
GUELPH FARMERS' MARKET:

Refreshing Our Local Tradition

Business Plan and Governance Report

Executive Summary

Prepared for

The City of Guelph

Infrastructure Development
and Enterprise Services

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Executive Summary

The Guelph Farmers' Market has operated for almost 200 years and is seen as an important community asset. The current location, formerly a horse barn on Wilson Street, has been the Market's home for over 50 years. The Market operates every Saturday from 7am to 12noon. It has loyal shoppers and dedicated vendors. Thirty-nine (39) of the Market's 112 vendors identify as farmers. Overall, the Saturday farmers' market is successful.

The City manages the Market through a municipal by-law. The last by-law revision was in 2009. In 2017, after hearing concerns from Market vendors and customers about outdated policies and procedures and lack of funding Staff began a review of the Market's by-law, policies, and regulations. Staff established a project team and engaged Philip Powell, a public and farmers' market consultant, and the author of this report.

In 2018, Staff initiated a consultative process entitled *Refreshing Our Local Tradition*. With the input of vendors and shoppers, the Market's vision and mission were reviewed, and five goals were developed. If met, these goals would provide a policy direction and framework for action to address outstanding concerns and ensure the Market's long-term success.

Refreshed Vision

The Guelph Farmers' Market is a dynamic, year-round public market and community cornerstone - the destination of choice for the best products Guelph-Wellington has to offer.

Refreshed Mission

The Guelph Farmers' Market offers a diverse range of quality farm-fresh and local foods, unique art and craft and friendly personal service. A community cornerstone in the heart of Guelph since 1827, the Market supports the farmers and the economy of Guelph-Wellington while promoting sustainability and healthy living.

Goals

1. **DIVERSE RANGE OF QUALITY LOCAL AND FARM-FRESH FOODS, UNIQUE ART AND CRAFT**
2. **FRIENDLY, PERSONAL SERVICE**
3. **A COMMUNITY CORNERSTONE IN THE HEART OF GUELPH**
4. **SUPPORT THE FARMERS AND THE ECONOMY OF GUELPH-WELLINGTON**
5. **PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY AND HEALTHY LIVING**

Challenges

The Market ***only operates for 5 hours on 52 days of the year***. Yet, it requires a dedicated facility and financial subsidization. For the remaining 313 days of the year the building is closed. Vendors only pay a basic fee (average of \$43 per booth) on Market

days, yet are permitted to leave their equipment year-round, preventing other uses. The Market Building is relatively small (11,400 square feet) with 50% required for customer circulation and only 50% available as rentable space.

This operating reality is why the Market has been minimally managed by the City for many years. There is not enough revenue to address the operating issues, outdated policies and procedures and staffing challenges.

The City of Guelph should be commended for its dedication to the farmers' market tradition. And the citizens of Guelph are to be credited for their strong support of the Market and its vendors. Market research undertaken for the review indicates that 46% of Market shoppers come every week, year-round. The Market's total sales are estimated at between \$4.5 and \$5 million with an economic impact of between \$13.5 and \$15 million. The Market has a very good mix of vendors with 39 (35%) identifying as farmers.

As successful as the Saturday farmers' market is, there is no way to make it operationally or financially viable. Adding additional market days is likely to spread the same sales out over a longer period of time while increasing operating costs. Vendors and farmers have other retail outlets and are not likely to participate at the Market on other days of the week. Other municipalities including Kitchener, Cambridge and Welland struggle with the same operating reality. A dedicated building has significant fixed operating costs that cannot be recovered with a one day a week market.

Unless the City of Guelph is prepared to subsidize the Market operation to a much greater degree it is not possible to implement the goals of the business plan. Even if more money and staff were allocated to the Market, the result would be the same: a dedicated building operating one day a week.

Many cities have found themselves in this situation. Over the years their markets have been over-regulated and under-managed. They have lost sight of their mission to serve their communities. Market vendors have become the dominant stakeholders protecting their vested interests (seniority rights, product quotas, low rents) rather than the interests of shoppers and citizens.

In the last twenty years municipalities have been exploring other governance models that provide more responsive, innovative and entrepreneurial management for their markets. Options include public-private partnerships, municipal service corporations and non-profit corporations.

Opportunities and Recommendations

The City of Guelph and Wellington County have an emerging opportunity through the Our Food Future initiative, to explore an innovative and strategic partnership to expand on the success of the Saturday farmers' market. The Building and grounds hold tremendous potential to be the focus of local food and business incubation for Guelph-Wellington on multiple days of the week.

Local production and buying supports local economies and has a positive impact on the environment. Covid-19 identified issues in global supply chains that drove shoppers to search for locally produced food. Guelph Farmers' Market shoppers said buying fresh local food was the main reason they come to the Market. Ninety-three (93%) of shoppers said it is important to buy fruit and vegetables directly from the farmer that grew them. These same shoppers would be interested in other local food related activities and events at and around the Market.

It is recommended that:

- 1. the City approve the Market's refreshed Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives to ensure the continued success of the Saturday farmers' market, and***
- 2. explore opportunities with the Our Food Future project collaborators to identify an existing or new non-profit corporation to operate the Market and program the Building and grounds on other days of the week with a focus on local food and business incubation for Guelph-Wellington.***

Ideally, the partner would be a non-profit corporation with a vision and mission that align with the Market's. It would operate the Saturday farmers' market based on the Market's Vision and Mission and be guided by the policies and procedures that have been developed with stakeholder input. The partner would have the opportunity to program the Building and grounds on other days of the week. The City would continue to own and maintain the historic Building's structure and have oversight of its use by way of a headlease.

This arrangement has the potential to be a win-win for the City of Guelph, the Guelph Farmers' Market, the local food movement and the economy of Guelph-Wellington. It would also ensure the continuation of the Market's almost 200-year tradition of being a community gathering place.