



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Marc A. Ott, City Manager; Sue Edwards, Assistant City Manager;
Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager; Robert Goode, Assistant City Manager;
Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager; Mark Washington, Acting Assistant City Manager;
Ray Baray, Chief of Staff

FROM: Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer
Edwin Marty, Food Policy Manager

DATE: July 27, 2016

SUBJECT: Response to Food Access Resolution 20160303-020

Background: On March 3, 2016, City Council passed Resolution 20160303-020, which directed the City Manager to 1) develop recommendations for improving access to fresh, healthy and affordable food, and 2) provide a status update on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment, as well as recommendations to improve those efforts. The Resolution also requested a fiscal note for consideration as part of the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 budget planning process.

The attached report provides an overview of the Resolution response process, research on best practices, and supporting details about each key proposal for improving food access. A summary of the recommendations and associated fiscal impacts are provided in this memo for quick reference.

Recommendations Summary: To improve access to fresh, nutritious food in zip codes experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity, we recommend the following:

1. Complete a comprehensive Food Environment Analysis of each district in Austin and use the resulting Food Environment Maps to inform evaluation of new projects.
2. Expand Healthy Food Retail Initiatives to provide funding for a diverse array of food-related projects based on community input and decision-making.
3. Increase local food production through community gardens and urban farms.
4. Pilot a Nutritious Food Incentives Program to expand buying power for produce at traditional brick-and-mortar retail.
5. Improve awareness about nutritious food and assistance options through SNAP outreach pilot programs and a coordinated outreach campaign delivered to residents by Community Health Workers.
6. Incorporate food access into comprehensive development, public safety, and transportation planning efforts to create Safe Routes to Markets.

Summary Fiscal Impacts for Improving Access to Fresh, Nutritious Food				
Recommendation	Budget Impact	Staffing Impact	Implementation Period	Possible Match
1) Complete a Food Environment Analysis	\$25,000 (One-time allocation)	\$95,500 1 employee Food Access Program Coordinator	Initial analysis in 2017, reassess bi-annually	
2) Expand Healthy Food Retail Initiatives	\$750,000 (Annual allocation)	\$191,000 2 employees Grant Manager and Grocery Ambassador	12 – 18 MONTHS Healthy Corner Stores, school farm stands, mobile market pilot initiatives are underway; additional new initiatives to be developed	Texas Grocery Access Investment Fund
3) Increase local food production	\$10,000 (Annual allocation)	\$95,600 1 employee Garden Program Coordinator	12 MONTHS Expansion of existing community garden program; opportunities for commercial urban agriculture on City land to be explored	Public and Private Foundations
4) Pilot a Nutritious Food Incentive Program	\$50,000 (One-time allocation)	N/A	12 – 18 MONTHS New initiative to be developed and implemented via contract with local organization	USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive funding
5) Build awareness about nutritious food	\$700,000: (Annual allocation)	N/A	12 MONTHS New initiative built on existing efforts	SNAP Education and SNAP Outreach
6) Create Safe Routes to Markets	Aligns with current City Departmental efforts & Mobility Bond	N/A	ON-GOING Food access considerations to be integrated into mobility planning efforts	
TOTAL:	\$1,535,000 (Program Cost)	\$382,000 (Staffing Cost)		

Please let us know if you have any questions or need additional information.

Austin Healthy Food Access Initiative

Improving Access to Good and Affordable Food

STAFF RESPONSE TO CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 20160303-020
JULY 27, 2016



OFFICE OF
SUSTAINABILITY

CITY OF AUSTIN

Acknowledgements

The following individuals contributed to the development of this report. Their commitment, spirit of collaboration, and tireless efforts to address food access for the entire Austin community are greatly appreciated.

Sari Albornoz, Sustainable Food Center
Raul Alvarez, Community Advancement Network
Lisa Barden, Keep Austin Fed
Simone Benz, Sustainable Food Center
Celina Bley, Del Valle Independent School District
Dominique Bowman, Huston-Tillotson University
Chelsea Brass, Latino Healthcare Forum
Joy Casnovsky, Sustainable Food Center
Megan Cermak, Central Health
Taylor Cook, Farmshare
Teresa Cox, Catholic Charities
Caitlin D'Alton, Capital Metro
Laurence Denis, University of Texas Public Health
J.C. Dwyer, Feeding Texas
Alexandra Evans, University of Texas Public Health
Jessica Gaffney, Austin/Travis County Food Policy Board
Marianna Gomez, Central Health
Kathy Green, Central Texas Food Bank
Hilda Gutierrez, Sustainable Food Center
Katie Hardgrove, Texas Hunger Initiative
Lorig Hawkins, Farmshare
Donna Hoffman, Blackshear Bridge
Christina Holch, American Heart Association
Carla Jenkins, Texas Farmers Market
Sara Law, Sustainable Food Center
Erin Lentz, University of Texas LBJ School of Public Affairs
Jonathan Lowell, Student, University of Texas
Karen Magid, Huston-Tillotson University
Sharon Mays, Austin/Travis County Food Policy Board
Paula McDermott, Food Access Consultant
Dianna Moore, Whole Cities Foundation
Paige Oliverio, Urban Patchwork
Raj Patel, University of Texas LBJ School of Public Affairs
Frank Preketes, Central Health
Carmen Pulido, Go Austin Vamos Austin (GAVA)
Kate Rodgers, H.E.B.
Eva Rodriguez, Del Valle Independent School District
Ronda Rutledge, Sustainable Food Center
Alba Sereno, Go Austin Vamos Austin (GAVA)
Andrew Smiley, Sustainable Food Center

Anneliese Tanner, Austin Independent School District
Mary Teeters, Meals on Wheels and More
Marla Torrado, Student, University of Texas
Chris Walker, American Heart Association
Jamie White, Central Texas Food Bank
Addie Woods, Texas Hunger Initiative
Glenda Velji, Texas Tech University

City of Austin Staff:

Edwin Marty, Office of Sustainability
Amanda Rohlich, Office of Sustainability
Nicole Fillion, Office of Sustainability Intern
Jason Umlas, Office of Sustainability Intern
Laura Dierenfield, Austin Transportation Department
Stephanie Helfman, Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services Department
Sarah Stein Lobovits, Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services Department
David Colligan, Economic Development Department
Meredith Gray, Parks and Recreation Department
Kathleen Fox, Planning and Zoning Department



