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November 21, 2011

Mayor Lee Leffingwell,
Austin City Council Members
301 West Second Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, and Council Members,

The Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) recommends changes to the draft Imagine Austin document so that the comprehensive plan will attain the goal of serving as a vital tool for creating a more livable, connected and sustainable city where "... the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all." Food and agriculture benchmarks in cities with similar goals and careful review of the current plan show that Austin must prioritize the creation of a just and community-based regional food system by increasing the visibility of food and farming throughout the plan and ensuring that specific criteria and indicators are added to the filters included for allocating staff and resources. Austin can only genuinely move toward our professed vision of sustainability, social equity and economic opportunity if a strong local food system forms a primary piece of the city's foundation.

Therefore, the board recommends the following:

- Rename *Building Block* - change **Society** to **Health, Food Systems, and Quality of Life**.
- Include related *Element* – add **Food Systems** as an element under that building block.
- Incorporate food in *Complete Community Matrix* under **Livable** and **Values People**:
 - Livable – Access to **fresh food** and community amenities.
 - Values People – **Access to fresh food**.
- Include food system-related *Criteria* and *Indicators* in *Complete Community Elements* - **Livable, Interconnected and Mobile, Values People, Prosperous, Natural and Sustainable**.
- Clarify/expand related *Policies* and *Actions* – include attached proposed language in **Land Use, Economy, City Facilities and Services, Conservation and Environmental Resources, and Society** (or the proposed **Health, Food Systems, and Quality of Life**).
- Incorporate above food-system related policies and actions in related *Priority Programs* or add a program – **Create an Accessible and Sustainable Local Food System**.

The SFPB will make the Planning Commission and Citizen Advisory Task Force aware of these recommendations as the next step in the Imagine Austin process, having already given this feedback to Imagine Austin staff when the plan was presented to the board in late September.

The board appreciates the mammoth task that Imagine Austin planners have undertaken and the inherent difficulty in ensuring that such a plan represent the perspectives and expertise of diverse stakeholders. To that end, we will share recent community input the board collected during a participatory community engagement meeting and survey. Additionally, given the regional context of food systems, the process should incorporate widespread support for sustainable food production as demonstrated in the July 2011 bond polling of 600 likely Travis County voters that resulted in 76.2% selecting "Protecting locally grown food sources in Travis County" as a priority for land conservation.

Policymakers working at all levels of government have begun to recognize the critical role that food systems planning, and related policy and initiatives, play in achieving livable, vibrant and socially equitable communities. To emphasize the importance of sustainable food systems, professional organizations such as the American Planning Association have recently published related briefings and guidance for planners. Moreover, the cities of Portland, Seattle, Madison, Baltimore, San Francisco, Cleveland, and Chicago are leading the integration of sustainable and local food policy in their comprehensive plans, while also connecting these efforts to regional and food-specific plans, initiatives, and policy packages. These efforts weave together the underlying principles of city and regional planning, connecting environmental sustainability, local economic development, social equity, and access. Attached find excerpts from a best practices report with some excellent models (full report available upon request).

Austin's comprehensive plan aims for a laudable vision by 2030, which can be reached only by planning for, and putting resources toward a strong, accessible and just food system. The members of the SFPB will assist city policymakers, staff, the Planning Commission and the Imagine Austin Citizen Advisory Task Force, as well as stakeholders, in bringing Austin to the forefront of city-led food system planning efforts.

Sincerely,



Paula J. McDermott
Chairperson
Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board

Enclosures (2): Proposed Comp. Plan Policies and Actions; Excerpt – Best Practices for City-Sponsored Sustainable Food Planning

cc: Marc Ott, City Manager
Bert Lumberras, Assistant City Manager
Greg Guernsey, Director, Planning and Development Review Department
Garner Stoll, Assistant Director, Comprehensive Planning
Austin Planning Commission Members
Imagine Austin Citizens Advisory Task Force Members
Vince Cobalis, Executive Liaison
Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer
Jake Stewart, Sustainable Urban Agriculture Coordinator
Sherri Fleming, Travis County Executive