

Report: Round Table Discussion on the Ontario Food Terminal

On June 17th, community groups, workers, and various BIA representatives came together to discuss the future of the Ontario Food Terminal (OFT). The OFT is an important economic hub that provides employment, ensures the sustainability of local small businesses, and allows access to quality produce at fair prices.

The Ontario government is reviewing the future of the Ontario Food Terminal and we have heard of the potential sale of the land to developers for condominiums.

Bhutila's Bill

Bhutila introduced Bill 127, the Ontario Food Terminal Protection Act, in the Legislature to amend the Planning Act to designate the lands on which the OFT is situated and the prescribed surrounding lands as a provincially significant employment zone. The Bill, if passed, would provide protection for these lands for employment and prevents the sale of the land for other purposes, such as for housing.

Guest Speakers

Randy Barba – Save the OFT community organization

- On 2 separate occasions, despite the City of Toronto asking for the OFT land to be designated as a Provincially Significant Employment Zone (PSEZ), the Ontario government has refused, effectively making the land easier to rezone for other developments.
- For every \$1 invested into the OFT, it translates to over \$3 injected to the Ontario economy, with no cost to the taxpayer, since no public money is invested into the Food Terminal.
- The OFT exists in an area right now where demand necessitates it, both in terms of employment and supply.

The rippling impact from the potential closure of the OFT is massive. **This is about jobs, small businesses and affordability.**

Jobs

- The OFT is home to:
 - 600+ growers
 - 21 wholesalers
 - 1500 local employees
 - 150,000 indirect jobs across the province

Businesses

- The OFT has over 5,000 registered buyers
- Everyone from corner stores, to florists, to independent businesses and restaurants to charities and not-for-profits to food processors take advantage of the OFT, many of whom are members of the Parkdale–High Park community

Affordability

- OFT keeps prices low, and has a range of products with varying qualities and abundant options

Lobsang Khedup – Worker and union steward at the OFT

- The OFT represents a 60+ year old tree that has its roots all over Ontario and Quebec, supplying produce and reaching consumers across provinces
- While the majority of workers are from the Parkdale—High Park riding, there are workers who are coming from as far as Niagara Falls, and while there are many young workers, there are equally the same number of seniors who have worked at the OFT for 30 to 40 years
- Everyone—from owners to customers to workers—are worried about the uncertainty of the OFT's future

Action items you came up with

- Speak with small businesses about the importance of the OFT and the role the OFT plays in their businesses
- Encourage people to pay closer attention to food supply
- Host neighborhood forums to discuss how the OFT's fate would impact people from different backgrounds
- Mobilize community groups to offer solidarity to those impacted, and work together to organize
- Use this issue as an opportunity to further public dialogue about urban farming, and address the issue of food scarcity in urban areas
- Circulate petitions, canvass, and organize meetings for all affected and those passionate about this issue.