



Growing deep roots in Seattle: embedding food systems planning and policy in municipal government

2018





GROWING FOOD CONNECTIONS

A key goal of the Growing Food Connections (GFC) project is to document ways in which local and regional governments adopt and implement policies and plans that simultaneously alleviate food insecurity and strengthen agricultural viability among small and medium-sized farmers. To that end, beginning in 2012, the GFC team conducted a national scan and identified 299 local governments across the United States that are developing and implementing a range of innovative plans, public programs, regulations, laws, financial investments and other policies to strengthen the food system. The GFC team defines the food system as the inter-connected network of activities, resources, industries, public and private stakeholders, and policies that play a role in the production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food. The GFC team conducted exploratory telephone interviews with stakeholders in 20 of these urban and rural local governments followed by in-depth, in-person interviews with stakeholders in four of these communities.

The GFC Story of Innovation Brief, *“Championing Food Systems Policy Change in Seattle, Washington,”* highlights innovative food systems related plans and policies in Seattle. This Innovation Deep Dive case study brief provides an in-depth exploration of the process taken to develop and implement these plans and policies. For this brief, GFC project team members conducted four in-person interviews with key stakeholders in April 2015 to better understand the food systems planning and policy making process in Seattle, and document lessons for local and regional governments interested in using plans and policy to strengthen food systems.

Cover Photo: Kristie McLean, City of Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment.



Embedding food systems planning and policy in municipal government

Seattle, Washington

INTRODUCTION

The City of Seattle, Washington is located in King County within the Central Puget Sound Region, an agriculturally rich region with long-standing community interest in local food. Comprehensive food systems planning and policy work within city government was fostered by the adoption of a landmark Local Food Action Initiative Resolution in 2008. This resolution paved the way for the development of a food policy advisor position, the creation of the interdepartmental food team, and the development and subsequent adoption of the Seattle Food Action Plan. This plan established an overarching food policy for city government and provided guidance to all city departments on the development of specific strategies to achieve higher-level food system goals. But none of this would have been possible without the leadership, vision and gravitas of a former city council member, dedicated staff, and the support of non-governmental community leaders. This *Innovation Deep Dive* describes the geographic, social, agricultural, and governmental contexts at play in the City of Seattle; explores the factors leading to, and the process of, developing the Seattle Food Action Plan; and highlights the various factors necessary for embedding and institutionalizing food systems planning and policy work within city government.

BACKGROUND

The City of Seattle is located in King County within the Central Puget Sound Region. The Central Puget Sound Region includes 4 counties and 82 cities and towns, spans 6,300 square miles, and is home to almost 4 million people. The diverse landscape includes large urban areas; environmentally sensitive areas such as forests, lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands; and natural resource lands such as agriculture, forest and mineral lands.¹

With a population of about 713,700,² Seattle is the largest city in King County, the region, and Washington State, and serves as the civic, cultural and economic hub. Seattle is home to many of the region's largest employers including several Fortune 500 companies – such as Amazon, Nordstrom, Starbucks, and Alaska Airlines, as well as the University of Washington. As the region is expected to grow to exceed five million in 2040, Seattle will likely accommodate much of that growth.³

Compared to its larger region, Seattle is racially and ethnically



Seattle P-Patch Community Garden. Photo by Kimberley Hodgson.

diverse. Although 63.7% of the population is white, a growing percentage of the population is black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino. Between 1990 and 2010, persons of color in Seattle increased from 26% to 34% of the population.³ Approximately 14% of the Seattle population lives in poverty. The poverty rate for people of color, however, is 2.5 times greater than for white people, 24% versus 9%, respectively.¹

FOOD SYSTEMS PLANNING AND POLICY

Local food is not a new topic in Seattle and the Central Puget Sound Region. The City of Seattle is nestled in an agriculturally rich region, and the city itself has a long and robust history of backyard and community gardening.⁴ There is a strong network of grassroots and community-based organizations working on food system issues.^{4,5} Many of these organizations have been actively addressing issues such as community gardening, food production, and food security since the early 1970s, long before



the city government began to take an interest in the Seattle food system.⁵ For example, Seattle Tilth, a longstanding non-profit organization in the city, has been advocating for sustainable food systems issues since it was established in the mid-1970s.

Over the years, community interest in the food system has steadily grown. Since the early 2000s, community groups and organizations have “become more sophisticated in their approach and their analysis of the food system.”⁵ Residents and activists alike are becoming more aware of the links within the food system and links to other social, economic and environmental issues.⁵

Today, being engaged in growing food and connecting with local farms is an important part of Seattle society.⁴ In general, the Seattle community is extremely interested in their own food system.^{4,6} This interest and awareness in the local food system has grown steadily over the years. Within the region, the Seattle community has led this growing awareness, but other communities across King County are also increasingly becoming interested in their food system,⁶ and many businesses are also engaged in food systems work.⁴ This growing interest in the local food system extends also to local universities, particularly the University of Washington. The excitement and interest around on-campus local food systems initiatives often mirrors what is happening in the Seattle region.⁷

