



HEALTHY FOOD HAPPY COUNTY

INFUSING FOOD INTO PLANNING & POLICY

CITY-WIDE MASTER PLAN
THE UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF WYANDOTTE COUNTY
& KANSAS CITY, KANSAS



PURPOSE

Food is a basic necessity for life. Disparities in food access and small-scale food production opportunities vary across communities for economic, social, and geographic reasons. With a changing climate, ensuring food access and production will be an increasing concern. Local governments will continue to play a role in regulating, increasing, and supporting food access and production, but must be innovative and adaptable in these policies and programs due to the changing conditions.

Wyandotte County is a prime example of a community poised for practical, fresh food production and access policies. Healthy Communities Wyandotte (HCW), a health-focused countywide initiative, is an example of this sort of innovation. Through the work of numerous action teams, HCW works to mobilize community members to improve health, as Wyandotte County once again received the worst health rating in the State of Kansas in 2016. Wyandotte County was recently selected to receive food systems policy and program training and assistance from Growing Food Connections to further their health initiatives. This report serves as a supplemental policy document, as directed by Growing Food Connections, that explores the viability of food systems policies within Wyandotte County.

AUTHORS' PROFILE

Growing Food Connections has partnered with second year students in the Masters of Urban Planning program at the University of Kansas. Students have a variety of backgrounds, with specializations in housing and community development, land use, and transportation planning.

In order to gauge current interests and opportunities in sustainable food systems planning, students met with Unified Government of Kansas City, Kansas and Wyandotte County planning staff. A second meeting, with representatives from the Mid-America Regional Council and Wyandotte County Health Department provided valuable insight into what is already being done in Wyandotte County and the scope of future work.

Research was conducted into a variety of food related organizations currently working in the Wyandotte County area to assess how each could best assist in the development of a sustainable food system.

ORGANIZATION OF REPORT

The following report outlines different options that the Unified Government can take related to food and the current City Wide Master Plan. Three different options are outlined that approach integrating food access and food production on different levels. The first approach, Existing Opportunities, highlights opportunities that the planning department and others can capitalize on, as this language is already included in the City Wide Master Plan. The second level, Food Access & Development, does more to integrate food into the plan by adding a subsection related to food within the Policy Plan Framework that is located in second chapter, Policy Plan, of the document. A third approach, Food Plan, more thoroughly integrates food into the plan by adding a new chapter solely focused on food access and production to the City Wide Master Plan. Each of these sections will outline the benefits and consequences of the approach, recommended language and text, and the required next steps by the planning department and other important players.



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**HEALTHY FOOD
HAPPY COUNTY**



EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES

INTEGRATION LEVEL



LOCATION REFERENCE

Throughout entire document

PROS

- Can be “implemented” right away
- Will not require additional funding or public input

CONS

- May limit innovation
- References to food systems are minimal and abstract

The current City-Wide Master Plan for the Unified Government presents several opportunities to tie current and future food initiatives with the existing policies and language in the plan. In this section, such excerpts to food policy from the existing plan are listed and expanded upon. This method allows for minimal effort on behalf of the Urban Planning and Land Use Department, while still infusing food policy into the current Master Plan. It will be the responsibility of the Planning staff to emphasize food access and production in current planning and daily activities. The excerpts are listed by applicable Master Plan section.

POLICY PLAN

1. “Advertise our intentions, successes and lifestyle to the metropolitan area, the Midwest region and the rest of the country” (p. 9).

Wyandotte County has the opportunity to become a leader in healthy lifestyles supported by a sustainable food system and can use this as a selling point to attract future residents.

2. “Sustainable strategies will be necessary for navigating the ups and downs of fewer available natural resources, progress in renewable resources, technological improvements in communication, education, delivery of services and the subsequent impact on the ever-present need for humans to connect to each other” (p. 10).

All aspects of the food system will require the use of sustainable strategies.

3. “Act Locally with Global Impact: The steps taken to weave economic, environmental, and social solutions to our community issues have a cumulative effect to create a better life, for not just us, but the rest of the world” (p.12).

