

Annual Internal Review

This report covers the time period of 1/1/2013 to 12/31/2013

Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB)

The SFPB mission statement (per the City Code):

The Board shall serve as an advisory body to the City Council and Travis County Commissioner's Court concerning the need to improve the availability of safe, nutritious, locally, and sustainably-grown food at reasonable prices for all residents, particularly those in need, by coordinating the relevant activities of city government, as well as non-profit organizations, and food and farming businesses.

1) Describe the board's actions supporting their mission during the previous calendar year. Address all elements of the board's mission statement as provided in the City Code.

(Reference all reports, recommendations, letters or resolutions presented to the City Council on mission-specific issues. If some of the elements of the mission statement were not acted on by the board in the past year, the report should explain why no action was taken.)

The Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) underwent an annual work planning process during the first quarter of 2013. The following are outcomes of that work plan, as well as a continuation of the activities from the previous year's work. Priority objectives and working groups were established as outlined in #2 below to work toward the board's far-reaching mission.

The 13-member volunteer board concentrated on strengthening economic vitality, social equity and natural resource protection in our local food system by engaging community stakeholders and expertise through working groups. This informed board recommendations to policy makers summarized below. Major accomplishments include: updating sustainable urban agriculture in the City's land use development code, detailing priorities based on recommendations from the Economic Impact of Austin's Food Sector report, facilitating the creation of an annual farmers market health permit and fee structure, and supporting budget allocations for a Food Policy Manager City staff position and efforts to increase local participation in, and economic impacts of, nutrition assistance programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The SFPB continues to keep abreast of legislative developments at both the federal and state levels. Cuts or limitations to federal nutrition programs will have a direct effect on the ability of Travis County citizens to remain food secure, and will affect both county and city budgets. Members of the board regularly meet with members of the state legislature and federal congressional delegation, as well as testify in committees on agriculture and nutrition issues. A summary of food-related legislation passed during the Texas 83rd Session was given at the Board's June 24, 2013 meeting. <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=193688>

In addition, the Board's food system-related input into the CDC Community Transformation Grant that was awarded to, and is administered by, HHSD, led to 10 mini-grants of \$2000 to support community work toward a more sustainable and just food system.

Working Group Highlights

Food Security Working Group:

The Food Security working group in 2013 included representation from the Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department, the Sustainable Food Center, Meals on Wheels and More, the Texas Hunger Initiative, Austin ISD, the Center for Public Policy Priorities, St. David's Foundation, and the Capital Area Food Bank of Texas. The group addressed issues related to nutrition programs outreach and access, food insecurity, and food deserts. Many of these issues were considered in the context of the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) coordinated by the Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department. The Food Security working group will continue to be the primary body working on food access policies for the CHIP over the next two years. Related to the CHIP, a healthy food zone advisory group was formed to review best practices and make recommendations on creating healthy food zones around schools and other locations where children congregate. The Food Security working group also continued to advocate for increased funding for SNAP and WIC outreach as well as benefit incentive programs at area farmers markets. Although the city council did not adopt these recommendations wholly, members of the working group continue to work with members of the Public Health and Human Services Committee to address future budget recommendations.

Community Engagement Working Group:

The working group included members from the Texas Department of State Health Services, UT-Austin, and Sustainable Food Center. This year, the working group added a co-chair to help the group devise ways to facilitate community inputs and increase awareness of the board's work in the general public and help advertise ways to get involved. This included revising the draft of an Engagement Process Map for Community Stakeholders (and SFPB working group members), which outlines ways to connect SFPB members with communities of expertise and helps enable civic participation in the SFPB process. The group also updated/improved the SFPB web presence by adding a link on B&C site to Travis Co HHS site to promote cross traffic and created a "Get Involved" page. The working group solidified liaison/connections with City of Austin Office of Sustainability in order to make better use of existing social media channels and contacts to promote SFPB work. The group also created a "Community Partner Distribution List" and solicited community inputs to better reach potential workgroup members and alert them to items/events of interest. Finally, the CEOR workgroup hosted the Community Engagement & Outreach event for Food Day 2013, which solidified the SFPB's first use of partner social media channels to promote the event through coordination with the Office of Sustainability. Co-chairs engaged and collated the feedback to help inform the 2014 workplan.

Codes and Metrics Working Group:

The working group, (formed in March of 2013) with Board Member Katherine Nicely as the chair and Heather Frambach (SUACG) and Kate Vickery (SUACG) as co-chairs, decided this year to take on the task to update the existing Urban Farm Ordinance. The first urban farm ordinance went into effect in the land development code in April 2000, making urban farms a permitted use in most

zoning districts, including residential. The city's Planning Commission voted to initiate a process to update that ordinance on February 26, 2013. The 2013 draft Urban Farm Ordinance was created with extensive stakeholder input; drafts were reviewed by staff from the Office of Sustainability, Planning & Development Review, Code Compliance, Environmental Health, and Watershed Protection Department in July-August, 2013. The working group coordinated with City Staff as Watershed and PDRD and included them in as stakeholders throughout the process. Structure of working group: Advisory board and Stakeholder group. List is available per request.

