

Improving Access to Food

City Council Work Session
June 15, 2016



OFFICE OF
SUSTAINABILITY

CITY OF AUSTIN

Improving Food Access: Council Resolution 20160303-020

- Convene working group
- Work with the future Office of Equity
- Develop recommendations to improve food access
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Provide an update on enrollment effort
 - Offer recommendations to reduce enrollment gap
- Report fiscal impact for budget planning

Agenda

- Work group process and participants
- Food access in Austin
- Barriers to food access
- Recommendations
- SNAP enrollment barriers
- Next steps



Resolution Response Process

SINCE MARCH:

- **11** stakeholder meetings
 - Food Policy Board's Healthy Food Access working group
- **47** individuals representing **33** organizations
- Input from **6** City Departments:
 - Office of Sustainability
 - Planning and Zoning
 - Health and Human Services
 - Economic Development
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Austin Transportation

Additional Community Input

OVER THE LAST YEAR:

- Food Planning in North Central Austin/Rundberg Area
 - Presentations to **880** people at 21 events
 - **93** focus group participants
 - **7** in depth interviews with key stakeholders
 - **310** reached at community outreach events
 - **268** survey participants (digital + paper)
- Austin Area School Garden Collaborative
 - Quarterly meetings
 - **75** participants representing **60** schools
 - **130** survey participants



Resolution Response Process

100 + ideas evaluated using specific criteria:

- Potential for community engagement and empowerment
- Potential to advance equity and community resilience
- Legal feasibility
- Political feasibility
- Financial feasibility
- Ability to track and evaluate return on investment
- Alignment with Imagine Austin policies and actions

Top **6** recommendations meet all criteria and align with Imagine Austin

Food Insecurity:

Not knowing
where the next meal
will come from

Prevention or Treatment?