Rural Agriculture and Food Production

The Central Puget Sound Region is an agriculturally rich area in the Pacific Northwest. The average farm size ranges from 14 acres in Kitsap County to 49 acres in Snohomish County. The region produces a wide range of agricultural products, including vegetables, fruit, poultry and eggs, milk from cows, beef, pork, and fish. In 2012, about \$140 million worth of agricultural

products were sold from Snohomish County and \$121 million from King County. The highest grossing products in the region were milk from cows and vegetables, \$82.3 million and \$17.2 million, respectively (see Table 1).⁸⁻¹¹

In King County, there are over 14,200 acres of preserved farmland and over 20,000 acres in food production. In a ranking of counties across Washington State, King County had the third highest number of farms (1,837). Despite these numbers, many King County farmers struggle financially. Farmers are aging and few have plans to transition land to the next generation. Furthermore, new and beginning farmers often lack capital to secure land. All these costs add up, making it very challenging for farmers to make farming a profitable business. Most farmers in the region supplement their income through non-farming sources. Between 2007 and 2012, 56% of King County farmers “relied on additional income sources aside from farming to support their operations and family.”¹²

While 99% of King County farmers market vendors are from Washington State, only 25% are from the county.¹³ King County residents spend about \$6 billion on food, however less than 2% of that is for food grown in King County.¹² However, in 2015 county farmers markets experienced a 236% increase in sales of King County produce.¹²

Urban Food Production

The City of Seattle also has a long and robust history of food production. Since the inception of the P-Patch Community Gardening Program in 1973, there has been strong public support and enthusiasm for urban food production. The public continues to value the educational, social and ecological benefits of urban agriculture, particularly its ability to unite and educate residents, improve societal understanding of what it takes to

Table 1. Central Puget Sound Region Agriculture

	King County	Kitsap County	Pierce County	Snohomish County	Total
Acres of land in farms	46,717	10,070	49,483	70,863	177,133
Average farm size (acres)	25	14	33	49	121
Market value of vegetables, fruit, nuts, meat, dairy, or fish sold					
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes	\$4,711,000	\$895,000	\$5,522,000	\$6,096,000	\$17,224,000
Fruit, trees, nuts and berries	NA	\$239,000	\$2,143,000	\$1,642,000	\$4,024,000
Poultry and eggs	\$204,000	\$131,000	NA	\$13,414,000	\$13,749,000
Cattle and calves	NA	\$555,000	NA	\$7,568,000	\$8,123,000
Milk from cows	\$32,100,000	\$178,000	\$3,788,000	\$46,182,000	\$82,248,000
Hogs and pigs	\$136,000	\$149,000	\$99,000	\$91,000	\$475,000
Aquaculture		\$168,000	NA	\$4,138,000	\$4,306,000
Total market value of agricultural products sold	\$121 million	\$5 million	\$91 million	\$140 million	\$357 million



grow food, provide ecological services, and connect immigrants with the greater community. Despite these strengths, the increasing cost of land and issues related to water rights, drainage and farm infrastructure create challenges for farmers throughout the region.

There are many support services for urban farmers in the region, but there is a need for business support and access to capital. Although there are several strong, small networks of food systems stakeholders in the city, a larger, more coordinated network where stakeholders can more fully share resources does not exist. Despite these challenges, farmers within the city and in surrounding counties have greater access to markets than farmers located elsewhere in the state. They also benefit from greater consumer interest in locally grown food, a greater number of opportunities to sell food in the city, and a moderate climate suitable for year-round growing.

Food Businesses

Many food brands call Seattle and King County home, including Starbucks and Theo Chocolates, as well as food related businesses, such as Urbanspoon and Allrecipes. The 818-acre historic Carnation Farms, the birthplace of the Carnation Milk Company, is located in King County. The Carnation Milk Company grew into a Fortune 500 company and over the years helped with the development of Seattle's downtown core.¹⁴ There are over 40 farmers markets throughout King County. According to the King County government, the Seattle-Tacoma metro area has 20 restaurants per 10,000 people, the second highest concentration of restaurants in the United States. Beyond food production and retail, King County has the largest food processing sector in the state, worth an estimated \$6.4 billion and employing over 12,000 people.¹³

Food Access

While most of the city has very good access to healthy and culturally diverse foods, physical and economic access to healthy food continues to be a challenge for low-income residents, especially for those without cars. The price of healthy food for low-income residents has emerged as a critical issue in the city. Poverty, unemployment and low-wage jobs contribute to this issue. Additionally, unhealthy food is often more affordable than healthier options. To complicate the issue, low-resource individuals also experience issues related to time poverty. Some low-resource individuals are working two and three jobs and do not have time to prepare healthy food, so they opt for convenience.⁷ Physical access to healthy food is impacted by car ownership. Some residents depend on access to corner stores for their food, because they do not have access to a car.

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

There is a long history of county and city government support and interest in aspects of the local and regional food system, particularly farmland preservation and community gardening.