Local options for food production will have the effect of connecting the community and creating a healthier lifestyle for residents.

4. “Develop or provide references to Best Practice Guides that contain information on specific green building topics for developers, contractors and the general public. For example, a Best Practices Guide for Construction and Demolition Debris or one for Kansas City Landscaping could provide information specific to the Kansas City metro area” (p.14).

Inclusion of a Best Practices Guide for local growing and food policy would support the green initiative.

5. “Encourage appropriate rural commercial uses including agribusiness, nurseries, roadside stands and markets, etc.” (p. 16).

Farmers markets, roadside fruit and vegetable stands, and agriculture will be an integral part of the local food system.

6. “Redevelop aging neighborhood commercial centers including rehabilitation and reuse of vacant and/or under-utilized buildings” (p.18).

Under-utilized and vacant lots can present a great opportunity to transform a blighted parcel into a center of community pride through garden development.



LAND USE PLAN

1. “Provide incentives for community economic generators east of I-635 and along I-35” (Guiding Principles, p. 25).

Depending on the scale of farmers’ markets or community gardens, they can provide employment opportunities as an economic generator.

2. “Enhance neighborhood cultural amenities and resources; use these amenities as: an opportunity to preserve, enhance, and celebrate historic buildings, structures and sites; a catalyst for development and reinvestment; to reinforce and enhance neighborhood identity; [and] a source of community pride” (Guiding Principles, p. 25).

Integrating local food sources, such as residential gardens, in a neighborhood can become a source of community pride - a gathering space.

3. “Public/Semi-Public: These areas include publicly-owned or non-profit property. When these uses are sold, the City should carefully consider alternative uses for redevelopment” (p. 27).

“Alternative uses” could include food-related uses, such as food hubs, gardens, farmers’ markets, etc.

4. “Rural-Density Residential: These areas are comprised of agriculture, ranches and large lot residential development” (p. 28)

This land use designation clearly supports food production; this category must not be compromised in an effort to support the local food system.

5. “Optional Densities: Additional densities (up to 50%) may be allowed upon discretion from the City Planning Commission for developments that demonstrate exemplary design solutions including but not limited to traditional neighborhood design

(TND) development with quality product types on small or narrow lots. Development area with optional densities shall be zoned in a Planned District and must meet minimum design guidelines for mixed-use areas as outlined on page 43-44” (Low-Density Residential, p. 29).

Traditional neighborhood design and mixed-use land use categories can offer the flexibility to allow small-scale food production within more dense urban cores.

6. “Green Principles: Incentives should be provided for: bicycle and pedestrian connections to adjacent neighborhoods; integration of transit stops” (Medium-Density Residential, p. 30).

While not directly related to food, increasing multimodal, more affordable transportation options works to increase access to food overall.

7. “Green Principles: Incentives should be provided for: transit oriented development” (Urban Residential, p. 31).

Transit oriented development has potential as a policy tool to increase food access and production opportunities. Corner stores can be incorporated into these walkable, mixed-use developments.

98 “Open Space: None; however, rooftop gardens, courtyards, plazas and other ‘people places’ are encouraged” (High-Density Residential, p. 32).

This land use designation offers a direct food production opportunity.

9. “Allowed Uses: agriculture; ranches; small-scale agribusiness; nurseries; general merchandise stores; roadside farmers markets...” (Rural Commercial, p. 33).

This land use designation also offers multiple food production and access opportunities as it is currently written.

10. “Cultural Principles: Incentives should be provided for: grocery stores east of I-635 and south of I-70” (Community Commercial, p. 36).

This principle is clearly related to food access and should be further implemented.



URBAN DESIGN

1. "Recognize and celebrate the cultural diversity of neighborhoods throughout the City" (Guiding Principles, p. 51).

Food plays a defining role in culture. Acknowledging this guiding principle means allowing this diversity to flourish.

1. "These streets should incorporate wide sidewalks (a minimum of 10-feet wide with a 5-foot minimum landscaping zone between the walk and the back of the curb) on both sides of the street to accommodate comfortable pedestrian and bicycle connections as well as retail businesses and outdoor cafe" (p. 55).

