

Memorandum

TO: Honorable Whatcom County Council
Honorable Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

FROM: Riley Sweeney, Chair, Whatcom County Food System Committee

DATE: August 28, 2023

RE: ARPA Dollars for Food Security Project

At the March 21st County Council meeting this year, the Whatcom County Food Bank Network requested ARPA dollars to sustain their operations in the face of dramatically increased need. The Council discussed ways to increase the sustainability of our local food system in addition to providing one-time support.

County Executive Satpal Sidhu recommended that in addition to funding the Food Bank Network, the county allocates funds to some of the food security initiatives outlined in the Food System Plan. The Food System Committee is grateful for the support of our County's Food Banks, as this is explicitly one of the action items in the plan (4.3.1). And The Committee has a proposal for the remaining allocated funds to have a longer term impact on food security.

The East Whatcom Regional Resource Center (EWRRRC), located in a USDA-designated food desert, has a kitchen. The kitchen, in its current state, is not eligible to be certified as a full commercial kitchen. With a few minor upgrades, it could be certified and expand services and functionality in a food insecure community.

The Foothills Community Food Partnership, a coalition of food security subject matter experts in East Whatcom, have identified the certification of a commercial kitchen as one of their priorities in the [Foothills Food Access Plan](#) (FFAP). The FFAP was created through robust community input in 2020 and was used to inform the Food System Plan.

The EWRRRC is a pillar in the East Whatcom community and is host to a roster of activities, such as SNAP education cooking and nutrition classes, the Kendall Senior Center, monthly Community Meals, Kids Dayz of Summer, is the site of Head Start. It is also proximal to the Foothills Food Bank, which could benefit from having a processing facility for farmers and food recovery groups nearby. All of these activities have a food component and are limited in their operations without a certified commercial kitchen.

The proposed project would allocate \$150,000 to add a fire suppression system, additional sinks to comply with the Whatcom County Health and Community Services guidelines, equipment to broaden the commercial scale of kitchen use, and an after-hours security system.

This is a County facility, therefore the project would be administered by the Whatcom County Parks Department through their standard process.

Upgrading the EWRRC kitchen aligns with several food security actions in the Food System Plan including:

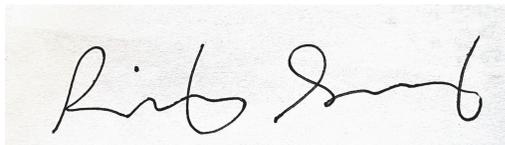
- 4.1.5 Collaborate with community groups to mitigate the impacts of and eliminate the causes of food deserts.
- 4.1.7 Explore opportunities for more commercial kitchens and cold storage available for community groups addressing food access and food recovery (i.e., food banks, homeless services, neighborhood groups).
- 4.1.8 Direct county parks and recreation department to explore upgrades to the Senior Center kitchen facilities to increase the capacity of the Senior Meals program; explore opportunities for shared use of these facilities with other community groups addressing food access.
- 4.2.2 Increase support for community educational programs for gardening, seed banking, cooking, and food preservation; focus efforts on low-income/low-access areas in the county.
- 4.3.6 Support universal school meals, including summer meal programs, that are nutrient-dense and in-line with the principles in this food system plan.
- 4.4.3 Fund and expand the food recovery program.

A kitchen upgrade would also allow for local growers to process their food for the commercial market and for cottage industry producers to have a certified space to work in. This aligns with the food economy goals in the Food System Plan:

- 3.1.2 Create and expand the network of shared-use kitchens and processing facilities for food businesses, food producers, and retailers.
- 3.1.7 Remove barriers to and support the development of additional food distribution and processing centers in the county.
- 3.2.1 Increase local food procurement for county departments and county-subsidized facilities and programs (such as childcare and senior meal programs).

This kitchen would be utilized by several different groups in the East Whatcom community. With a minimal, one-time investment from the County, this Kitchen would improve food security for a key area of our community. This is in alignment with the goals of ARPA and the Food System Plan.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Riley Sweeney".

Riley Sweeney
Food System Committee Chair