



## **COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION**

### **Joint Sustainability Committee**

#### **Recommendation 20200122-3B – Food Systems and the LDC Rewrite**

*The following Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommendation as worded was approved by the Joint Sustainability Committee with a couple of friendly amendments on January 22, 2020.*

We have a food access problem in the City of Austin which is not limited to low-income families or segmented communities. Did you know less than 1% of the food consumed in Austin is produced locally, and there is approximately two days' worth of food at any given time in grocery stores?<sup>1</sup> Land use policy directly and indirectly affects our entire food system. The City of Austin's ongoing Land Development Code Revision creates a unique opportunity to have a lasting and positive impact on the development of a more just and equitable food system. Embedding components of food security and food access into the code revision will allow communities and the City to meet community food system needs, whether that is growing, processing, distributing, purchasing, preparing, consuming, or disposing of food.

The Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board (ATCFPB) serves in the unique capacity of directly advising both the Austin City Council and the Travis County Commissioners' Court to address health disparities; improve the availability of safe, nutritious, locally and sustainably-grown food at reasonable prices for all residents, particularly those in need; end food injustices; and ensure the community has a voice in policy decisions that support a healthy and equitable food system.

We, the ATCFPB, are of the opinion that the current code and proposed revision does not align with food system components of Imagine Austin and does not meet the necessary requirements to support a just, equitable food community that meets the needs of residents, developers, and businesses, and corrects for historical injustices.

A food system is an integrated and interconnected network that includes everything that happens with food, from where and how it is grown, to how it is ultimately disposed of. All

---

<sup>1</sup> The State of the Food System Report (October 2018), City of Austin, Office of Sustainability.  
<http://austintexas.gov/department/local-sustainable-food>

current and future land uses in the City have the potential to be part of the food system if codes and ordinances allow for it. As a powerful policy lever, the new code should facilitate dexterity to allow as many uses for the food system as possible, including future developments of the food system not yet implemented or envisioned.

We recommend the following to meet the needs of communities, farmers, and regulators in the interest of a healthy, safe, and sustainable food system for all of Austin:

- 1) Develop the revised Land Development Code using an environmental justice and food equity lens, including a formal equity analysis.<sup>2</sup>
- 2) Conduct an asset examination on which food-related land uses, such as commercial food preparation, food sales, mobile food sales, and general agriculture land uses, are allowed in various zones throughout the city.
  - a) The resulting asset map should then be evaluated to determine if the distribution of these land uses is equitable.
  - b) Additionally, the use of the Office of Sustainability's geographic food environment analysis, Food Access in Austin<sup>3</sup>, can assist evaluation of food and agriculture land use patterns.
- 3) Ensure that the code addresses the unique food system needs for each transect, including urban core, urban, suburban and rural.
- 4) Allow uses and remove barriers for food production, including but not limited to:
  - a) Review the city's existing Urban Farm Ordinance (Ordinance No. 20131121-105) to ensure the ordinance reflects current and future urban agricultural uses. For example, the requirement to have a house on urban farmland with livestock precludes livestock farming on land where a house is prohibited, such as flood plain land.
  - b) Allow density-appropriate farming activities.
  - c) Preserve USDA-designated prime agricultural and farm land, taking into consideration the positive link between urban food production and watershed protection.
  - d) Develop inclusive definitions of agricultural production to include, but not limited to, production techniques such as vertical farming, food forests, aquaponics, and apiaries. Develop inclusive language to include future farming technologies.
  - e) Allow new food gardens in proximity to residential areas and public transportation.
  - f) Ensure that the code's definition of Community Agriculture Land Use does not create unfair barriers for underserved communities, such as setback definitions.
- 5) Remove barriers to establish land use patterns that support healthy food access, including but not limited to increasing housing density (i.e. affordable and mixed use housing) near existing food retail stores, encouraging food retail within walking and bicycling distances of housing units, work places, and gathering places.

---

<sup>2</sup> formal tool example: Health and All Policies framework, <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hiap/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://austin.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=ddf4807ce0ad4304a8fef38f769ab14b>

Other U.S. cities have successfully integrated food equity into their development codes and can serve as models for Austin. These cities include Des Moines, IA; New York, NY; Redmond, WA; and Tacoma, WA. We believe that incorporating these principles into the Land Development Code Revision and subsequent city resources to carry them out will increase food equity throughout the city.

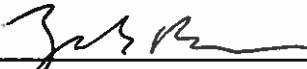
Lastly, the process which the City of Austin chose to undertake has the potential to further embed inequities or to lead to improved outcomes that benefit everyone. To reach the most equitable outcomes, the process must be a thoughtful one that engages and encourages input from a diverse set of stakeholders. However, the timeline set out by the city has made it difficult for groups such as the ATCFPB and its working groups to delve into the code and present a comprehensive response. A more meaningful approach might have included opportunities for direct dialogue between city staff and city boards and commissions when developing the code. With more time, the resulting recommendations would undoubtedly lead to more significant positive and equitable results.

Additionally, more time would allow for the Land Development Code Revision team to complete a formal equity analysis and incorporate its recommendations into the code draft.

We appreciate the chance to provide our feedback and look forward to being involved in this process to revise the Land Development Code.

Record of the vote: Motion to approve by Commissioner Hadden, second by Commissioner Lackey. Motion passes 9 approve, 0 opposed.

Date of approval: January 22, 2020

Attest:   
Zach Baumer, Liaison

