



Food Security Stakeholders Meeting

Food Security in the Community Health Improvement Plan

February 4, 2013; 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Communities in Schools, 3000 South IH-35, Austin, TX 78704
Second Floor Community Room

Meeting Goals:

- 1) Enhance awareness of food security issues identified through Community Health Assessment process,
- 2) Enhance awareness of overarching goals, objectives and strategies to address issues/needs, and
- 3) Identify potential partners and initial action steps for the Access to Healthy Foods section of the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

Attendance: Altogether, 62 individuals representing a variety of organizations attended the meeting. A list of participants will be forwarded with the meeting follow-up.

Introductions and Welcome: Meeting participants introduced themselves and their organizations. Paula McDermott, Chair of the Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB), provided an overview of the commission which is co-appointed by the City Council of Austin and Travis County's Commissioners Court. She indicated that there are opportunities to serve on the board especially representing more rural areas of the county. The SFPB would also like to encourage more public engagement with the board as they proceed with their work. For more information, visit <http://www.austintexas.gov/sfpb>.

Presentation on Community Health Assessment and Access to Healthy Foods: Shannon Jones and Veena Viswanathan from the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department (A/TC HHSD) gave an overview of the Community Health Assessment (CHA) with a particular focus on the section related to Access to Healthy Foods. Jones presented key findings. To access the full CHA report, visit http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/CHA-CHIP/cha_report_Dec2012.pdf. The presentation will be forwarded with the follow-up to the meeting.

Overview of Goal, Objectives, Strategies, and Performance Measures: Shannon Jones, along with CHIP Core Team and Workgroup Facilitators Lawrence Lyman (Travis County Health and Human Services & Veterans Services) and Becky Pastner (St. David's Foundation) discussed the Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Performance Measures of the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). The CHIP document will be forwarded to participants with the meeting follow-up.

Three objectives fall under the Goal: **All in our community have reasonable access to affordable quality nutritious food.** They are:

Objective 2.1: Increase access to and participation of eligible people in food assistance programs that increase access to healthy foods.

Objective 2.2: Ensure that two new distribution and production points for healthy food are available and accessible in each of the five high need areas.

Objective 2.3: All local municipalities will establish a healthy food zone ordinance around schools municipal parks, child care centers, libraries, and recreation centers.

Facilitators led stakeholders in a discussion related to the CHIP Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Performance Measures. Discussion topics included

- There was some concern that CHA does not address the issue of people who have difficulties obtaining food due to income (SNAP enrollment etc. is one way CHA will be addressing this.) There are other communities that have done some work in developing healthy food zones. Representatives indicated that more information about research that was done can be sent out to the distribution list for this meeting. Model healthy food zone ordinance information was also provided in handouts.
- Participants expressed concern that low-income residents don't always know what "healthy food" is. Representatives indicated that the work group has discussed this topic, and the issue was addressed in part through strategy 2.2.4. There is an opportunity for today's participants to suggest activities needed to meet objectives and strategies on the worksheet provided to participants.
- A participant commented that education is implied in policy efforts of CHA (e.g. farmers markets, etc. are completely healthy choices and their expansion naturally helps people to make healthier choices). CHA found that households in the areas of need can best be reached at food stores to receive education about healthy foods. CHA/CHIP explored nutritional information at distribution points including restaurants and other places people get food. Representatives stressed that objectives and strategies that CHIP has outlined are just a portion of what several community partners are already working on.
- A stakeholder raised a question related to the manner in which housing programs fit into this plan. This is important in locating farmers markets and community gardens which provide avenues for access and education in addition to venues that can be located on city land. Foundation communities/HACA was noted as a good potential partner for this as well. CHA/CHIP leaders are concerned about level of involvement in this process from private industries, particularly full-service grocery store providers.
- Are there things coming down the pipeline from the state and federal level that CHA/CHIP leaders should be aware of as they proceed into implementation? Staff would appreciate feedback from any experts that might have such information. Facilitators explained that this is the beginning of a process. What we have is what the process has produced so far, but this is an on-going process. For the beginning phase, these are the strategies that leaders plan to focus on. As time goes on leaders may add strategies as critical needs become apparent.
- A question was raised related to data gathering. Facilitators explained that, as leaders build capacity around this effort, they hope to have the staff to provide this data and make it accessible to the community on a routine basis. The City of Austin (and hopefully other partners) will secure additional resources for this process over the next few years, though this does not necessarily guarantee funding for it. Strategies were developed with the thought that

they could be realistically implemented to some extent regardless of whether additional resources can be secured.