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Austin Healthy Food Access Initiative

Improving Access to Good and Affordable Food

STAFF RESPONSE TO CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 20160303-020

Executive Summary

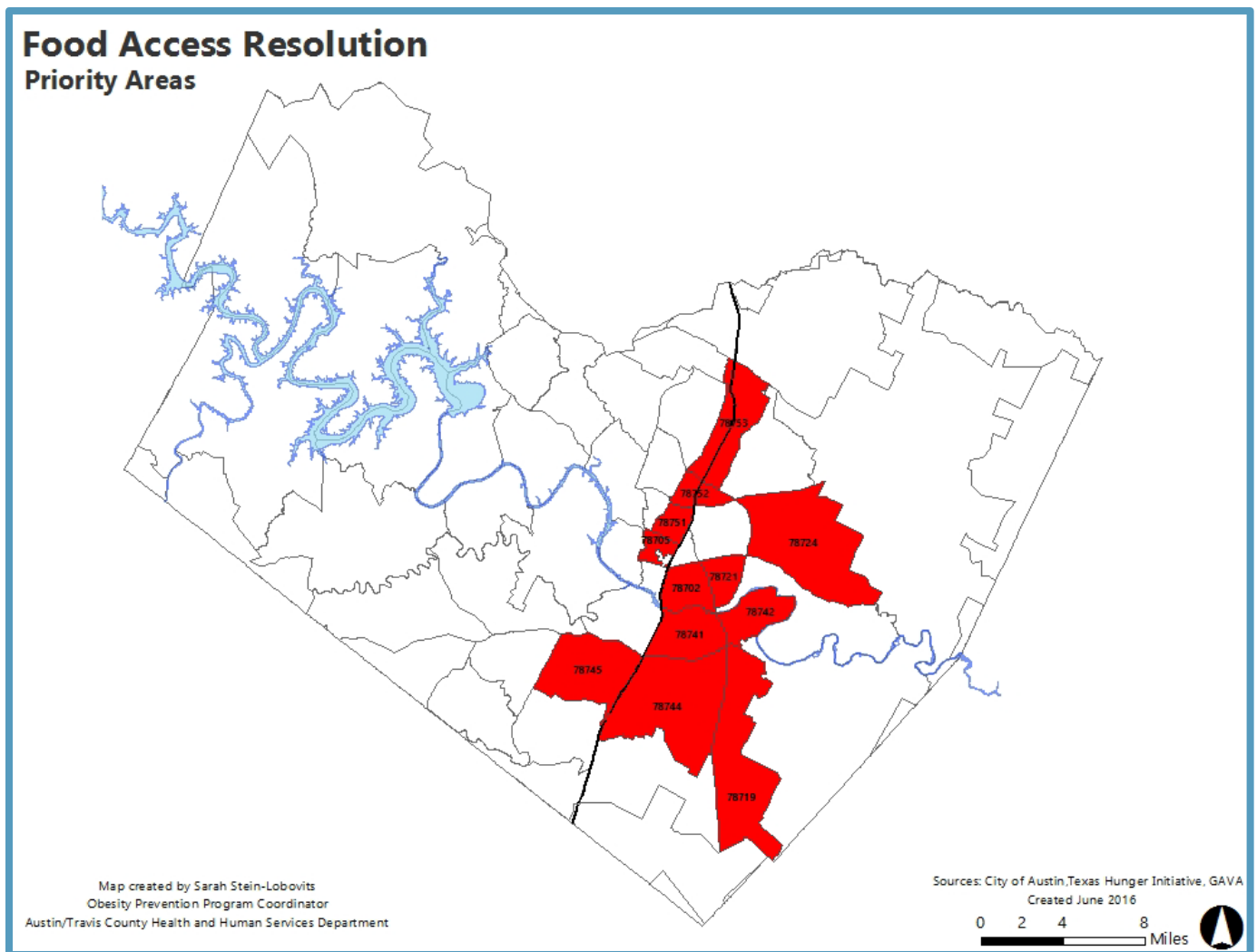
On March 3, 2016, City Council passed Resolution 20160303-020, which directed the City Manager to 1) develop recommendations for improving access to fresh, healthy and affordable food, and 2) provide a status update on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment, as well as recommendations to improve those efforts. The Resolution also requested a fiscal note for consideration as part of the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 budget planning process.

Recent studies indicate that one in four people in Austin is unsure of where their next meal will come from. Numerous research studies have also identified a strong connection between food insecurity and increased rates of negative diet-related health outcomes such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. In addition to higher incidences of food insecurity, negative diet-related health outcomes disproportionately affect the African American and Latino communities as well as low-income areas.

Where you live impacts your health, and Austin is no exception. The zip codes experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity are located primarily in Austin's Eastern Crescent. These areas have the longest average distances to food retail, lowest household incomes, and fewest mobility options between homes and food retail. In responding to the Resolution, these zip codes were considered priority areas for the recommendations developed.

The goal of this initiative is twofold: 1) remove barriers so as to increase the amount of food retail and farming available in low-income communities, and 2) provide food insecure community members with additional purchasing power, so that nutritious food can be affordable within their budget constraints. Making an investment to address food insecurity would positively impact diet-related health outcomes in these high-risk communities, provide long-term healthcare cost savings, and support the City's affordability goals.

Food Access Priority Areas



The priority areas identified in the map above represent zip codes with more than 5,000 SNAP recipients and include census tracts with more than 25% of residents living at or below the poverty line. These priority areas also include the top 10 zip codes for food insecurity identified by Texas Hunger Initiative and overlay with the Eastern Crescent. These priority zip codes areas are:

78702	78742
78705	78744
78719	78745
78721	78751
78724	78752
78741	78753

The recommendations provided in this document were developed with the goal of creating lasting change that could be sustained over the long-term. They are designed to build on the strengths and interests of community members, as well as existing City of Austin initiatives and community partnerships.