The Working Group used a Context Sensitive Solutions and Public Involvement Approach. A series of four public engagement sessions in East Austin were organized. Session #1 (Animal Raising & Aquaponics-April 22); Session #2 (Site Requirements, Wholesaling & Labor-May 1); Session #3 (Byproducts, Environmental Health & Sustainability-May 15). A good sample of community members with an average of 70 people attending each meeting. Members of the working group also met with neighborhood groups, environmental justice activists, boards, commissions, city and county staff, and members of the region's varied urban food producers. A "process document" can be found here: <http://bit.ly/19hDDg9>. It served as backup throughout the process at: the Sustainable Food Policy Board (August 26-included public hearing), PC Codes & Ordinances subcommittee (September 17-included public hearing), Planning Commission (September 24-included public hearing), City Council Meeting (November 21-included public hearing). In addition, letters from stakeholders were received (<http://bit.ly/16YWRjV>).

The Urban Farm Ordinance went up for City Council on November 21, 2013 and passed with some changes. The ordinance honors and maintains the ability for the urban farm use to be allowed "in every zoning district". The ordinance creates market gardens, allows third-party sales of up to 20% of the farm stand's sales area and be produced in the state of Texas, urban farms can have up to two dwellings on the property, animal raising and processing: raising fowl, rabbits and fish (aquaponics only) allowed, but no processing or composting in single family use but can be allowed in commercial uses and other zoning categories, and urban farms (in SF) will be able to apply for up to six Temporary Use Permits per year to host non-educational outdoor events. Non-code recommendations were also made by the working group. These can be found here: <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=193493>.

Meat Processing Working Group:

Farmers and others have been meeting to identify the roadblocks to raising and selling more local meat grown using sustainable methods. Recent meetings include a statewide gathering of farmers at the annual Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Conference held in Houston in January as well as a Poultry Processing Summit held in Elgin in February. Concerns tend to vary according to the size of the farm and its location, however, repeated issues, include:

Lack of support for 1) farmer-driven efforts to create mobile processing units and innovative, sustainable on-farm processing systems (e.g., zero-waste, humane, composting, etc.) and 2) existing small processing facilities.

This lack of support, includes:

- regulators who give conflicting and unclear information (e.g., “You ask three inspectors, you get three different answers.”);
- arcane and inappropriate regulations intended for massive factory processing systems enforced on small, family operations;
- hostile county inspectors. (For instance, while the state controls meat manufacturing, counties and cities control retail distribution. Several participants identified Travis County as a particularly difficult county to work in because inspectors choose such strict interpretation of rules. Many initial participants in the working group requested anonymity fearing retribution from regulatory officials.)

Given concerns about confusing and punishing regulations, several growers from the working group lobbied the state’s Public Health Committee during the 2013 legislative session. The result was that HB 1392, called the DSHS Better Communications Act, passed and now requires the Department of State Health Services to respond to requests about how the food safety regulations apply to specific situations. HB 1392 also requires the agency to state its interpretation of the law, and to protect farmers who comply in good faith from being fined.

Going forward, the working group will prioritize farmers concerns and produce recommendations on what steps can be taken to help local meat farmers succeed, particularly in Travis county.

Healthy and Local Food in City/County Venues:

This group informed the board’s January 28, 2013 recommendation to Council and the Commissioner’s Court, which led to Austin City Council Resolution 20130228-038, The SFPB working group was then dissolved. An interdepartmental team charged with developing healthy and local food procurement policy recommendations began convening in March of 2013. Team included staff from: COA Purchasing, Building Services, Health and Human Services, Parks and Recreation, Economic Development, Convention Center, Human Resources, Aviation, Libraries, Office of Sustainability and Travis County. The Deputy Purchasing Officer, Yolanda Miller and HHSD Chronic Disease Prevention and Control Manager, Cassie DeLeon presented initial recommendations to PHHS on June 18, 2013 and to the City Manager on September 11, 2013. The recommendations were scheduled to be presented as a Council Briefing on September 26, but were rescheduled to November 7. On November 4, the workgroup was notified that the Council Briefing was pulled from the agenda and is on hold until further notice.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=191575>.

Retail Capacity Building Working Group:

This working group never got off the ground as intended. However, a related group (initiated in 2012) met throughout the year to developing a new annual farmers market permitting system and fee schedule. The group included SFPB representation, City staff from HHSD Environmental Health Services and stakeholders representing nine area farmers market. The group presented to PHHS on several occasions to ensure a fair farmers market ordinance that went into effect on November 4, 2013.

Board Recommendations and Letters

Available on the SFPB's web page: <http://www.austintexas.gov/page/sfpb-resources>

Follow-up Letter: SNAP Outreach/Enrollment Efforts and Incentives Funding (January 28, 2013)

Letter restates the SFPB's initial recommendation made in April 2012 to increase outreach/enrollment and funding of efforts to make more fresh food available for those eligible for nutrition assistance programs like SNAP and WIC.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/SustainableFood/SNAP%20Follow-up%20Letter%20to%20Mayor%20and%20Council.pdf>

Food Security Chair, Kathy Green, summarized letter at February Council Public Health and Human Services (PHHS) Committee when HHSD related recommendations were presented.