Outdoor cafes, grocery stores, and other places to purchase food should be accessible via pedestrian walkways.

3. "Encouraging community anchors including businesses, schools and churches to work with their surrounding neighborhoods on area improvements and activities" (p. 54).

The development of a sustainable food system will be enhanced by the support of prominent businesses and members of the community.

PARKS, OPEN SPACE, & TRAILS

1. "Promote passive recreational uses and educational opportunities in environmentally sensitive space areas" (p. 61).

Food production can take place in recreational and environmentally sensitive areas.

2. "Develop a comprehensive greenway and trail system to connect all parks, schools, and other community" (p. 61).

Greenways provide space for food production and also create better access throughout the community for residents to get to food options.

3. "Encourage the establishment of outdoor classrooms to promote environmental education opportunities" (p. 63).

Food education is a easy way to talk about a healthier lifestyle, food choices, food production, and the relationship between food and the environment.

4. "Identify partnership opportunities with the private sector (businesses, civic organizations, neighborhood and homes associations, and interested residents)" (p. 63).

Partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and neighborhoods can be used to promote food production as well as access if the area of production is happening nearby in neighborhoods.

TRANSPORTATION

1. "Develop a functional mass transit system that provides reliable service between major land uses" (p. 67).

Adequate transportation systems will be a fundamental part of improving food access to underprivileged areas of the community.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

In order to turn the current language in the Master Plan into straightforward action steps, it is necessary to take a fresh look at implementation strategies.

For example, it is recommended that the staff report template be revisited. Language referring the reviewing planners to the Master Plan should be integrated into the staff report. A lengthened review process of the Master Plan itself, will allow for greater implementation. Additionally, it is important for

the Unified Government staff, and specifically the Urban Planning and Land Use staff, to recognize the connections between transportation, economic development, land use patterns, and food access and production. While little "food" language exists currently within the Master Plan, several connections that have the potential to further food access and production efforts should be taken advantage of and implemented across the County. Key opportunities were mentioned throughout this section.



FOOD ACCESS & DEVELOPMENT

INTEGRATION LEVEL



LOCATION REFERENCE

Inserted as page 24

PROS

- Existing framework
- Uses current efforts for a targeted approach to further food initiatives

CONS

- Without implementation /accountability, policies can be ineffective
- Multi-agency coordination can prove cumbersome

The Policy Plan Framework for *Food Access and Development* strives to make Wyandotte County a healthy and vibrant community by introducing policies and programs that will increase access to locally grown food. Stakeholder engagement and education is a key aspect of the Policy Plan Framework for *Food Access and Development* to ensure the development of policies and programs that are targeted and community driven.

The purpose of this option is to simply insert it into the existing City-Wide Master Plan.

POLICY PLAN: Policy Plan Framework

Food Access & Development

This is intended to focus on increasing not only the access to food, but also the quality of food available to all residents of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City Kansas.

Guiding Principles

- Engage with communities to promote healthy eating habits and lifestyles
- Discourage food waste
- Encourage sustainable food production methods
- Support local economies through local food systems
- Increase access to healthy food
- Support educational efforts

Policies

- Include food related framework into area and neighborhood plans ensuring neighborhood involvement.

- Remove barriers and provide educational materials or opportunities for at-home composting, rain collection and gardening.
- Encourage institutional purchasing of local produce to support local economy.
- Remove barriers such as permitting fees for temporary structures such as hoop houses that encourage sustainable growing practices.
- Coordinate an annual seed exchange for backyard gardeners and local farmers to foster community investment in sustainable growing practices.

Priority Recommendations

1. Identify food-insecure areas to prioritize targeted implementation efforts. Use census data, combined with local data to determine where the areas of highest need are to better focus funds and resources.