Stakeholder and Research Summary

In response to the Resolution and as part of a grant-funded food planning pilot in North Central Austin, the Office of Sustainability worked closely with stakeholder organizations, residents experiencing food insecurity, and representatives from key City departments to identify the key barriers to food access and SNAP enrollment. This process included:

- Eleven stakeholder meetings in response to Resolution No. 20160303-020, comprised of the Austin/Travis County Food Policy Board's Healthy Food Access Working Group and 47 individuals representing 33 organizations.
- Presentations to 880 residents at 21 events as part of a grant-funded food planning pilot in the North Central Austin/Rundberg Area, as well as:
 - Focus groups with 93 participants.
 - In-depth interviews with 7 key stakeholders.
 - Community events that reached 310 residents.
 - Digital and paper surveys that involved 268 participants.
- Quarterly meetings of the Austin Area School Garden Collaborative group to explore opportunities for expanding community gardens at local schools (involving 75 participants representing 60 schools, as well as 130 survey participants).
- Input from six City Departments:
 - Office of Sustainability
 - Planning and Zoning
 - Health and Human Services
 - Economic Development
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Austin Transportation
- Research on food access best practices from other cities:
 - Baltimore
 - Madison
 - Philadelphia
 - Seattle
 - Vancouver
 - New York City



Community outreach in North Central Austin

This collaborative process resulted in more than 100 ideas that were evaluated using the following criteria:

- Potential for community engagement and empowerment.
- Potential to advance equity and community resilience.
- Legal feasibility.
- Political feasibility.
- Financial feasibility.
- Ability to track and evaluate return on investment.
- Alignment with Imagine Austin policies and actions.

This prioritization process resulted in a shortlist of six ideas that met all of the criteria. These key recommendations were determined to be the best methods for improving access to nutritious food in zip codes experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity:

1. Complete a comprehensive Food Environment Analysis of each district in Austin and use the resulting Food Environment Maps to inform evaluation of new projects.
2. Expand Healthy Food Retail Initiatives to provide funding for a diverse array of food-related projects based on community input and decision-making.
3. Increase local food production through community gardens and urban farms.
4. Pilot a Nutritious Food Incentives Program to expand buying power for nutritious food at traditional brick-and-mortar retail.
5. Improve awareness about nutritious food and assistance options through SNAP outreach pilot programs and a coordinated outreach campaign delivered to residents by Community Health Workers.
6. Incorporate food access into comprehensive development, public safety, and transportation planning efforts to create Safe Routes to Markets.



The Office of Sustainability sought input from department and community stakeholders to clarify the cost of initiating and sustaining each recommendation, as well as to identify staffing needs, estimated timelines for implementation, and possible matching funds from community partners. A summary of these efforts is presented in the following table:

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RECOMMENDATION 1

Complete a Food Environment Analysis



Complete a Food Environment Analysis to provide an analytical basis for prioritizing food access initiatives in high-need areas and gain a deeper understanding of food access in Austin.

Some information currently exists about food insecurity and food deserts in Austin. Nonprofit organizations Feeding Texas and the Central Texas Food Bank have offered rough estimates of how many people are unable to access healthy food in Austin. However, the past year of research for the North Central Austin area (Plan4Health) revealed that the existing data on food access and availability is insufficient.

To support the rest of the recommendations in this report and best target assistance to residents in need, it is essential to complete an initial food environment analysis modeled after a similar project for the City of Baltimore. This process is necessary to gain a more accurate understanding of where food deserts exist, who is living in them, and the overall public health impact for Austin. This initial analysis would guide implementation of the other recommendations, as well as set benchmarks that could be used to evaluate their success.

Part of this research includes developing a Food Environment Map for each City Council District. This would involve collecting data for each District including:

- Food retail and supermarket locations.
- Household income.
- Vehicle availability.
- Supply of healthy food at food retail locations.

This effort would include an analysis of food deserts and rates of diet-related disease, the locations of food assistance programs, and measuring the gap between those who are eligible for food assistance but are not currently enrolled (known as the SNAP Gap). Every two years, these Food Environment Maps would be updated to inform ongoing food access initiatives and prioritize future investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Partner with an academic institution to conduct targeted research on the food environment in Austin.
- Reevaluate the food environment by District on a bi-annual basis to track the changing food access environment and evaluate performance of initiatives.
- Incorporate research results into food access initiatives to increase impact.

GOALS

- Gain a deeper understanding of the food environment in Austin, which would be used to inform all future food planning efforts.
- Produce District maps that would provide additional detail about areas with the greatest need for investments to address food insecurity.
- Implement a best-practice process for analyzing food access than can be replicated by other cities in Texas.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Creation of District Maps that accurately identify food deserts, as well as assets to build upon.
- Creation of District Maps that illustrate areas with negative health outcomes and high rates of food insecurity.

BUDGET IMPACT

- One (1) new employee (\$62,300 Program Coordinator base salary + \$33,200 overhead = \$95,500)
- One-time allocation of \$25,000 to conduct a Food Environment Analysis by District (four undergraduate students to perform food retail survey for 12 weeks)

POSSIBLE MATCH

No matching funds have been identified at this time, though partner institutions have expressed interest in offering research assistance.

IMPLEMENTATION

The methodology developed by Johns Hopkins University would be adapted for use in Austin with the help of research partners at the University of Texas at Austin.

Timeframe	Activities
0-3 months	Develop a research plan with Johns Hopkins University and develop a partnership with the University of Texas at Austin or other academic institution.
3 – 12 months	Adapt Johns Hopkins University scoring criteria to best reflect Austin's Food Environment.
	Collect data via student research assistants.
	Complete Food Environment Analysis, including publishing of the Food Environment Maps by District.
Ongoing	Complete analysis biannually.
	Use subsequent analysis to evaluate the success of programs and interventions.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

A new Food Access Program Coordinator would work with the Office of Sustainability's Food Policy Manager, the Office of Equity, and other City Department staff to develop and supervise the research process, including coordination of field research efforts and hiring students for the survey implementation. This new employee would also be responsible for overseeing, tracking and reporting the other recommendations that are included in this Austin Food Access Initiative.

The Food Policy Manager would continue to develop and maintain relationships among City departments and community organizations, while the Food Access Program Coordinator would focus on the day-to-day logistics of data collection and program evaluation.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Baltimore: In 2015, the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (the City of Baltimore's Intergovernmental Food Policy Group) partnered with the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future to create a Food Environment Map. Using the four criteria described in the recommendation above, the resulting Food Environment Map created a detailed picture of Baltimore's food insecurity problem, as well as its effect on public health. This document provided the basis for developing interventions and tracking their impact over time.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Expand Healthy Food Retail Initiatives



Expand Healthy Food Retail Initiatives to provide funding for a diverse array of food-related projects based on community input and decision-making.

