will provide a response through the weekly Q&A.

Thank you,
Margaret

Margaret Wittgens | she, her

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples

MEMORANDUM

July 31, 2026

TO: Mayor & Council

CC: City Leadership Team
Donny van Dyk, City Manager
Jason Twa, City Clerk
Mellisa Morphy, Acting Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

FROM: Margaret Wittgens
General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Report Back: Closing the Gap: Investing in the City of Vancouver's Food System to Increase Food Access and Support a Resilient, Equitable, and Sustainable Food System for All

RTS #: 17887

PURPOSE

This memo responds to the July 2024 Council motion *Closing the Gap: Investing in the City of Vancouver's Food System to Increase Food Access and Support a Resilient, Equitable, and Sustainable Food System for All* ([RTS 17887](#)). It includes a summary of challenges facing the food systems sector, and status of related work and initiatives.

BACKGROUND

On July 24, 2024, Council passed the *Closing the Gap* motion, directing staff to explore and develop a food systems funding strategy in line with Council's strategic priorities:

- Resolution A directed staff to: (i) examine potential increases to related Social Operating Grants (i.e., Community Services Grants), including the Sustainable Food Systems grant stream; (ii) explore the potential creation of an Indigenous Food Systems grant; and (iii) consider funding or contract mechanisms for initiatives that recover and redirect food from waste; and
- Resolution B directed staff to evaluate space opportunities in City-owned or operated buildings for food-driven non-profits.

Previous Council Direction

Council provides broad direction in the 2023-2026 *Vibrant Vancouver* strategic priorities to support local, sustainable, and equitable food systems. Council has also directed funding for specific initiatives (e.g., Vancouver School Board meal program). Food systems are also

prioritized in the Vancouver Food Strategy ([2013](#)) and Action Plan ([2017](#)), Vancouver Plan (2022), Healthy City Strategy ([2026](#)), and respective food policies in area plans.

DISCUSSION

In response to the Closing the Gap motion:

- Staff conducted needs and opportunities assessments in late 2024 and early 2025. This included surveying current food systems grant recipients, sector-led research, and input from the Vancouver Food Policy Council – an advisory group to Council.
- In 2025 staff developed funding strategy considerations and have advanced early actions within the existing Community Services grants operating budget in 2026.
- Staff will seek direction from Council in early 2027 to confirm prioritization of food systems grants within the overall Community Services grants program.

Further details are provided below.

Assessment of Food Systems Grant Demand and Programs

Existing Grant Programs

The City currently offers three food-focused operating grant streams through the Community Services (Social) grants operating budget. In 2025, these three streams represented approximately 10% of the available overall Community Services grants operating budget of \$6.7M: ¹

- *Sustainable Food Systems Grants*: support networking and program partnerships addressing community food insecurity (\$184,700);
- *School Food Grants*: support school-day meal programs (\$477,126);²
- *Social Innovation Food Grants*: support one-time capacity-building projects (\$40,000).

Other streams of Community Services grants support food-focused organizations including Core Support Grants (if food is central to the organization's mandate) and Small and Medium Capital Grants for infrastructure like kitchens and gardens. The City also provides in-kind grants to enable below market or nominal leases for NPOs in City-owned spaces as described later in this memo.

Despite demand for emergency food provision, the City has historically not funded direct food provision (outside of the school meal program and subsidized meal services at the Carnegie Centre, Evelyn Saller Centre and Gathering Place) as this has been seen as the responsibility of senior government to address through their granting and policy work.

Analysis revealed that demand for food-focused grants is typically three times greater than available funding, similar to other Community Services grant streams. A substantial proportion of food grants are allocated to established programs year over year (e.g., currently \$325K per annum to Vancouver School Board), leaving limited flexible funding.

¹ In 2025, the Community Services (Social) grants operating budget was \$6.7M reflecting a one-time re-allocation of \$1M for Project Hope from the base operating budget of \$7.7M.

² The School Food Grants stream includes \$325,000 in Council-directed funding to the Vancouver School Board.

Grant Funding Considerations

Based on sector feedback and staff assessment, advancing potential increases to food grants could include:

- *Increasing average grant size of Sustainable Food Systems grants* – to adjust to NPO needs and related program objectives;
- *Expanding scope of grant streams* – to include city-wide networks (e.g., food recovery network; demographic-specific food networks) in Sustainable Food Systems grants, and/or to include broader child/youth food education in School Food Grants; and
- *Piloting a new grant stream for Indigenous Food Sovereignty grant* – to provide an opportunity for dedicated funding in alignment with City commitments to reconciliation with Host Nations and urban Indigenous groups.

Early Actions

In line with these considerations, staff have advanced opportunities to increase emphasis on food systems within the existing 2026 grant program when aligned with Council-approved strategies. For example:

- In March 2026, Council approved a \$40,000 increase to Sustainable Food Systems grants within the existing Community Services grants budget, relative to the previous year (from \$184,700 in 2025 to \$223,700 in 2026).
- Staff are exploring feasibility of allocating funding in 2026 and 2027 from the Social Innovation Project Foods grant stream for an Indigenous Food Sovereignty pilot grant; a recommendation will be brought to Council in the Q4 2026 grants report.
- Staff continue to consider non-food-dedicated organizations for opportunities to provide adjacent food systems benefits (e.g., neighbourhood houses).
- Staff also continue to explore provincial and federal funding opportunities that can be disbursed through City-run granting programs.

Staff will be seeking Council direction on priorities for the Community Services Grant Program in early 2027 which will be an opportunity for Council to provide further direction on food systems grant funding within the context of the broader grant program priorities.

Assessment of Food Recovery Opportunities

The third part of resolution A directs staff to look at creating a funding or contract mechanism to support food recovery initiatives. Currently Community Services grants provide only limited support to food recovery initiatives. Staff will bring forward considerations for expansion of funding for food recovery initiatives within the context of Council's direction on grant program priorities in early 2027, as above. Staff also explored other options to support food recovery, including:

- Increasing capacity of food recovery operators and supporting greater industry awareness of available food-recovery services through ongoing partnerships; and
- Continued opportunities to leverage other City processes such as special event permitting and the City's Sustainable and Ethical Procurement Policy to encourage proactive food-recovery planning.

With respect to City operations, staff assess that there is insufficient generation of surplus food within the City's routine food services to warrant food-recovery contracting.

Opportunities Related to City-Owned or Operated Spaces

In alignment with the direction in this motion and on an ongoing basis, staff assess available city-owned or operated spaces against food systems needs and opportunities. Where feasible, staff seek to optimise the use of spaces on non-City sites through space matching and partnerships. Across City-owned properties, staff estimate approximately 50 facilities are leased to social service organizations at below-market rates, and that 20 NPOs provide food programming in City-owned spaces.

In addition, food assets are achieved through land-use policies and programs, such as provisions in large site developments to expand access to suitable and affordable spaces for non-profits. As part of regular work process, staff continually seek opportunities to integrate food systems infrastructure in capital planning and delivery.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will be seeking Council feedback on Community Services grants priorities in early 2027, including food systems funding priorities within the context of overall grant priorities. Staff will continue to progress the City's priorities, programs and opportunities shared above within resources available. Additionally, there are a number of Council motions that align with solutions identified in this memo, which staff will report back to Council on by Q4 2026. This includes motions related to [removing obstacles preventing sustainable food systems](#), and [placekeeping for cultural food assets](#).

FINAL REMARKS

This memo provides a high-level summary of the work completed and underway to address the Council motion for the City's urgent support of, and investment in, Vancouver's food systems sector. If Council requires further information, please feel free to contact me and we will provide response through the weekly Council Q&A.

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