Healthy and Local Food Service Procurement Resolution (January 28, 2013)

Recommendation for City and County to adopt 100% health standards for all food and beverage served on city and county property to employees and/or the public, including vending and food service. and to work with the Office of Sustainability to develop practices and policies which encourage the City's purchase of food from local vendors and producers.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/SustainableFood/Healthy%20%20Local%20Food%20Resolution%20to%20Mayor%20and%20Council.pdf>

Land Use Development Code Urban Farm Update Resolution (January 28, 2013)

Recommendation that the Planning Commission initiate an amendment to clarify, update and revise language in Austin City Code 25-2-863 and 25-2-7 related to urban farms, especially concerning: livestock, size of farm, employees and dwelling. That the SFPB will work with the Planning Commission and City staff to review zoning for additional opportunities to increase local food production.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/SustainableFood/Urban%20Farm%20Definition%20Update.pdf>

Clarification of Economic Impact Analysis Recommendations (May 28, 2013)

Recommends that the City and County allocate the resources and staff direction necessary in the 2013-2014 fiscal year to accomplish these summarized priorities: Create infrastructure and facilities, support local farmers to help increase markets, and implement innovative and proven practices that improve access to healthy and local foods and reduce hunger.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/SustainableFood/Rec. 20130528-5Ar Clarification.pdf>

Memo and Support Document: Economic Impact of Austin's Food Sector (June 19, 2013)

Additional guidance and resources to reach SFPB Recommendations of May 28, 2013.

Non-code recommendations - Urban Farm Land Use Update (July 22, 2013)

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=193493>

Farmers Market Permits Ordinance Fee and Sampling Recommendation (August 26, 2013)
Encourages the Austin City Council to ensure that when a farmer or vendor procures multiple permits to operate at multiple sites on the same day, that the fees be reduced on those subsequent permits; and that sampling of “farm produce” can be done without a permit in accordance with HB 1382.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=195711>

SNAP Outreach/Incentives Budget Reconsideration Request (August 26, 2013)

Reiteration of recommendation that in its 2013/2014 fiscal budget the City allocate \$50,000 to expand the Double Dollar Incentive Program at farmers markets and provide funding and staff support to increase outreach and assistance efforts toward SNAP enrollment and redemption.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=195710>

Reiteration of Non-code Recommendations to Fund SNAP Technology at Farm Stands and Assist Urban Farms with Certificates of Occupancy (November 25, 2013)

Recommendation that the City immediately allocate \$5,000 to fund the technology to accept SNAP and WIC benefits at existing farm stands and contribute with local organizations and funders to double those benefits so that \$1 of benefits buys \$2 of farm produce. Reiteration of recommendation that a City staff person assist current urban farmers in expeditiously obtaining necessary Certificates of Occupancy. <http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=202236>

Board-Related Council Resolutions and Ordinances

Healthy and Local Food Service Procurement Resolution 20130228-038 (February 28, 2013)

The City Manager is directed to develop recommendations for a local and healthy food purchasing policy for the City of Austin and a healthy vending machine policy for City facilities. Included in the recommendations should be one option that ensures 100% healthy standards for all food and beverages served on city property, including vending and food service; The policy recommendations should be presented to the City Council Public Health and Human Services Committee before reporting to Council by May 30, 2013.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/SustainableFood/Local%20and%20Healthy%20Food%20Procurement%20Resolution%2020130228-038.pdf>

Food Sector Economic Impact Analysis Prioritization Resolution 20130411-038 (April 11, 2013)

The City Manager is directed to work with the SFPB to identify and prioritize recommendations from the Economic Impact of Austin's Food Sector Report; and to implement those recommendations that do not require budget amendments and work with the SFPB to identify short and long-term priorities and budget implications and report back to Council prior to the May 2, 2013 budget work session.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=187319>

Implementation of SFPB and Staff EIA Priorities and Funding of FTE Resolution 20130627-080
(June 27, 2013)

The City Manager is directed to present options for funding in the FY2014 budget the creation of a city wide staff coordinator and implementation of the recommendations as prioritized by the Sustainable Food Policy Board and the city staff memo. The City Manager should consider FY2013 vacancy savings and reallocating unfilled part-time positions from other City food-related programs in order to limit the amount of new funding required for implementing these recommendations in FY2014.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=193381>

Farmers Market Ordinance 20131024-016 (October 24, 2013)

Amends City Code Chapter 10-3 (FOOD AND FOOD HANDLERS) Regarding Regulation of Individual Vendors at Farmers Markets.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=199817>

Farmers Market Fees Amendment Ordinance 20131024-017 (October 24, 2013)

Adds New Health and Human Services Farmers Market Vendor Permit Fees

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=199818>

Amendments to City Code Chapters 3-2,10-3, AND 14-7 Relating to Urban Farms. Ordinance 20131121-020 (November 21, 2013)

http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/SustainableFood/Ordinance_No._20131121-020.pdf