One barrier to accessing nutritious food is availability, or ensuring that an adequate supply of fresh, high quality produce is obtainable in community stores. A Healthy Food Retail Initiative would support small business and community development projects by offering flexible capital and/or technical assistance to a diverse array of food-related projects (grocery stores, food hubs, mobile food retailers, farmers markets, neighborhood food-buying cooperatives, etc.) in communities with limited nutritious food availability. In addition to start-up funding, additional assistance would be provided to qualifying businesses in the form of tax incentives as well as training, support, and assistance with the permitting process through a 'Grocery Ambassador' position.

Related to this recommendation, Austin City Council included a one-time \$400,000 allotment for Healthy Food Access Funding in the FY16 Health and Human Services Department budget. This allocation was used to fund the expansion of Healthy Corner Stores, School Farm Stands, and to pilot a Mobile Market project. Organizations were selected to coordinate these efforts this spring and implementation of the initiatives is underway. Continued funding is recommended to allow time for full implementation and an evaluation of efficacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Renew funding for the Health and Human Services Department Healthy Food Access initiatives currently underway to allow a full calendar year for implementation and evaluation.
- Establish a new Grant Manager position that would leverage relationships with public, private and/or philanthropic organizations to generate matching funds for projects, as well as obtain available Federal and State funding such as the Texas Grocery Access Investment Fund.
- Create a Grant Fund to provide seed capital for opening, expanding, or stabilizing food retail outlets that would be supplemented with State and Federal resources.
- Provide a new Grocery Ambassador position that would be responsible for permitting facilitation and developing systems to streamline funding for food retail initiatives in the future. This position would work with Economic Development, Planning and Zoning, Development Services, and Health and Human Services to qualify retailers and producers, and to provide incentives for expanding healthy food access options.
- Use the Food Environment Analysis to identify communities in which Healthy Food Retail projects will be located and evaluate impact over time.
- Develop materials in multiple languages that explain the permitting process for food retail establishments in an easy-to-understand, step-by-step format.
- Ensure that all new Healthy Food Retail projects accept SNAP and WIC. The Grocery Ambassador would provide support for retailers to participate fully in these programs.

GOALS

- Increase food security by improving existing and creating new food retail in targeted zip codes.
- Offer support to new and existing food retail businesses for renovations or expansions to provide healthy, nutritious food.
- Expand distribution opportunities for local farmers, grocers, and healthy food entrepreneurs.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

- Stimulate private and public investment in low-wealth communities.
- Create economic anchors that support other retail development.
- Provide job opportunities through 'a supported employment' model for hard to employ individuals.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increase in food security as indicated in future Food Environment Analysis.
- Number of new healthy food retail establishments created in targeted areas.
- Amount of food sourced locally or sustainably in healthy food retail in targeted areas.

BUDGET IMPACT

- Two (2) new employees (\$62,300 Program Coordinator base salary + \$33,200 overhead = \$95,500 for each employee).
- Annual \$750,000 initial investment (this includes \$400,000 to continue Healthy Food Access funding from FY16, with an additional \$350,000 for new initiatives).

POSSIBLE MATCH

Texas Grocery Access Investment Fund. A bill proposed in the 2015 Texas Legislature would have created a fund for new grocery stores to use in their start-up phase. A similar bill is being discussed for the 2017 State Legislative session that could complement the Healthy Food Retail Initiative, providing additional options for new stores to be developed in local food deserts.

IMPLEMENTATION

The City of Austin would invest in an annual grant fund to provide seed money to eligible business for preliminary costs associated with food retail improvements. In addition, other sources of funding from the Federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative, private foundations, and others would be leveraged. Priority will be given to businesses in the Eastern Crescent and other high-need areas, as well as initiatives that support engagement, education, and positive health outcomes.

Timeframe	Activities
0-3 months	Fill new Grant Manager and Grocery Ambassador employee positions.
3-12 months	Identify Healthy Food Retail Initiatives for funding.
	Distribute grant funding for Healthy Food Retail Initiatives.
	Develop Grocery Expeditor Program to streamline permitting process and identify incentive opportunities.
1 year and beyond	Obtain matching grant funds.
	Leverage State and Federal programs for additional financing and support.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The new Food Access Program Coordinator (described in Recommendation 1) will work with the Office of Sustainability's Food Policy Manager, the Office of Equity, the Health and Human Services Department's Chronic Disease staff, and other City Department staff to develop and supervise the Healthy Food Retail Incentive program.

With oversight from the above, a new Grant Manager would oversee City grant funding, as well as solicit partner funding to increase the grant fund. A new Grocery Ambassador would be responsible for cultivating relationships with community partners to assist in identifying locations for healthy food retail in high-need areas, and provide assistance with permitting and identifying potential incentives.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Pennsylvania: In 2004, Pennsylvania created the first Healthy Food Financing Initiative in the country, becoming a model for similar initiatives at the federal, state, and local levels. The program was seeded with a \$30 million grant; with the help of a national Community Development Financial Institution Program, an additional \$145 million investment provided loans and grants for predevelopment, acquisition, equipment and construction costs, as well as for start-up costs such as employee recruitment and training. This Healthy Food Financing Initiative attracted 206 applications from across Pennsylvania, with 88 projects financed as of June 2010. In total, more than \$73.2 million in loans and \$12.1 million in grants were approved. Projects approved for financing were expected to bring 5,023 jobs and 1.67 million square feet of commercial space.

Baltimore: Baltimore has created a Food Desert Incentive Area Personal Property Tax Credit to encourage the growth of healthy food retail in recognized food deserts. The program provides retailers a 10 year, 80% credit towards their personal property tax.

<http://baltimoredevelopment.com/incentives/tax-credits/food-desert>

New Orleans: New Orleans launched a Fresh Food Retailers Initiative with \$7 million from Disaster Community Development Block Grants and an additional \$7 million in matching funds through the Hope Enterprise Corporation. The Initiative provides direct financial assistance in the form of forgivable or low-interest loans.

<http://www.nola.gov/city/fresh-food-retailers-initiative/>

New York City: New York City provided zoning incentives and tax credits for businesses that sell healthy food in underserved areas. Zoning incentives include reduced requirements for parking, access to areas zoned for light manufacturing, and additional development rights. Tax credits may include a reduction in real estate tax, sales tax exemption and mortgage recording tax deferral.