2. Consolidate and streamline current efforts of food-related stakeholders. Once areas have been identified as the highest need, lead efforts to focus groups in a coordinated effort.
3. Update zoning regulations to allow agricultural uses in increased zoning districts. For example, allowing gardening in commercial districts. Once areas have been targeted to updating the zoning regulations, propose a new Land Use Map.
4. Examine opportunities for food-related economic development. The Unified Government has an opportunity to be a leader in local food-related economic development by agreeing to purchase locally grown foods.
5. Identify and preserve productive agricultural land. Decrease minimum lot size requirements for subdividing land so that it can play an influential role in preserving productive agricultural land.



FOOD PLAN

INTEGRATION LEVEL



LOCATION REFERENCE

Inserted as page 71

PROS

- Adequate level of ideas, detail, and direction commensurate with the scale of the problem
- Fully developed and implementable

CONS

- Large commitment
- May require increased personnel and funding
- Adds additional burdens on existing planning agenda

The food system is the network of people and activities connecting growing, harvesting, processing, distribution, consumption and waste, as well as associated government and non-government institutions, regulations and programs.

This option is an entirely new section of the City-Wide Master Plan. If this option is pursued, it can be added in as an additional section at the end of the Master Plan.

INTRODUCTION

Planning for food is increasingly a topic of local and national interest. Local governments are recognizing the roles they can play in supporting local agriculture, promoting public health, improving access to healthy and affordable food, reducing environmental impacts, and diverting food waste from landfills. Seven years into an effort to improve its poor showing on statewide surveys of resident health, Wyandotte County continues to rank near the bottom. The county ranked very last, number 101, in 2016.

Together with the Board of Commissioners, community members, business and agricultural interests, and others, the Urban Planning and Land Use Department is tasked with developing integrated and sustainable policy recommendations to strengthen the regional food system. Beyond its work on food policy, one of goals is to develop

multicounty planning policies and include it into the master plan.

As such, the necessity of adding a stand alone chapter focusing on food planning to the Master Plan is important. This chapter includes goals, guiding principles, and recommendations. An important aspect of this is policy tools. The policy tools can be categorized into three primary types: financial incentives, education and outreach.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Research and engagement with the Health Department and Growing Food Connections served to identify several policy areas where there is a clear planning role for the city and an opportunity to holistically address the food system. An improved food system will help lead to improvements in health outcomes and quality of life. Following these principles will facilitate the transformation of the food system into a more robust solution to the community's needs.

- Engage with communities to promote healthy eating habits and lifestyles.
- Discourage food waste.
- Encourage sustainable food production methods.
- Increase access to healthy food.
- Support local economies through local food systems.
- Support educational efforts.

Food-friendly neighborhoods provide all residents of Wyandotte County with easy access to fresh, healthy foods, and the means to sustainably dispose of food waste. Building and maintaining strong food systems across the Wyandotte County will require the facilities and organizational support for:

- Community/collective gardens.
- Food storage facilities.
- Farmers and community markets.
- Healthy corner stores.
- Community composting facilities.
- Individual food production.



Priority Actions

- Explore how to keep community gardens on county property.
- Encourage community garden models that promote working with local schools, neighborhood houses, and other local organizations as part of their educational programming.
- Find ways to sell and distribute produce from urban farms in community centers, neighborhood houses, and schools.
- Create baseline models of existing urban farms, monitor changes, and integrate new models.
- Determine assets and gaps in mid-scale local and sustainable food infrastructure.
- Determine whether a central food hub is feasible in the County, and if so, how.
- Find opportunities to combine food purchasing among neighborhood houses, smaller community centers, and childcare centers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Each recommendation can be used as a starting point to further improve specific aspects of the food system broken down into categories of land use, urban agriculture, and data acquisition and analysis. Creating pilot projects to spearhead some of these recommendations will promote the successful implementation of this plan.