Discussion on Potential Partners and Initial Activities/Action Steps: Filip Gecic of A/TC HHSD led stakeholders in a discussion of potential partners and additional activities/action steps. Feedback related to each objective included:

Objective 2.1:

- Capital Area Food Bank has a goal of increasing SNAP enrollment, and they are experiencing funding reductions currently. The organization serves 21 counties. SNAP enrollment is an easy way to increase the income of low-income households. Potential activity could be a mobile van that helps people to enroll in more rural areas. The Dove Springs community is an example of an area where the food bank sends representatives into the community because transportation is a challenge. The City of Austin has committed to increasing SNAP enrollment, has been working with community members and has found that enrollment sites are limited in Travis County, but there are initiatives such as the Texas Benefit Bank and HHSC which have tools to help non-profits conduct enrollment. Some people have resistance to SNAP enrollment, as they feel that the benefits are not worth the hassle. This indicates that education about shopping healthy on a limited budget is an important component, as is easing the enrollment process. There are some matching benefits programs at farmers markets. There is a hope that this will become more widespread and this would make SNAP benefits more worthwhile. Austin Energy is also working to provide utility discounts to people enrolled in SNAP.
- Stakeholders suggested connecting to the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan and its Healthy Austin priority program. In order to ensure connectivity, the land use code update as part of Imagine Austin is important to sync with this effort as well. Facilitators explained that CHA/CHIP leaders have engaged Imagine Austin in the process so far.
- Superior Healthplan provides food market gift cards to new members to give their participants a first experience with the farmers markets so they can see the affordability. They have found that this has not been enough to raise interest, and that more education is needed to help people know what the resources are available (from benefits programs to programs that more immediately increase food security).

Objective 2.2:

- There are no full-service grocery stores in the most eastern parts of Travis County. This is particularly significant because these are also the areas of the county that are beginning to see increases in low-income households. There were suggestions for visual gap analysis of grocery stores, community gardens etc., as well as a demonstration of the current demand for groceries.

- Participants expressed a need to partner with private organizations, Community Housing Development Corporations (CHDOs) and Foundation Communities. CHDOs are working on rooftop gardens, and private developers can be encouraged to do the same. TXDOT is working on efforts to smooth connections over I-35 which may help to address the east/west divide. The City development process could incentivize rooftop gardens, etc. Grocery distributors based locating to some extent on number of rooftops (which we anticipate has increased greatly in recent years), available infrastructure and land – they also look for incentives from municipalities. Participants asked: how can the city work with other municipalities to incentivize grocers? There was a suggestion to explore what kind of incentives full-service grocers need. Facilitators indicated that a report on this should be coming out in March.
- It was pointed out that very few organizations represented at the meeting serve Manor and Del Valle which are in the most vulnerable areas of the county that were identified.
- It was also mentioned that, on February 20th, an event is being scheduled to discuss food deserts and will have maps created with civil engineers. That information can be distributed to the group. There is a cost to attend the event.

Objective 2.3:

- Facilitators indicated that they will work to make healthy foods more available and make unhealthy foods more difficult to access. School health advisory councils should be a partner in this area. Other school advisory councils beyond AISD should be engaged as well.
- Active transportation would be an important component of any new farmers markets/community gardens/full-service grocery stores that are created. It was suggested that public/private partnerships with grocery stores could subsidize a certain amount of the food – this could help people to make healthier food choices within the stores. It was pointed out that the stores simply being there does not increase healthy eating habits. The importance of teaching kids the cycle of food through gardening, cooking habits, eating food that is prepared was stressed (see UT elementary school as an example). Participants reiterated that school gardens are an important tool.
- Access within neighborhoods is just as important as access at public sites such as schools/workforce centers/rec centers, etc. The Sustainable Food Center has found success in building capacity for communities to create food sources for themselves (what do people in the community really want to pursue? What food distribution points would they prefer? Are they interested in community gardens or other programs that residents themselves can run?) Austin Interfaith and Marathon Kids were mentioned as potential partners.
- Land preservation is an important consideration in this, including land preservation for farming purposes. Urban Roots Farm is willing to partner to expand neighborhood farm stands in at-need areas. The organization does not have the resources to do community outreach to best locate the farm stands; organizations with this information could help inform their service

locating to make it more impactful. Urban Roots was given as an example of a type of program that would be good to implement outside of the City of Austin, given that they do youth growing, farming, etc. The importance of capacity-building in rural areas was mentioned. Facilitators asked stakeholders to keep in mind that some of these things will be long-term projects for the CHIP and not necessarily things that can be immediately implemented.