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/misc/html/2009/fresh.shtml>

Washington, DC: Washington DC's Healthy Food Retail Program provides existing businesses with six months of low cost produce and new equipment, as well as training and assistance with developing a marketing program for healthy food sales. The initial pilot program took place over a six-month period and included 34 businesses. The pilot program was initiated with \$300,000 (\$50,000 of this initial funding was spent on equipment such as coolers and display cases).

Washington also passed the Food, Environment, and Economic Development Act in 2010 (FEED DC) which created a package of economic incentives for creating supermarkets in underserved areas. The program not only provides grants and loans to businesses, but also created a Grocery Ambassador position in the City's Planning and Development Office. This position is responsible for guiding applicants through the permitting process and fast-tracking eligible businesses.

<http://dslbd.dc.gov/service/healthy-food-retail>

http://www.dchunger.org/currentbills/feed_dc_act.htm

RECOMMENDATION 3

Increase Urban Food Production



Increase local food production through community gardens and urban farms.

Urban food production enhances food security by making fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate food more readily available at the neighborhood scale. Expanding opportunities to grow and produce food also supports the local economy and offers educational opportunities for residents to learn about gardening and preparing nutritious food. There is high demand for community gardens in Austin; currently there are 54 community gardens in Austin with 14 on City-owned land, but no available plots at these gardens.

Currently, participation in community gardens is limited to those who have the time, funds, and professional resources needed to start a new garden or rent a plot in an existing garden. Community gardens require an input of resources that some cannot afford – namely a lack of time or interest in navigating a process that can involve administrative delays, prohibitive permit fees, and a license agreement approval process that requires professionally-drawn site and water tap plans.

Additionally, current regulations prohibit the commercial sale of any produce grown in community gardens. While support of community gardens should be continued, additional opportunities for commercial urban agriculture on City-owned lands and yard-to-market programs should be explored. Providing gardeners with the ability to sell what they grow will help alleviate the burden on those who cannot currently participate for financial reasons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase staffing for the Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens program by one (1) employee to restore staffing to the 2009 Council-proposed level.
- Incorporate community garden support into relevant City employee job descriptions.
- Further streamline the community garden application process to minimize delays, permitting complexities, and financial burdens for community members.
- Explore waivers for City of Austin Site Development Exemption Fees and Travis County Recordation Fees, which are significant barriers to community garden permitting.
- Identify funding mechanisms to pay necessary permitting and license agreement fees for community gardens on City land.
- Increase capacity for technical assistance to underserved communities.
- Train City and County program staff to utilize and establish gardens at City and County facilities.
- Develop process for using City-owned property for commercial urban agriculture.

GOALS

- Reduce food insecurity by enhancing the ability of community members to grow, and where appropriate, sell their own food.
- Remove barriers that disproportionately prevent low-income communities from urban food production.
- Build community capacity to organize around food.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increase in food security as indicated in future Food Environment Analysis.
- Increase in the number of community gardens per capita.
- Percent increase in square feet of urban food production in low-income, reduced-access areas.
- Volume of local food produced.

BUDGET IMPACT

- One (1) new employee (\$62,400 Program Coordinator base salary + \$33,200 overhead = \$95,600).
- \$10,000 to pay necessary fees for initial permitting and City-required infrastructure costs for two new community gardens or urban farms per year.

POSSIBLE MATCH

Public and Private Foundations, such as the Austin Parks Foundation, could match the City investment in community gardens.

IMPLEMENTATION

Timeframe	Activities
0-3 months	Determine high-interest areas for food production (community gardens and urban farms) in priority zip codes.
	Determine strategy for implementing programs in low-income communities.
3-12 months	Work with low-income communities to develop urban food production opportunities.
	Streamline permitting process for new community gardens/urban farms.
	Conduct feasibility analysis for commercial urban agriculture on City-owned land.
1 year and beyond	Evaluate success of new urban food production programs.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The new Urban Food Production Coordinator position would be part of the Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens program in the Parks and Recreation Department; this new employee would coordinate closely with the new Food Access Program Coordinator (see Recommendation 1) to align with overarching Food Access Initiatives.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

New York City: New York is working to expand urban agricultural production through Grow NYC’s New Farmer Development Project. This project identifies, educates and supports small farmers who establish small agricultural businesses.

Vancouver, Canada: Vancouver supports urban farming through the Britannia Urban Garden Project. This initiative provides educational programs on farming, nutritious cooking, and healthy eating habits and is focused on opening new community gardens.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Pilot a Nutritious Food Incentive Program



Initiate a Nutritious Food Incentives Program to expand buying power for produce purchases at traditional brick-and-mortar retail.

A barrier to healthy food access is affordability. For lower income families, a smaller percentage of income is available to buy food and often fresh produce is more expensive than less nutritious options. The City of Austin contributes funding to the Sustainable Food Center's (SFC) Double Dollar Incentive Program, which doubles the dollar amount of SNAP (formerly food stamps), WIC (Women, Infant, and Children) EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer card) fruit and vegetable benefits, and/or Farmers' Market Nutrition Program vouchers. Families can spend their Double Dollars on fruits and vegetables at SFC Farmers Markets and other markets and farm stands supported by SFC. A new Nutritious Food Incentives Program would expand this purchasing power to traditional brick-and-mortar food retail locations in the Eastern Crescent area. A food retail outlet (or outlets) would be selected to implement the pilot program in collaboration with a local non-profit, allowing low-income customers to receive rebates for the purchase of health foods.

Nationally, the majority of Nutritious Food Incentive Programs use SNAP enrollment as the sole criteria for eligibility. However, this excludes many from participating who are food insecure due to strict SNAP eligibility requirements. We propose developing additional criteria for food insecurity to include other poverty indicators. City staff would develop specific criteria for the Nutritious Food Incentives Pilot to identify: 1) who would be eligible (SNAP, Section 8 Housing, Free and Reduced Lunch, etc.), 2) eligible food purchases that best promote proper nutrition, and 3) possible food retail collaborators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue support for the existing City contract with the Sustainable Food Center's Double Dollar Incentive Program.
- Launch a Nutritious Food Incentive Program pilot for brick-and-mortar locations to be implemented by local non-profit organizations in collaboration with the City.
- Identify additional opportunities to subsidize the cost of nutritious food for prioritized zip codes.

GOALS

- Provide consistent, daily opportunities for voucher redemption for nutritious food purchases.
- Improve access to healthy food and decrease negative diet-related health outcomes in prioritized zip codes.
- Expand distribution opportunities for local farmers, grocers, and healthy food entrepreneurs.
- Increase local food production and strengthen farmer workforce.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increase in food security as indicated by future Food Environment Analysis.
- Number of program participants.
- Total healthy food sales at participating retail locations.

