June 13, 2017

OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY
CITY OF AUSTIN

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.