- A participant asked: Do the Housing Authority of the City of Austin and private Section 8 providers have any kind of commitment to ensuring access to healthy foods on their campuses? The CHDO roundtable would be a good place for this conversation to occur – the broad group could create broad policies that could be floated to individual properties to be adopted and revised as needed. The Rebekah Baines Johnson Center redevelopment and Rosewood Courts Rosewood Choice Neighborhood Program are two important projects to keep in mind for this. The Go! Austin/Vamos! Austin-Dove Springs initiative sponsored by the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation is an effort to watch in terms of community engagement and strategies.

Additional Individual Feedback: Meeting participants provided additional ideas, comments, and suggestions for potential partners and activities or strategies via written forms at the end of the meeting. Major points are summarized below:

- **Healthy Eating Education:** HEB was given as an example of a grocery store that provides information and education related to healthy eating. Their HEB Buddy markers identify healthy options and coordinate recipes with sale prices. Other stakeholders suggested additional groups or in-store demonstrations related to healthy food preparation. Whole Foods was mentioned as an organization currently doing this. Participants also noted the need to incentivize healthy eating, possibly through a public/private partnership. Health Start was mentioned as a program providing healthy-eating education. Providing low-cost, healthy eating information in utility bills was mentioned. Stakeholders also suggested working with financial entities to provide information and tips on budgeting for and planning low-cost, healthy eating options.
- Restaurants could be incentivized or required to provide healthy food choices on children's menus.
- Various suggestions were related to incorporating a gardening program into public schools, as well as classes related to food preparation and healthy eating. Participants also suggested working with ISDs (particularly their School Health Advisory Councils) to provide healthy food options in schools. UT Elementary was mentioned as a school that provides a garden and resources related to food preparation. Expansion of summer food programs for students was mentioned as a need.
- Several participants suggested involving local media outreach, particularly in Spanish-language media, as well as advertisements for SNAP and other food programs on public transportation.

- Participants in the SNAP program also require more, or better, information on using benefits for healthy options. SNAP enrollees could also be provided with information on gardening. Other suggestions related to SNAP included: Expanding enrollment sites for SNAP, possible at grocery stores; Subsidizing the cost of providing EBT machines (to accept SNAP benefits) at farmers markets; Expanding “double-dollars” programs at farmers markets and grocery stores.
- Provide farm stands or urban food lots in neighborhoods with limited access to grocery stores. Urban Roots and the Sustainable Food Center are piloting a program in Dove Springs as part of the Go! Austin Vamos! Austin initiative.
- Several participants suggested working with local universities to conduct research related to access to healthy foods, including conducting gap analyses (possibly utilizing GIS data) to identify areas of need.
- Increased education related to food allergies.
- Creation of a phone app related to identifying healthy food options
- Working with health care providers and clinics to educate patients on nutrition and healthy food preparation.
- Donation of land/Land Trusts for farming.

Potential Partners: The list below contains organizations suggested by meeting participants as potential partners.

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4-H Capital Area
ACC
Active Life
Austin Energy
Austin Families with Food Allergies group
Austin Parks and Recreation Department
Beyond 2nd Nature
CAMPO
CAPCOG
Capital Area Food Bank
Capital Metro
CARTS
CHDO Roundtable
CoA EGRSO
CoA Office of Sustainability
Congress for New Urbanism
El Buen Samaritano
Faith Community
Farmers Market Coalition
Foundation Communities
Fresh Food for Families
Go! Austin/ Vamos! Austin
Goodwill
Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce
Tree Minds
Urban Roots

Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Grocery Stores (HEB)
Grow Together Community Gardens
HACA
Health Clinics
Health Start
HOPE
Imagine Austin Planners
ISDs (School Health Advisory Councils)
Libraries
Lifeworks
Local Radio/TV/Spanish-language media
Lonestar Circle of Care
My 35
Neighborhood Associations
People Fund
Private Developers
RBJ Center
St. Edward's University
Superior Health Plan
Sustainable Food Center (La Cocina Alegre)
Texas Agrilife Extension
Texas Benefit Bank
Texas Impact
Texas State University
Texas Workforce Commission

UT Community and Regional Planning Program
UT Elementary School
UT LBJ School of Public Affairs
UT School of Public Health
UT School of Social Work
Wheatsville Co-op
WIC program
Workforce Solutions