BUDGET IMPACT

- \$50,000 for pilot program implementation (healthy food incentives and program administration).

POSSIBLE MATCH

- A City funded Nutritious Food Incentive Program could create a foundation for expanding the pilot to include additional food insecure communities through the use of matching funds. Match funding may come from private and public organizations working to improve community food choices and generate positive social, health, and economic returns. Examples may include hospitals, insurance companies, and social investors and philanthropies.
- The Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program supports projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase. There are three categories of projects: (1) FINI Pilot Projects (awards not to exceed a total of \$100,000 over one year); (2) Multi-year, community-based FINI Projects (awards not to exceed a total of \$500,000 over no more than four years); and (3) Multi-year, FINI Large-Scale Projects (awards of \$500,000 or more over no more than four years).

IMPLEMENTATION

The City of Austin would work with food retailers to develop a point-of-sale system and program design that incentivizes nutritious purchases. The Nutritious Food Incentive Program would be implemented by a local non-profit organization and piloted in the Eastern Crescent.

Timeframe	Activities
0-3 months	Selection process for non-profit community partner to implement program pilot.
3-12 months	Identify potential matching funds for incentives.
	Launch program pilot in brick-and-mortar store(s).
1 year and beyond	Leverage Federal and State Programs (FINI Grants) for additional funding.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The new Food Access Program Coordinator (see Recommendation 1) would work with the Office of Sustainability's Food Policy Manager, the Office of Equity, and other City staff to develop the criteria for the pilot Nutritious Food Incentive Program, develop contacts with possible collaborators, and execute a contract with an organization to implement the program. The Food Access Program Coordinator will oversee and evaluate the pilot program. The new Grant Manager (see Recommendation 2) would identify additional funding opportunities for continuation and expansion of the pilot.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Madison, WI: Contract staffing and implementation costs for a similar program in Madison costs \$90,000 annually, with matching funds for the incentive program coming from public and private donations as well as Federal Grants.

Double Up Food Bucks: In 2015, the USDA awarded \$31 million in Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grants to the Double Up Food Bucks program. These grants create 'double dollar' incentives for the purchase of produce by SNAP beneficiaries and utilize EBT technology already in place. Double Up Food Bucks was developed in Michigan and has been implemented in 21 other states.

<http://www.doubleupfoodbucks.org/national-network/>

RECOMMENDATION 5

Develop a Coordinated Awareness Campaign about Nutritious Food Resources



Improve communications and outreach about nutritious food and assistance options through Community Health Workers.

Access to healthy, nutritious food is often impeded by a lack of information. Residents may not know what is considered healthy, where or how to buy it, how to prepare nutritious meals, or what food assistance programs are available to them. Numerous organizations in Austin are working to improve access to healthy food. However, with no coordination between these efforts, outreach and messaging can be confusing, and often resources are expended on duplicate efforts. A Coordinated Awareness Campaign across organizations would be more efficient in connecting people to the resources they need about healthy food and/or assistance programs. Additionally, a coordinated effort would provide a better understanding about which strategies are effective and where gaps exist.

In addition to coordinating messaging and communication materials, it is important to have effective, culturally appropriate delivery and navigation of healthy food information. Community Health Workers are trained and certified advocates working in association with the local health care system to bridge the gap between providers and underserved populations in need of care. They are members of a community who share ethnicity, language, and life experiences with those they serve. A Community Health Worker helps people gain access to needed services and builds individual, community, and system capacity by increasing knowledge and self-sufficiency. They perform a range of activities such as outreach, community health education and information, informal counseling, social support, advocacy, and

participation in clinical research. Community Health Workers would prove invaluable in identifying and delivering the most relevant food-related resources to meet the specific needs of individual community members.

Community Health Workers are currently trained and employed by the City of Austin through Quality of Life Initiatives, Maternal Infant Outreach Programs, and My Library Keeps Me Healthy programs, among others. Community Health Workers are also employed by organizations such as Latino Healthcare Forum, El Buen Samaritano, Amerigroup, and Sendero Health Plans. Building on the Sustainable Food Center's Community Health Worker food module, the City of Austin would partner with community-based organizations to identify and train Community Health Workers who would advise their clients about practical issues concerning food including cooking, eating, shopping, weight management, as well as application procedures for food assistance programs.

An important focus for the Coordinated Awareness Campaign would address the "SNAP Gap." The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is essential in addressing food insecurity in Austin. As of 2014, only 57% of those who are eligible for SNAP benefits actually utilize those benefits. The 43% of people who are eligible but do not enroll make up the "SNAP Gap" – almost \$170 million in federal funds that go unused. Reasons for SNAP under-enrollment include the stigma around using food stamps, language barriers or illiteracy, and a cumbersome enrollment process. To address the SNAP gap, the City and other community organizations must increase awareness about SNAP benefits and eligibility, as well as assist residents in the enrollment process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build collaborative partnerships with organizations working on healthy food access and SNAP enrollment.
- Coordinate messaging about food resources and nutrition education to maximize clarity and eliminate redundancy.
- Develop a central hub for information about healthy food resources and procedures to ensure equitable and comprehensive access to needed information.
- Expand capacity for culturally appropriate messaging by coordinating resources to make information available in different languages and for people with disabilities.
- Help train and sustain a network of Community Health Workers focused on food access issues who can connect populations to information and resources in culturally appropriate ways.
- Develop a Food Access Toolkit for Community Health Workers to use in providing assistance in navigating the food system.
- Fund part-time and full-time Community Health Workers in prioritized zip codes to operate out of schools, libraries, faith communities, and recreation and community centers.
- Develop targeted messaging and explore cross-enrollment opportunities between SNAP and other programs and entities such as affordable housing, the National School Lunch Program, the Summer Food Service Program, public libraries, recreational centers, and healthcare facilities.
- Explore a potential statewide policy shift to ensure that SNAP benefits are serving residents in the best manner, including an examination of monthly vs. biweekly distribution of benefits.

- Partner with the Central Texas Food Bank and other stakeholders to fund pilot initiatives that include cultural competency training and professional development for SNAP enrollment staff, mobile enrollment support, low-wage employer enrollment coordination, and development of a phone hotline for enrollment assistance.