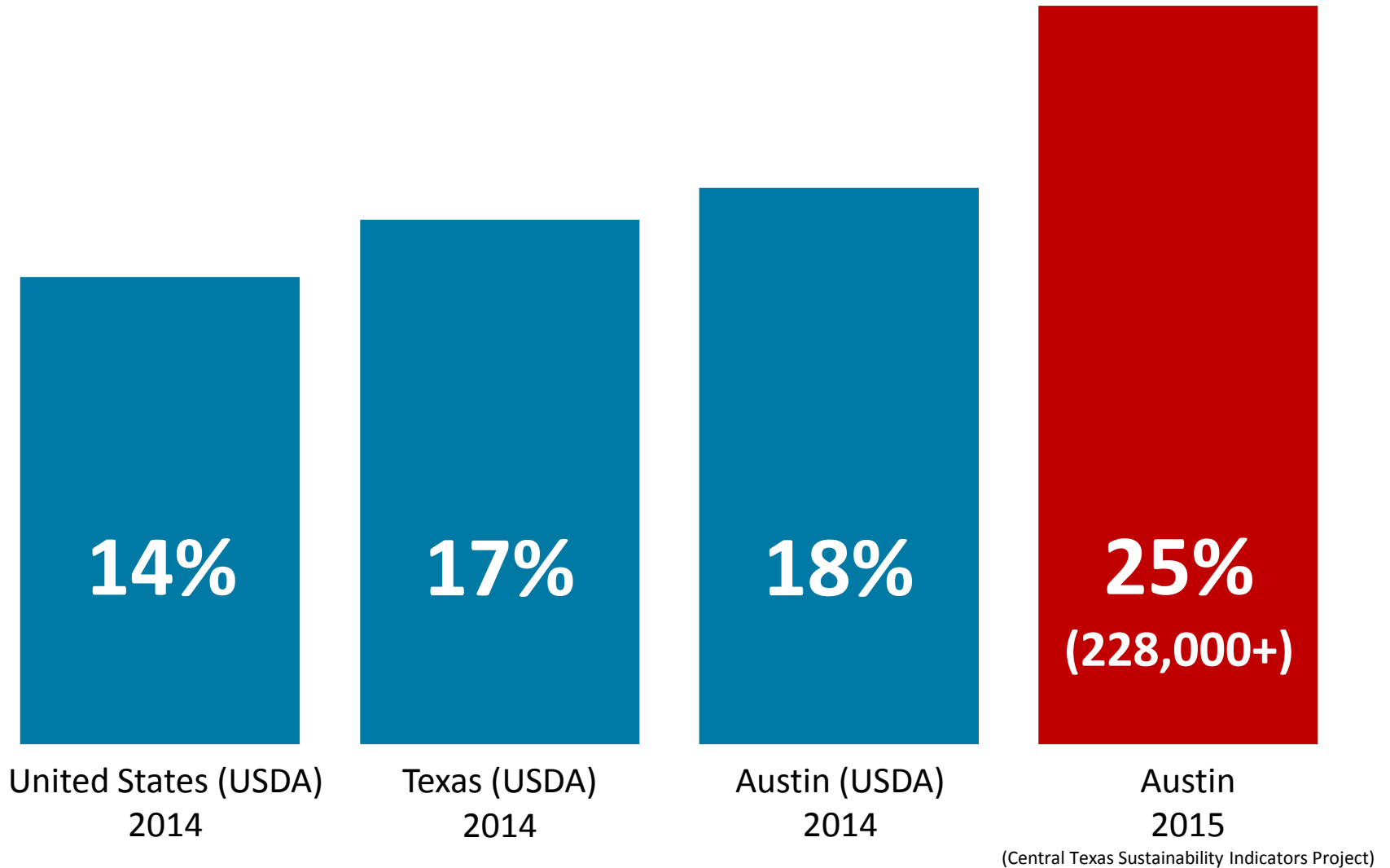
\$160.7 Billion

U.S. healthcare costs from food insecurity

\$18.8 Billion

Cost of poor educational outcomes in the U.S. from food insecurity

Food Insecurity

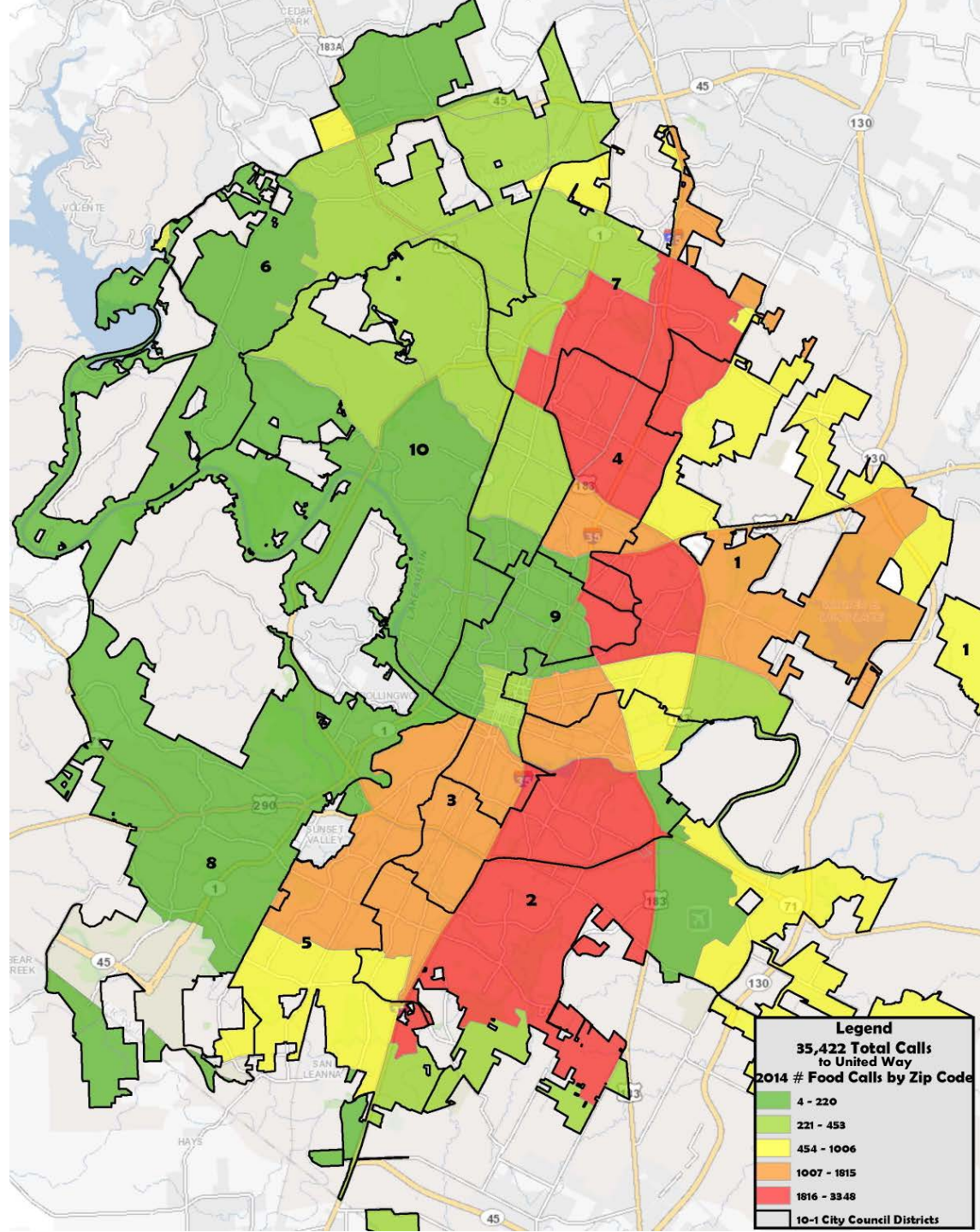


(Central Texas Sustainability Indicators Project)

High Priority Areas

Food insecurity has the most impact on children, seniors, and people without cars.

The greatest population growth is projected in areas with the most food insecurity.



Barriers to Food Access

- Availability
- Affordability
- Awareness
- Mobility options



Barrier: AVAILABILITY

- Adequate supply of fresh, nutritious food in stores
- Quality of fresh produce

“If I want to give healthy food to my family, I can’t do it because the broccoli is rotten and I won’t buy that.”

-- North Central Austin resident

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Expand Availability

Create Healthy Food Financing Program:

- Develop grant fund for community-based healthy food retail:
 - farm stands
 - healthy corner stores
 - mobile markets
 - grocery stores
- Streamline permitting process for healthy food retail in targeted zip codes
- Leverage State and Federal resources for a Healthy Food Financing Program



RECOMMENDATION 2:

