

TO: Austin Travis County Food Policy Board

FROM: Healthy Food Access & Food Security Working Group

RE: Austin Land Development Code Revision

DATE: November 21, 2019

Land use policy significantly affects our entire food system, both directly and indirectly. The City of Austin's ongoing Land Development Code Revision process creates a unique opportunity to have a lasting and positive impact on the development of a more just and equitable food system. The process which the City of Austin chooses to undertake has the potential to further embed inequities or lead to improved outcomes that benefit everyone. To reach the most equitable outcomes, the process must be a thoughtful one that engages and encourages input from a diverse set of stakeholders.

The Healthy Food Access & Food Security Working Group desires to make meaningful recommendations for the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board to consider recommending to city staff. The working group's priority is to ensure that food equity is integrated in the revised code. However, the timeline set out by the city has made it difficult for the working group to understand the revisions and present a well-informed response. A more meaningful approach might have included opportunities for direct dialogue between city staff and city boards and commissions when developing the code. With more time, the resulting recommendations would undoubtedly lead to more significant positive and equitable results.

Given the existing time constraints, the Healthy Food Access & Food Security Working Group recommends that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board consider submitting to Austin City Council the following principles for inclusion in the Land Development Code Revision. In addition, the working group welcomes additions to this list from the other working groups, including Farms & Farmers, Food & Climate, Food & Gardens, and Build Opportunities for Food Entrepreneurs.

- 1) Ensure that the revised code be wholly developed using an environmental justice and food equity lens.

- 2) Examine which food-related land uses, such as commercial food preparation, food sales, mobile food sales, and general agriculture land uses, are allowed in various zones throughout the city. Map these assets to evaluate if the distribution of these land uses is equitable.

- 3) Ensure that the code addresses the unique food system needs for each transect, including urban core, urban, suburban and rural.

- 4) Provide incentives and remove barriers for food production, including but not limited to:
 - a) Review the city's existing Urban Farm Ordinance (Ordinance No. 20131121-105) to ensure ordinance reflects current and future urban agricultural uses. Examples:
 - i) Requirement to have a house on urban farmland with livestock (precludes livestock farming on flood plain land).
 - ii) Requirement limiting urban agriculture to 5 acres or less.
 - b) Encourage density-appropriate farming activities.
 - c) Protect prime agricultural and farm land.
 - d) Develop inclusive definitions of agricultural production to include production techniques such as vertical farming, food forests, aquaponics.
 - e) Allow community gardeners to earn income from produce grown or education provided in community garden spaces.
 - f) Locate new gardens in proximity to residential areas and public transportation.

- 5) Provide incentives and remove barriers to establish land use patterns that support healthy food access, including but not limited to:
 - a) Use the Office of Sustainability's geographic food environment analysis, [Food Access in Austin](#), to evaluate food and agriculture land use patterns.
 - b) Create incentives for affordable housing near existing retail grocery stores, using affordability definitions and thresholds aligned with Austin Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department policies. Take into consideration median family income levels within the context of ongoing gentrification and displacement, particularly the outmigration of lower and middle-income families to more affordable communities such as Pflugerville, Manor and Del Valle.
 - c) Provide economic incentives for grocery development in underserved areas in the same way that the city provides economic incentives for tech companies and sports facilities. Incentives could include density bonuses, parking requirement reductions, and grocery or food retail as permitted use in a greater number of zones. Place priority for incentives to locally-owned and culturally-appropriate commercial food enterprises. Ensure incentives do not have unintended consequences for existing locally-owned businesses or

create barriers for future local businesses. Conduct outreach to local businesses to ensure they are aware that incentives exist and provide support on how to apply for incentives.

- d) Create economic incentives for healthy “grab and go” prepared meals, including family size portions, and healthy “fast food,” particularly in communities that face barriers to healthy, affordable food. Place priority for incentives to locally-owned and culturally-appropriate commercial food enterprises. Ensure incentives do not have unintended consequences for existing locally-owned businesses or create barriers for future local businesses. Conduct outreach to local businesses to ensure they are aware that incentives exist and provide support on how to apply for incentives.
 - e) Provide opportunities for shops, services, recreation, and access to healthy food sources within walking or bicycling distance of homes, work places, and other gathering places.
- 6) Develop numeric goals to achieve equitable food access, such as in a regional food system plan.
 - 7) Ensure that the code’s definition of Community Agriculture Land Use does not create unfair barriers for underserved communities, such as lot size requirements and setbacks.

Many examples have been successfully developed in other U.S. cities and cities across the world that can serve as models for Austin. These cities include Des Moines, IA; New York, NY; Redmond, WA; and Tacoma, WA. We believe that incorporating these principles into the Land Development Code Revision and subsequent city resources to carry them out will increase food equity throughout the city.