GOALS

- Increase awareness around access to healthy foods.
- Educate and empower residents to influence decision makers in adopting policies and allocating resources that improve access to healthy foods.
- Address language barriers and equity issues in communications and outreach about healthy food.
- Create living wage jobs for Community Health Workers.
- Streamline the SNAP enrollment process to make it simpler to sign up and utilize benefits.
- Increase participation in SNAP and associated programs such as the Double Dollar Incentive Program and Nutritious Food Incentive Program.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increase in food security as indicated by future Food Environment Analysis.
- Improved utilization of 211 and other resources for food assistance.
- Decreased gap between those eligible and those enrolled in food assistance programs.
- Increase the utilization of allocated dollars from federal food and nutrition assistance programs.
- Number of people assisted with food-related issues by Community Health Workers.
- Number of new SNAP enrollment partnerships developed.
- Amount of Double Dollar and Nutritious Food Incentive benefits utilized.

BUDGET IMPACT

- \$300,000 Coordinated Awareness Campaign.
 - \$100,000 for communications materials design, printing, media purchases, and translation services.
 - \$200,000 for staffing and administration of 3-4 full-time Community Health Workers through community organizations.
- \$400,000 for support of pilot SNAP enrollment programs.

Possible Match

- USDA SNAP Education. These funds could be used to match City allocated funds for a Coordinated Awareness Campaign at eight to one (8:1). The City would only need to allocate \$30,000 and then receive \$270,000 in matching funding for a total of \$300,000.
- USDA SNAP Outreach. These funds could be used to match City allocated funds for piloting SNAP Outreach projects at one to one (1:1). The City would only need to allocate \$200,000 and then receive \$200,000 in matching funding for a total of \$400,000. Pilot projects could include the following:
 - Cultural competency training and professional development for SNAP enrollment staff.
 - Mobile enrollment support.

- o Low-wage employers enrollment coordination.
- o Development of a phone hotline for enrollment assistance.

IMPLEMENTATION

Timeframe	Activities
0-3 months	Identification of community organization partners and analysis of communications and outreach messaging and materials.
	Selection of marketing and communications firm.
	Coordinated outreach and education campaign planning with marketing firm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identification of key messages. ● Identification of and research on target audiences. ● Development of campaign brand.
	Identify priority communities for additional Community Health Workers and training needs for existing Community Health Workers.
	Use the Food Environment Analysis to identify priority SNAP pilot initiatives.
3-12 months	Develop scope of work and request for proposal with community based organizations to hire, train, and administer Community Health Workers; award and execute contract.
	Create outreach and education campaign materials.
	Campaign implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using multiple communication mechanisms for saturation with consistent messaging. ● Expand reach with interpersonal communication through Community Health Workers. ● Engage faith communities to further expand reach.
	Pilot SNAP Enrollment initiatives.
1 year and beyond	Monitor and evaluate success of outreach and education campaign; refine messaging and materials as needed.
	Continue to monitor and evaluate pilot projects and request additional funding or solicit assistance from other partners to continue their implementation.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The new Food Access Program Coordinator (see Recommendation 1) would work with the Office of Sustainability's Food Policy Manager, the Office of Equity, and other City staff to develop and implement the Coordinated Awareness Campaign in collaboration with relevant private-sector stakeholders, such as Central Texas Food Bank, Feeding Texas, Meals on Wheels and More, Sustainable Food Center, and Texas Hunger Initiative. Additionally, the Food Access Program Coordinator would develop contracts with community-based institutions to hire Community Health Workers to assist in the implementation of the Coordinated Awareness Campaign, as well as contracts with community-based institutions to implement SNAP Gap pilot projects.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

"Messaging campaigns should be clear and simple, associated with a campaign logo or a consistent image, sustained over time, and should form part of a larger coordinated strategy. Awareness campaigns may include events, poster campaigns, websites, documentaries, newspaper articles, radio, TV, or theatre programs – creative, innovative ways of sharing information with the community can increase the success of awareness raising efforts."

Food and Agriculture Education and Communications Strategies

"The ultimate goal of nutrition education is to produce nutritionally literate decision makers who are motivated, knowledgeable, skilled, and willing to choose proper nutrition alternatives (Lewis, 1976). To be effective, nutrition education must communicate clear messages with a specific behavior-change goal for target groups (Guthrie, 1978 in Valdecanas, 1985).

Nutrition education and communication programs have evolved from a one-way flow of communication, that is, a mere dissemination of information to persuade target groups to change food beliefs, attitudes, and habits. A two-way process of sharing is preferred, where participants in a nutrition program can freely exchange knowledge, values, and practices on nutrition, food, and related areas. This view of nutrition education as a mechanism for interaction, ensures the active involvement of those who could and should take part in decision making, and in motivating and providing users with easy access to nutrition-related information, resources, and services."

Massachusetts: Massachusetts is attempting to integrate applications for SNAP and MassHealth (a combination of the Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program) into one application portal. Developing this portal will reduce costs, decrease the SNAP Gap, and bring unused federal SNAP funds into the community to generate additional economic activity.

<https://www.foodbankwma.org/closing-the-snap-gap-in-massachusetts/>

Maryland: Maryland has been working to rethink the time frame during which SNAP benefits are distributed to reduce instances of people running out of benefits before the end of the month.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Create Safe Routes to Markets



Incorporate food access into comprehensive development and transportation planning.

Accessibility to food, especially healthy food, is problematic for residents who do not own cars. People who are unable to get to nutritious food options, often buy food at convenience stores or fast food restaurants. Mobility challenges exist for people living in food deserts, as well as for individuals who live relatively close to a grocery store but cannot access the store due to disability, a threatened sense of personal safety, a lack of sidewalk connectivity, or limited public transportation options. To address these issues, the City should increase mobility options in prioritized zip codes, as well as ensure the safety and security of utilizing routes to food retail stores. **Safe Routes to Markets** would prioritize planning and development of dense, mixed-use, affordable housing and multiple mobility options to make sure that low-income community members have sufficient access to good food retailers. In addition to developing new sidewalks, bike lanes, and bus routes, the City should explore additional avenues for increasing safety in areas that are both high-crime and high-food insecure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritize key food access corridors identified in the Food Environment Analysis (including investments in sidewalks, improving bus routes, and providing safe bike lanes) through development and transportation planning initiatives such as:
 - Sidewalk Master Plan.
 - Austin Strategic Mobility Plan.
 - Capital Metro Connections 2025.
 - CodeNEXT.