Land Use

- Establish a task force to assess and address barriers to new vacant land reutilization strategies that promote local food production, including zoning, building, health codes, and access to city land and water, etc. [Urban Planning and Land Use Department, Board of Commissioners, Building Inspection Department, Public Works Department, Water Pollution Control Department, Economic Development Department]

- Undertake a comprehensive review of zoning and land use ordinances to identify barriers to local food access and take steps to streamline processes to encourage development of new food distribution, marketing, and selling businesses. [Urban Planning and Land Use, Economic Development Department]
- Adopt land use decision-making mechanism for Land Bank properties that prioritize the use of land for local food production. [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department, Community Development Department, Economic Development Department, City Council, Mayor's Office]
- Encourage the use of hydrological data and soil characteristics as guiding factors for determining future land uses and stormwater management strategies at the city-wide level and in neighborhood master

plans. This data will ideally lead to promoting land suitable for food production to be allocated for such uses. [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department]

Data Acquisition & Analysis

- Develop new ways to classify and geocode vacant land in the GIS system to identify sites that have the strongest potential for green space/urban agriculture, provision of specific ecosystem services, and environmental contaminants. [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department]
- Develop parcel-based mapping of environmental contamination that distinguishes highly contaminated sites from those with lower contamination levels; include this information in the city's GIS parcel data. [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department]
- Map and document wetland criteria (hydric soils, hydrophytic vegetation, and water regime) and drainage patterns with the goal of identifying and preserving wetlands that should not be developed or used for agriculture. [Water Pollution Control Department]
- Delineate areas of existing vegetative cover throughout the city using recent aerial photographs with the idea of preserving vegetative cover, identifying invasive species, and locating areas that may be appropriate for urban agriculture. [Urban Planning and Land Use Department]



Urban Agriculture

- Provide permanent support for local food production. Prioritize agricultural land uses in the city through the creation of a new land use category for urban agriculture to aid in long-term planning and land security for urban farmers and community gardeners. Revise zoning and assess creating an Urban Agriculture District zoning classification as appropriate. [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department]
- Establish a goal that every Wyandotte resident will be within a minimum 1/2-mile radius of a community garden or market garden (ideally within a 1/4-mile). This will increase local food security, reinforce neighborhood relationships, beautify vacant lots, and promote local entrepreneurship. [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department]
- Integrate permanent garden space in model block/neighborhood planning. [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department]
- Establish strategies for the public control and preservation of productive urban land (i.e. re-zone to urban agriculture district, transfer ownership of land to community land trust, long term land leasing with ability to fence and secure). [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department, Community Development Dept., Land Bank, Economic Development Department]
- Develop policies and practices within the Water Pollution Control Department that streamlines farmers' and gardeners' access to water. Establish water rates that incentivize and promote agricultural uses. [Water Pollution Control Department, Community Development Department, Economic Development Department]
- Explore new ways of bringing water to sites including maximizing the use of rainwater runoff from adjacent building roofs, leaving water lines to properties after demolition of buildings, etc. [Water Pollution Control Department, Community Development Department, Economic Development Department]
- Explore potential for a municipal composting facility and community composting projects. [Community Development Department, Parks and Recreation Department]
- Explore methods of preserving farmland in the western portions of the county. [Board of Commissioners, Urban Planning and Land Use Department, Public Works Department, Community Development Department, Economic Development Department]

Pilot Projects

Pilot projects can be prioritized based on the availability of funding and partnerships for implementation. Benchmarks need to be established for all pilot projects so that benefits can be clearly quantified and monitored. This initial list of pilot projects was developed to test the ideas put forth in this place and determine the most feasible and effective approaches for vacant land reuse. The criteria for pilot projects include:

- Projects that break new ground
- Locations near primary development areas
- Ability to attract funding
- High visibility locations
- Local constituencies and implementation partners

Example

Aquaponics in Kansas City, Missouri
A unique growing technique called aquaponics is being built in the heart of the urban core. The Nile Valley

Aquaponics at 29th and Wabash is currently under construction. Dre Taylor, of Males to Men, is the project manager of Kansas City's first commercial aquaponics system. He says the system is capable of growing 100,000 pounds of food.

Landholding Strategies can be implemented in prime development areas and growth neighborhoods. Landholding strategies can be piloted in prime development areas and other targeted investment areas. Potential partners can include all of the community development corporations.