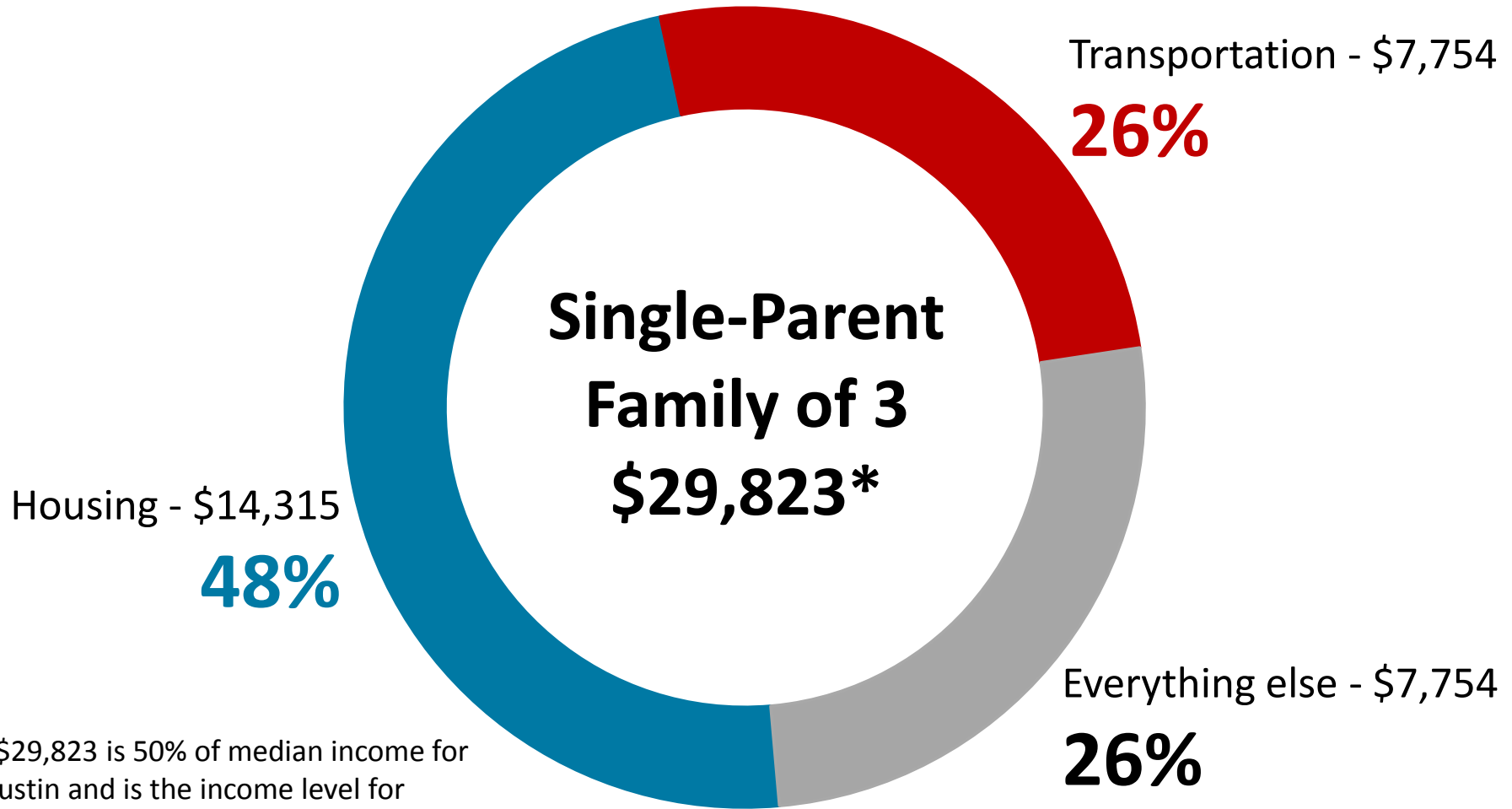
Expand Availability

Increase opportunities to grow food locally:

- Streamline process for community gardens
- Increase funding and resources for community gardens
- Utilize City-owned land for commercial urban agriculture



Barrier: AFFORDABILITY



*\$29,823 is 50% of median income for Austin and is the income level for 62% - 87% of the residents in areas with higher levels of food insecurity.

From the Local Affordability Portal provided by:
US Department of Housing and Urban Development
US Department of Transportation

Barrier: AFFORDABILITY

- For lower income families, a smaller percentage of income is available for buying food
- Limited SNAP/WIC acceptance among retailers
- High housing costs/overall affordability
- Stagnant wages
- Fresh produce is more expensive than less nutritious options

“Healthy options are expensive. You can get fruits and vegetables, but it’s costly.”

