

MEMO

TO: MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MAYOR, Elinor Carbone

DATE: June 15, 2023

RE: Small Cities Loan – Friendly Hands Food Bank

On April 5, 2000, The City of Torrington and Friendly Hands Food Bank Inc. (FHFB) entered into an Agreement to utilize \$133,300 of the City's Small Cities' Grant Funds authorized under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-383) to purchase the building at 50 King Street, complete renovations and support operational costs for up to one year to establish a Food Bank. Of the total loan of \$133,300 only \$94,500 of the funds were used for the purchase of the property. The balance of the funds were used for food bank upgrades and operating expenses. The terms of the loan were 0% interest and no payment of principal was required as long as FHFB continued to provide food services.

The performance measures that were built into the terms of the loan were clearly defined and by all accounts have been met over the past 23 years. In fact, FHFB, far exceeded the annual requirement of providing food for 500 persons in the first year of its existence and the most recent census of individuals/families served by FHFB has reached over 5,000 monthly. FHFB is filling a critical need in the community and the region. It is beyond our comprehension what we would have done without this valued resource during, and in these post-pandemic years.

As you can imagine, the extraordinary need that is being served out of the 3,231 square feet of building space on a short street that was never intended to support the hundreds of cars and foot traffic the food bank has attracted has far surpassed its capacity. Each food distribution brings its own set of complications that require traffic controls. Neighbors on this residential street have been inconvenienced by blocked driveways and traffic jams that impede access to their homes.

The President of the Board of Directors, Danny Hartnett and Executive Director, Karen Thomas, recently reached out to the city to share that they recognize the urgent need to expand and relocate their facility. With the recent enactment of the CIF2030 grant funds for priority districts, FHFB is well positioned to apply for funds that will assist in property acquisition, retrofitting to expand and enhance a user-friendly food bank that will preserve the dignity of the individuals that rely on this resource. The site that they have selected will alleviate the imposition of the line-up of vehicles on a public road and allow for a more sustainable business model. Of course, property acquisition is only possible if the grant is awarded, so they are not at liberty to publicly disclose the location at this time.

After consultation with the Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development, Dan Farley, Treasurer of the City of Torrington and Corporation Counsel Victor Muschell, we have been assured that the City of Torrington (City Council, upon recommendation of the Small City's Committee) has the authority to "make the loan repayable or forgivable".

To strengthen their CIF application, FHFB is proposing to provide matching funds from the sale of its property at 50 King Street to offset the cost of purchasing and upgrading the new location. In light of the continued and growing need for a food bank, and as a gesture of support of their expansion and enhancement, I am recommending the council (in accordance with the recommendation of its Small Cities Committee) authorize the release of the city's lien on the 50 King Street property at the time of the sale of the property. The value attached to this lien can be considered a contribution of "other funds" in the FHFB grant application; further demonstrating to the State that this agency and the city are working together to address food insecurity in Torrington.