Land Reuse Projects in urban agriculture, energy generation, bio- and phyto-remediation, stormwater management strategies, and additional recreation/green space can be piloted in low-growth neighborhoods. Potential partners can include community development corporations.



Land Acquisition and Management develop an organizational model for acquiring and maintaining vacant land and redirecting it for the uses described in the criteria section.

- Pursue land acquisition and management strategies at the watershed-scale, rather than at a neighborhood- or citywide-scale.
- Work with existing local and regional land conservation organizations to develop an urban land conservation mechanism that targets small (<10 acre) sites in the city.
- Work with the City Land Bank to acquire strategic parcels for conservation through the foreclosure process.

Mow-to-Own Program Vacant lots can be absorbed into residential neighborhoods by encouraging adjacent property owners to acquire and maintain these sites as an expansion of their own properties. Residents can earn the ownership of a neighboring or nearby property in exchange for providing good maintenance of these properties according to city-established standards. A property owner who maintains a property for one year would receive title to the property with the condition that the property continue to be maintained to the same standards. If the property owner fails to maintain the property, ownership would revert to the city's Land Bank. At high-profile locations in targeted parts of the city, funding could be developed to provide minimal landscaping and fencing in order to make these sites cared for and attractive, and potential locations for local food production.

Phytoremediation and bioremediation for soil restoration and lead containment/remediation of vacant sites. Even if areas must be disturbed later, preserving or establishing vegetation on vacant sites will help restore soil structure and reduce the presence of airborne lead in city neighborhoods.

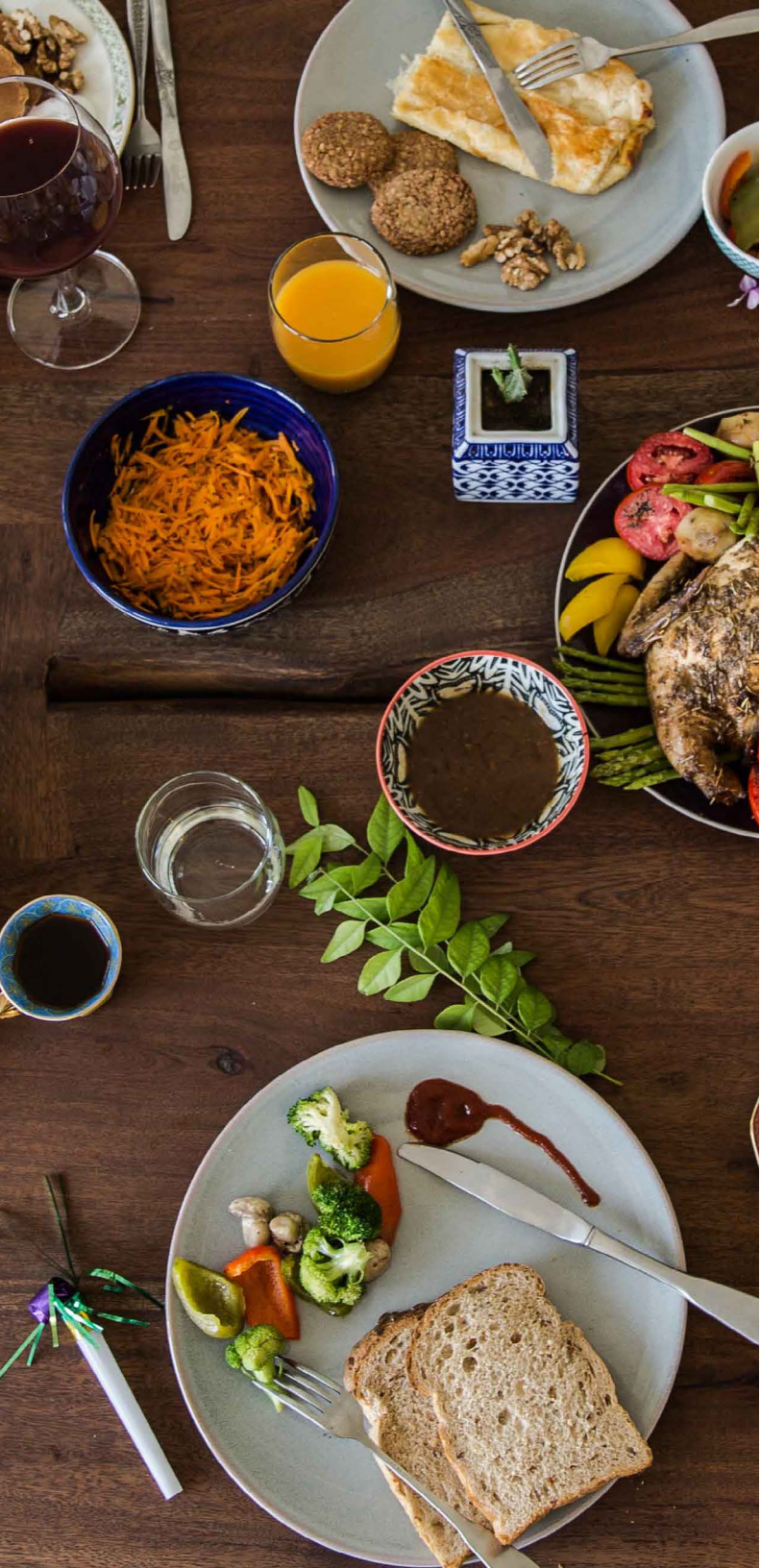
- Vegetation strategies can become part of the city's demolition specifications and/or a separate initiative led by local community development corporations.
- Phytoremediation and bioremediation demonstration sites can be identified from the city's land bank; this would be a site for which remediation funding is not yet available through Brownfield Program, but could be used as an experimental site for phytoremediation strategies.