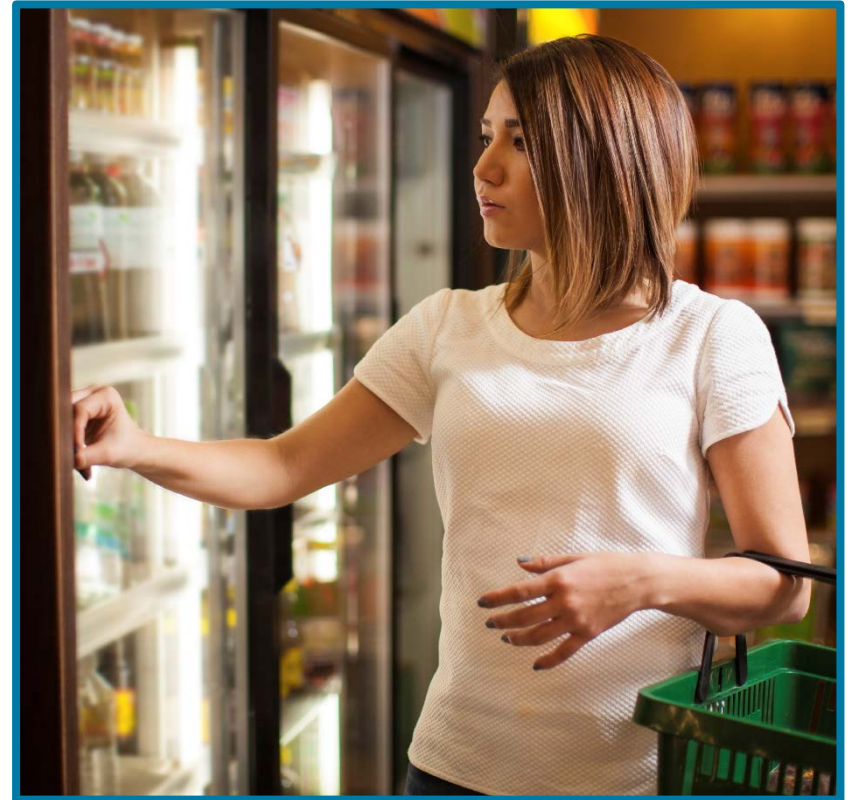
-- North Central Austin resident

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Increase Affordability

Pilot a Nutritious Food Incentive program in targeted zip codes that:

- Builds on Double Dollar Incentive Program success
- Provides store discounts on nutritious food
- Expands buying power to brick-and-mortar food retail
- Discounts can be loyalty program, rebates, and/or incentives



Barrier: AWARENESS

LACK OF INFORMATION:

- What is nutritious food?
- Where can I get nutritious food?
- How do I cook a nutritious meal?
- What food assistance programs are available?
- Am I eligible for food assistance programs?

“If you don’t know what to do with vegetables and you’ve never seen them before and you don’t have any time ...education is major.”

-- North Central Austin resident

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Create Awareness

- Coordinate education materials messaging between multiple organizations
- Expand support for Community Health Workers to distribute information at schools, community centers, and senior centers



Barrier: MOBILITY OPTIONS

For people without cars:

- Proximity to food retail
- Public transportation routes
- Frequency of public transportation
- Lack of sidewalks/bike lanes
- Sense of security/safety

*“I ride the bus.
I have two kids.
There’s no sidewalk
and it’s so hard to
get in and out....
It’s just so hard.”*

-- North Central Austin resident

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Improve Mobility Options

- Incorporate food access in planning efforts (Sidewalk Master Plan, Corridor Improvements Plan, CodeNEXT, etc.)
- Leverage investments in sidewalks and food retail
- Increase safety and security to food retail in targeted zip codes
- Promote affordable dense housing along corridors to make existing CapMetro services more cost effective and useful



Photo credit: John Langmore

SNAP Enrollment Rate

43%

(103,243 people)

of those **eligible** for SNAP in Travis County have **not enrolled**

\$303 million

Lost economic activity from unreceived SNAP in Travis County

SNAP Multiplier Effect



SNAP & WIC Enrollment Rate Barriers

- Language
- Literacy
- Isolated/mobile populations
- Cumbersome process
- Stigma
- Documentation
- Customer service
- Perception of value

RECOMMENDATION 6:

SNAP & WIC Enrollment Rate

- Short-term:
 - Funding for research to develop/address comprehensive strategy
 - Explore cross enrollment opportunities
- Support pilot initiatives:
 - Develop enrollment staff (cultural competency training, etc.)
 - Support mobile enrollment
 - Targeted campaign with low-wage employers
 - Phone helpline to decrease enrollment time



Overall Recommendations

- Create a Healthy Food Financing Program
- Expand community gardens and urban agriculture
- Pilot a Nutritious Food Incentive program
- Build awareness about nutritious food
- Improve transportation infrastructure/safety around food retail
- Support research and pilot initiatives to improve SNAP enrollment rate



Next Steps

- Feedback from Council about recommendations
- Develop budget estimates to implement recommendations
- Identify partners for matching funds
- Fiscal impact report to Council by August 2