

# **Austin Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board**

## **Report of the Imagine Austin Work Group**

**June, 2012**

The Imagine Austin (IA) Working Group was established by unanimous vote at the Sustainable Food Policy Board Meeting held March 28, 2011.

Its purpose was: to review the Imagine Austin process and current plans, to invite participation and ensure representation in each of the 7 work groups.

Participants were expected to voice the importance of sustainable local agriculture and of access to healthy food for Austin residents across all income and geographical areas as it specifically relates to each comprehensive plan working group. The targeted outcome was high priority food related objectives on the final working plan for each group.

The original timeline ran from April 2010 to August 2011, however, work continued until April 2012. Reports were provided to SFPB bi-monthly, with a letter of support provided to the City Council in April, 2012, and adoption of the final comprehensive plan by the City Council in June of 2012.

### **Background**

On March 22, 2009 the Sustainable Food Policy Board convened a *Meeting in a Box* in order to participate in the original stakeholder input. Individuals also participated in the online survey. However, when the resulting framework was shared, any mention of sustainable food, agriculture, community gardens, and the local food economy were disappointingly missing. The entire category of 'good food for all' was missing. Planners pointed out that food was implicitly included under public health issues ("nutrition"). The SFPB felt that food and the underlying food economy should be made more explicit in the comprehensive plan and could be done without straying from stakeholders' original priorities.

### **Activities of the Imagine Austin Work Group**

The Imagine Austin Work Group activities included:

- Recruiting stakeholder input for any and all community forums (Phase 1, 2, and 3) and online surveys through:
  - Email announcements;
  - Personal conversations; and
  - One house party in east Austin.

- Attendance as individuals in various community forums and through any opportunity to use the on-line format of participation;
- National related best practices and benchmark research and analysis;
- Item-by-item analysis of the framework to look for implied mention of access and food system issues that could be made explicit (see Appendix A);
- Participation in meetings of the Imagine Austin sub-committee of the Planning Commission and the Citizens Advisory Task Force;
- Advising City Council of SFPB concerns based on working group input via a letter dated 21 November 2011 (Appendix B);
- Assistance provided to city planners with integrating input into the existing framework and priority programs and in compiling metrics and language for the “Healthy Austin” Program;
- A letter to the Planning Commission outlining work group proposed changes to the Imagine Austin plan (Appendix C); and
- A letter to the City Council from the full Board dated 23 April 2011 voicing support for the final form of the Imagine Austin comprehensive plan (Appendix D).

The IA Work Group provided best practices from other cities, examples of sustainable food being included in amended plans, and made a proposal to the city planners that all aspects of sustainable food be included in the plan. On Nov 22, 2010, these materials were shared with the Sustainable Food Policy Board, along with city planning staff and council representatives (Appendix A). The suggestions were carefully vetted and processed through the system. Any changes that could be included in the existing framework (i.e. they were aligned with original stakeholder intent but were only implied) were included. Any new policy suggestions from the work group which could not reasonably be found in the original framework intentions were not included (Appendix E). In addition, the Work Group’s suggestion to change the name of the “Society” building block to “Health, Food Systems, and Quality of Life” to clarify the nature of the entire building block, also was not accepted.

Over the course of 14 months the Imagine Austin Work Group recruited and participated in community forums and through online dialogue, and met with city planners to fully understand the proposed process. Members also provided technical assistance to city staff and the Planning Commission and the Citizens Advisory Task Force, with the goal of including the full breadth of contributions to sustainability as envisioned in the plan. The local food economy, increased access to healthy, local food, support for local farmers and conservation of natural resources required to raise local food all are in alignment with the five core principles: 1) become a compact, connected city; 2) provide paths to prosperity for all; 3) embrace the natural world; 4) grow a healthy, affordable city; and 5) live within our resources.

## **Success**

The final comprehensive plan includes explicit reference to food, farmers, sustainable agriculture, community gardens, family farms, healthy nutrition, and the local food economy (see Appendix F).

The Imagine Austin Work Group has a great deal of admiration for the dedicated professionals who shepherded this process on behalf of the City of Austin. In addition, we are proud of the amount of the active participation, time, and resources provided by our fellow citizens, whether through planning activities or as members of advisory boards and committees. Finally, we are especially grateful to Heather Nieto Frambach, a UT student in regional planning, who did extensive research and support work to help us all look beyond Austin's city limits in considering possible solutions (Appendices G-H).

The Sustainable Food Policy Board is well satisfied with the final product and indicated such to the City Council in the letter dated 23 April, 2012 (Appendix D). Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan was adopted by the City Council on 15 June, 2012.

### **Imagine Austin Work Group Members:**

- Michele Murphy-Smith
- Paula McDermott
- Katherine Nicely
- Heather Nieto Frambach
- Shirene Garcia
- Jake Stewart

June 25, 2012

# **Austin Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board**

## **Imagine Austin Work Group**

### **Appendices**

**Appendix A:** IA Work Group's item-by-item analysis of the Imagine Austin framework compiling a list of instances of implied mention of access and food system issues;

**Appendix B:** SFPB's letter to City Council outlining concerns with the Imagine Austin framework dated 21 November 2011;

**Appendix C:** A letter to the Planning Commission outlining work group proposed changes to the Imagine Austin plan dated 28 March 2012;

**Appendix D:** Letter to the Mayor and City Council dated 23 April 2012;

**Appendix E:** Itemized staff responses to specific SFPB recommendations;

**Appendix F:** Items in the final Imagine Austin Plan relating to food and the food economy;

**Appendix G:** Presentation on best planning practices for food - provided by Heather Frambach Nieto to the SFPB and attending staff October 23, 2011; and

**Appendix H:** Best Practices for City Sponsored Sustainable Food Planning Report prepared by Heather Frambach Nieto for the SFPB and City Council.