- Potential collaborators can include the Brownfield Program Coordinator, Health Department, Neighborhood Development Coalitions, local community development corporations.

Urban agriculture incubators could provide land and appropriate infrastructure for urban agriculture enterprises. Aspects of this pilot project would include:

- Develop a business plan, resources for start-up, and operating partnership.
- Identify several sites of at least two to three acres that would be available for long-term use as urban farms and re-zone as an Urban Agriculture District; conduct environmental assessment to determine whether soil at the preferred site(s) have detrimental environmental contaminants.

- Develop appropriate infrastructure at the site and agreements for the management of infrastructure, including access to water, utilities, packing shed/cooler, tool storage, rototiller, security, and soil remediation.
- Once long-term use of land is secured, infrastructure developed, and the project has the support and approval of adjacent landowners, the city, and other stakeholders, 1/2-acre parcels would be available to agriculture entrepreneurs.



CONCLUSION

This is a supplementary document to be used in conjunction with the City-Wide Master Plan. The purpose of this document is to reiterate what is currently in the Master Plan, and expand on opportunities to address food production and access. Wyandotte County, in conjunction with MARC, recently received the Growing Food Connections grant, in addition to other grants and initiatives. The community has a strong foundation and network of food-related stakeholders and community organizations of all scales. As such, the County is well poised to formalize and capitalize on the current momentum.

Feedback from Unified Government staff and other community groups suggested that it would be most helpful to have a spectrum of options presented as strategies to increase food access and production opportunities throughout the County. This spectrum allows for a flexible implementation process to best meet the community's needs as they arise.

Based on the three approaches presented here, the following are suggested next steps to move toward implementation.

- Gather community input to determine a preferred approach
- Establish mechanism for regular inter-departmental collaboration
- Coordinate efforts between the various stakeholders and community groups

For more immediate integration of food consideration, we recommend that the Urban Planning and Land Use Department revise the current staff report template used in the current planning review process. Specifically, the impact of land use decisions on food production and access in the County should be evaluated under "Factors to be Considered." Such a revision could also incorporate other community priorities and values.

REFERENCES

[City-Wide Master Plan](#)

[2016 Kansas Counties Health Rankings](#)

[Aquaponics in Kansas City Metro](#)

[Income's Role in Life Expectancy](#)

[APA Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning](#)