



**Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board  
Annual Report, 2015**



## **Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board Annual Report**

### **Background**

The Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board (board) (previously the Austin-Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board) is a 13-member board jointly appointed by the Austin City Council and the Travis County Commissioners Court. The board was established in 2008 by City of Austin ordinance #20081120-058 with the mission of serving as an advisory body to these two bodies “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.”

### **Purpose and Structure**

In 2015, the board established its scope and purpose for the year: “to address health disparities, increase local sustainable food production, and end food injustices through research and advocacy. We strive to ensure the community has a voice in policy decisions that support a healing, thriving, and sustainable local food system in Austin/ Travis County.” The city’s new 10-1 city council structure, first seated in 2015, allowed the Board to focus on food systems via city council district and provide more strategic recommendations.

The board is comprised of a chair and vice-chair, as well as several working groups. These working groups are issue-related in scope, and involve both board members and outside stakeholders. This participatory structure allows the board to research food systems issues more thoroughly, and make policy recommendations with community input. The full board meets monthly, on the second Monday of the month at 6:00 PM at the City of Austin Street-Jones Building on E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street.



## **2015 Working Groups and Objectives**

**Retail Capacity:** Continue retail capacity work that educates and promotes traditional and non-traditional venues for healthy foods, including alternate methods of distribution of local, sustainable foods. Recommend new policies to increase local, sustainable meat processing and distribution.

**Codes and Ordinances/Food Security:** Ensure community engagement and participation in food systems-related discussions that address food access at different scales (e.g. transportation, affordability and distribution) as part of the CodeNEXT process. Facilitate/integrate a Neighborhood Food Systems Planning Process to recommend resident-driven food policies that support a healthy, accessible, and sustainable food system.

**Farmland Preservation and Access:** Increase access to land used for sustainable, local food production - including improving the feasibility of farming - especially for potential farmers with limited resources and from diverse communities.

### **Summary of Work Completed**

Codes and Ordinances Working Group: The Codes & Ordinances working group (WG) researched and wrote a white paper for CodeNEXT, the City of Austin's rewrite of the Land Development Code, which included recommendations to consider on the five stages of the food system (production, processing, distribution, consumption, and food waste recovery). This paper called for the CodeNEXT to create a "connected, protected, and community-integrated food system". This work provided the WG a dialog with the CodeNEXT team to continue throughout the entire code rewrite process.

After sending the paper to CodeNEXT, the Codes & Ordinances WG was invited to participate in community education events. The WG participated in Sound Check - a CodeNEXT event to help the public learn about the land code rewrite process. The WG was able to distribute the white paper to the public, discuss our recommendations, and answer questions about how improving Austin's food system could improve the community's access to food.

Farmland Preservation and Access Working Group: The Farmland Preservation and Access Working Group met every month in 2015 with an average attendance of twelve community stakeholders. The group accomplished three

significant priorities throughout the course of the year. The first was to determine strategies for how CodeNEXT can incorporate mandates for farmland preservation/access, including recommendation language and desirable production uses in each of the four transects.

The second priority accomplishment was to draft a letter of support for existing farmers and farms that are experiencing growth and developer pressures to move off their land. In November 2015, the working group submitted 17 originally signed copies of a letter for support for Green Gate Farms to all Austin City Council members and all Travis County Commissioners. The last priority accomplishment was to finalize language for a food system study recommendation, which the Sustainable Food Policy Board unanimously passed in the January 2016 meeting. This recommendation was the culmination of six months of complex conversations and group dedication.

Retail Capacity: The Retail Capacity Working Group met every month in 2015 with an average attendance of eight community stakeholders. The group focused most of their effort on crafting a recommendation for the Austin City Council to fund a set of strategies for increasing access to healthy food. Significant research was done on examples of other cities that had developed successful strategies and evaluated their impact on food access. It was clear there was no single solution for ensuring Austin residents could effectively access healthy food, but instead there was a need for supporting a range of options. This perspective led to a recommendation with three core suggestions: 1) support the expansion of an existing pilot project to provide healthy food at local corner stores, 2) support the expansion of an existing school and community Farm stand pilot project, and 3) support the development of a new pilot mobile farm stand. These strategies were drafted into a single recommendation and approved by the Board in June 2016.



### **Accomplishments**

The board made several recommendations in support of initiatives for food access and sustainable food systems.

These recommendations advanced to the Austin City Council, and resulted in \$400,000 being allocated for food access initiatives.

- Increasing SNAP Enrollment with Outreach, June 8, 2015; Recommendation 20150608-5A1C

- Support for Strategies for Increasing Access to Healthy Food, June 8, 2015; Recommendation 20150608-5A1C

This recommendation advanced to the CodeNEXT working group to ensure that the rewrite of the City of Austin Land Development Code integrates production and access to healthy, sustainable food.

- CodeNEXT Supports Sustainable Food System, October 15, 2015; Recommendation 20151015-5.A.1.a.

The Board also forwarded a letter of support to the Austin City Council and Mayor for Green Gate Farms, who was in danger of being shut down due to new development on its property.

Lastly, board members actively participated in the Austin-Travis County Community Health Improvement Plan strategies related to food access and health.

