

I've been invited by Edwin Marty (Office of Sustainability) and Aiden Cohen (Austin's Resource Recovery) to get involved in a Food Recovery Policy revisit.

This is an issue that can potentially make a huge difference in many people's lives. As a food recovery coordinator myself, I've seen first hand how big an impact it makes on peoples lives, being able to chose from a selection of fresh, colorful fruits and vegetables.

They both agreed that my unique experience will be valuable in facilitating the necessary discussions. If it makes sense to establish a new food policy working group, I would love to be a member of that group. I served on a *food recovery* working group several years ago, headed up by Brandi Clark. I've had 8 years of experience creating the most comprehensive (grocery store) food recovery program in Austin thanks to Wheatsville Food CO-OP and a small group of fellow volunteers. I've had 17 years of food retailing experience including: 11 years with Whole Foods Market, 1 with Sun Harvest, 4 with Wheatsville and currently, almost 2 years now at *In.gredients*, a zero waste neighborhood grocer. There, the manager Josh Paine is a ZWAC member. Recently I worked for 2 years with Break It Down Recycling and Compost pick-up. There, the owner, Jeff Paine was a ZWAC member.

I read that the mission of the Office of Sustainability is a commitment to a just and fair local food policy. That is; a policy based on, or behaving according to what is morally right and fair.

I too, on many occassions, have said that my personal motivations for giving so many hours and resources toward food recovery are:

Social justice - don't allow nutritious food go to waste. Get it to the mouths of the needy, quickly, before it goes bad, and *Eco justice* – that is... don't waste our earth's resources: soil, water, fertilizers, fuel.

I think the reason both Mr. Marty and Mr. Cohen agree that this issue needs a revisit is because, to date, it has not been given the emphasis that it needs and that it deserves. The **emphasis** at the Office of Sustainability has been to identify and enumerate the need, and on the URO end of it, organic waste diversion.

In my opinion, in order to capture as much food as possible (and that's the goal, right?) the following two issues need the most attention.

Issue A

As I read through the Office of Sustainability's food recovery policy and the Resource Recovery department's URO and zero waste initiative, I see the concept of food recovery being combined with that of organic waste diversion into compost. This combining effectively waters down and de-emphasizes the issue of Food Recovery. The emphasis is being put on organic waste diversion, and Food Recovery is always mentioned as a sub-category.

Action item 1: Create and publish a glossary of terms regarding the issues of food policy and organic waste diversion.

Action item 2: Simultaneously, separate the issues of food recovery and organic waste diversion.

Proposal to action item 1

The terms for *food* issues should be: *food, food recovery, food donation, food for human consumption.*

The terms for *organic waste* should not include the word *food*, but should include the words: *organic waste, compostables, produce trimmings, kitchens scraps.*

Proposal to action item 2

On the Office of Sustainability's website, the page labeled "food recovery" should be all about feeding needy people food diverted from retail grocery and other food venues - who does it, how it's done, what are the best practices and regulations. Organic waste diversion and composting could have a separate page.

Issue B

It is my understanding that the people who reach out to retailers to ask for food recovery donations get only a little cooperation. (let me be clear here. My issue is not that corporate food donations aren't happening. I know for example HEB give a lot to the Central Texas Food Bank. They play a big part in keeping CTFB's truck rolling. What I'm referring to is Food recovery, from the grocery stores themselves: produce culls, or whats call now ugly produce, dated bread, dairy adeli and meat). I believe this will always be the case, until retailers see the city emphasizing these types of food donation with policies, brochures, phone calls, and visits by city officials. They should be made aware of the tax breaks as well as the societal benefits of Food Recovery. With that, retailers are more likely to choose to donate.

*Note: many non-profit organizations are reaching out to retailers. I want to acknowledge these folks for the great work they do. In critiquing the seemingly weak overall effort of food recovery in Austin, which I think is in its infancy, I in no way am criticizing the non-profits, their tactics, and their energy. I praise it. For what they are doing is **in spite of** the difficulty they, and we, endure.*

Action item 3: Write an F.R.O. - Food Recovery Ordinance. That is, create a third category of diversion: 1) single stream recycling, 2) organic waste, 3) food. The food category would have its own goals, timeline and its own compliance mechanisms.

Action item 4: If not a F.R.O., at least compile a list of food-permitted businesses, and rate them in regard to food recovery efforts.

eg; 1 star, 2 star, 3 star, 4 star, 5 star; similar to the cities **green building** rating. (Wheatsville, for example, would get a 5 star rating.)

Proposal to action item 3

If the city was to go as far as to issue an ordinance that **wouldn't allow** the disposal of edible food, whether to the landfill or to composting, then retailers wouldn't have a choice but to donate. Other jurisdictions have done this. The volume of food that would then be distributed would be huge.

All entities that address food scarcity, whether they be food runners or food redistribution sites, would then be overwhelmed with food. I would rather have that problem to solve, than the one we have now in trying to convince retailers to donate.

In conclusion:

If we can pass an ordinance that reduces the amount of plastic bags we see around us, isn't it only right and just that we pass an ordinance reducing the amount of hungry, malnourished people we see around us?

We need to keep business owners and corporations from disposing of perfectly good, nutritious food. All of my proposed action items serve to emphasize and support the system of Food Recovery and feeding people; from clarifying the topic with retailers and the general public, to creating ordinances to enforce the changes we need.