- o Small Area Planning.
 - o Community Health Assessment/ Community Health Improvement Plan.
 - o Vision Zero Action Plan.
 - o Community Improvement Plan (CIP) projects.
 - o Austin Energy Street Light and Night Watchman Program.
- Increase security along key food access corridors to ensure that residents feel safe walking or biking to and from food retailers by increasing lighting, clearing overgrown vegetation, providing routes that do not require crossing major highways, and increasing collaboration with the Austin Police Department.
 - Align Austin Healthy Food Access Initiatives with Smart City initiatives by utilizing Food Environment Maps to inform locations for Smart Stations, exploring opportunities for farm stands to be located at Smart Stations, and using Community Health Workers as Smart Ambassadors.
 - Coordinate transportation and new food access initiatives to ensure that multiple community needs are being met.

GOALS

- Develop guidelines to encourage food retail within a short trip to dense residential areas.
- Increase / improve sidewalk and bike lane infrastructure to food retail.
- Improve mass transit routes and frequency to food retail.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

- Increase transportation options for people living in population-dense, low-income communities.
- Decrease percentage of household income spent on transportation.
- Reduce traffic-related injuries and deaths.
- Reduce crime.
- Improve public health through active transportation modes.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increase in food security as indicated by future Food Environment Analysis.
- Number of new miles of sidewalk in food access corridors.
- Number of miles of repaired sidewalk in food access corridors.
- Number of new sidewalk ramps in food access corridors.
- Number of new miles of bike lanes in food access corridors.
- Number of food retail locations in food access corridors.
- Safety lighting improvements in prioritized zip codes.

BUDGET IMPACT

This work could be completed as part of existing & proposed planning, Capital Planning Office and operational budgets.

POSSIBLE MATCH

Mobility Bond.

IMPLEMENTATION

Timeframe	Activities
0-3 months	Develop criteria for priority food access corridors in Austin.
	Identify key partners and develop a coordinated strategy.
	Develop a plan for gathering and evaluating data.
	Participate and inform meetings related to transportation and infrastructure planning.
3-12 months	Research and map priority food access corridors and integrate into development and transportation planning and project priorities.
1 year and beyond	Ongoing evaluation of food access corridor priorities and integration with planning efforts.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The new Food Access Program Coordinator (see Recommendation 1) will work with the Office of Sustainability’s Food Policy Manager, the Office of Equity, and other City staff to develop criteria for priority food access corridors in Austin.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Pennsylvania: The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) has made increasing food access through transportation planning a priority in their sustainability plan. They have partnered with the City of Philadelphia to prioritize bringing fresh food within ten minutes for 75% of residents. SEPTA works with the City in plan transportation efforts to combat food deserts; they have also partnered with The Food Trust to establish farmers markets at SEPTA stations.

<http://www.septa.org/sustain/blog/2011/04-15.html>

Appendix A: Summary of Staffing Impact

One (1) employee

Food Access Program Coordinator

(Supports all Recommendations)

- Manage contract relationships with researchers to develop Food Environment Analysis.
- Manage contracts for Healthy Food Retail Incentive Programs currently underway; develop and coordinate expansion of Healthy Food Retail Incentive Program.
- Develop and implement Nutritious Food Incentive Program pilot with assistance from other City Departments.
- Incubate a Coordinated Awareness Campaign strategy with stakeholder groups.
- Develop Safe Routes to Market strategy.
- Evaluate impact and efficacy of all Healthy Food Access Initiatives.

One (1) employee

Healthy Food Retail Initiative Grant Manager

(Supports Recommendations 2 & 4: Healthy Food Retail Initiatives, Nutritious Food Incentives Program)

- Leverage relationships with public and private organizations to generate matching funds for both the Healthy Food Retail Initiatives and Nutritious Food Incentive Program.
- Apply for grant funding from State and Federal sources.
- Distribute City of Austin grants to qualified businesses.
- Disseminate information about grants to potential business owners and non-profit organizations.
- Create alignment with community organizations engaging in similar efforts.
- Coordinate efforts to address barriers to behavior change.

One (1) employee

Grocery Store Ambassador

(Supports Recommendation 2: Healthy Food Retail Initiatives)

- Streamline permitting process for new and expanding healthy food retail in targeted areas.
- Identify incentives for new healthy food retail.
- Develop systems to make the process easier and more efficient.

One (1) employee

Urban Food Production Coordinator

(Supports Recommendation 3: Increase Urban Food Production)

Many duties are closely tied to the current job functions of Sustainable Urban Agriculture & Community Gardens & Wildlife Austin Program Coordinator, Meredith Gray (Parks and Recreation Department). One

(1) additional employee is recommended to manage additional workload:

- Facilitate the development of community gardens in prioritized zip codes.
- Serve as a liaison between City of Austin and community gardening organizations.
- Coordinate the use of City of Austin property for urban agriculture.
- Work to allow for commercial sale of produce grown on City-owned land.
- Coordinate community garden food production and farm stand programming.
- Provide training to community leaders/members on community garden maintenance.
- Evaluate impact and efficacy of program.

Appendix B: Diet-Related Impacts to Texas

Texas currently suffers from an obesity epidemic, with the rate of adult obesity above 30%. The current cost to the State of Texas for obesity-related expenses is an estimated \$10 billion annually and is expected to increase to \$30 billion by 2030 if no interventions are made. At the current rate of weight gain, 57 percent of Texans will be obese by 2030, which could lead to 13 million additional cases of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart failure and stroke, arthritis and cancer. Investing in initiatives that decrease the rate of obesity will pay dividends in healthcare and disability cost savings.

“If BMIs (Body Mass Index) were lowered by 5 percent, Texas could save 7.7 percent in health care costs, which would equate to a savings of \$ 54,194,000,000 by 2030.”

“The number of Texas residents who could be spared from developing new cases of major obesity-related diseases includes:

- 605,152 people from Type-2 diabetes.
- 465,739 people from coronary heart disease and stroke.
- 472,671 people from hypertension.
- 270,868 people from arthritis.
- 34,918 people from obesity-related cancer.

(Levi, J., Segal, L. M., St Laurent, R., & Kohn, D. (2010). F as in fat: How obesity threatens America's future. *Trust for America's Health*, 1-124.)

Appendix C: Austin Healthy Food Initiative Diagram