County Government

King County and other counties in the Central Puget Sound Region have successfully protected agricultural land and other natural resources lands. King County launched a number of county and regional initiatives to protect farmland. The longstanding **Farmland Preservation Program** was created in 1979 and is estimated to have saved about 14,000 acres of the most productive agricultural lands in King County. This program allows landowners the opportunity to sell their development rights to the county, thereby allowing a restrictive covenant to be placed on the land to limit the property's use and development.¹⁵ In 1998, the county government launched the **Puget Sound Fresh Program** to "support farmers markets and promote farm products grown, raised or harvested regionally."¹⁶

Since 2001, King County has operated a **Transfer of Development Rights Program**, which allows the transfer of development rights from rural landowners to urban growth areas within the county. The concept for this program dates back to 1988.¹⁷ Rural landowners receive financial compensation for their development rights without having to sell or fully develop their land, while developers purchase these rights in exchange for increased density in their development projects. According to the county government, over 141,000 acres of rural and natural resource lands have been protected through the program.¹⁷

Since 2010 approximately 97% of all new residential development in King County has occurred within Urban Growth Areas, as designated by the Washington State Growth Management Act of 1990; and more than 40% of housing and job growth has occurred within Urban Growth Centers in the Urban Growth Areas.¹⁸ The Growth Management Act requires the fastest growing municipalities and counties in the state to focus growth in urban areas; plan for the protection of open space, habitat areas, shorelines, and natural resources lands, including agricultural lands; and coordinate with other jurisdictions to address issues related to environmental protection, transportation, affordable housing and economic development.¹⁹⁻²¹ The Act also requires consistency between regional, county and municipal comprehensive plans.²²

Municipal Government

The Seattle city government established the **P-Patch Community Gardening Program** in 1973, and the Seattle-King County department of public health (Public Health Seattle-King County) has been actively engaged in public health and nutrition issues for decades.⁵ However it was not until the early 2000s, that the Seattle city government began engaging in systems level work. In the early 2000s, several representatives of key community and non-governmental organizations came together to establish the **Acting Food Policy Council** (AFPC). These stakeholders wanted to collaborate and expand upon the food systems work of many of the grassroots and community organizations. Within the city government, former city councilmember Richard Conlin and his key staff person Phyllis Shulman acted as internal champions and pushed the city government to tackle food policy. They worked closely with the AFPC, and relied on



AFPC members' as a "brain trust" for the food policy work.⁴ The AFPC recognized the need for government support to expand the impact of their work. According to Conlin and other city government staff, the AFPC was instrumental in pushing the city government to play a bigger role in food policy.⁴

In 2007, Conlin championed the development of a resolution to strengthen community and regional food systems and integrate food system planning and policy in city government activities. Adopted by the City Council and signed by the mayor in 2008, the **Local Food Action Initiative Resolution** established a core framework for food policy and provided direction and authority to city departments to work on food issues. Furthermore, this resolution helped the city government institutionalize food as an important city topic and priority by:

- creating an **interdepartmental food system team** to coordinate food systems efforts,
- establishing a new **food policy advisor position** to allow deeper city work related to food systems, and
- calling for the development of a **food system policy plan**.^{4,5}

According to city government staff, many city government programs, policies and plans emerged as a result of this resolution. Shortly after the passage of the resolution, city council and the mayor initiated the **City of Seattle's Interdepartmental Food Team (IDFT)** and tasked the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) with its coordination and facilitation. This team is responsible for coordinating food work across city departments.

City of Seattle Interdepartmental Food Team

Current participating departments include:

- Seattle Office for Civil Rights
- Department of Parks and Recreation
- Office of Sustainability and Environment
- Office of the Mayor
- Public Health - Seattle & King County
- Human Services Department, Aging and Disability Services Division
- Office of Sustainability and Environment
- Department of Neighborhoods
- Seattle Department of Transportation
- Office of Planning and Community Development
- Human Services Department, Youth and Family Empowerment Division
- Office of Economic Development
- Seattle Public Utilities

And in 2012, the OSE created the food policy advisor position, making Seattle only a handful of cities in the country with a per-

SEATTLE MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE

The City of Seattle is located within King County and serves as the county seat. The city government operates under a mayor-council form of government and is governed by the Seattle City Charter, which defines all governance powers and responsibilities. The Seattle mayor serves as the chief executive officer for the City and is responsible for enforcing city and state law and city contracts; appointing departments heads; and has the power to veto ordinances passed by City Council. The Seattle City Council creates city policies, public regulations and budgets in the form of ordinances and provides collective statements in the form of resolutions (expressions of policy or intent, not law).²³ The City of Seattle has 40 departments of local government, including the Department of Neighborhoods, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Office of Planning and Community Development, Office of Sustainability and Environment, and Department of Economic Development.²⁴

The Puget Sound Regional Council is the metropolitan planning agency that "develops policies and coordinates decisions about regional growth, transportation and economic development planning in King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap counties."²⁵ And the King County government provides a range of services to people living in all parts of the county, including in municipalities like Seattle: courts and related legal services, public health services, the county jail, records and elections, property tax appraisals, regional parks and facilities, King County International Airport, public transit, and sewage disposal.²⁶

son in this role. The advisor is responsible for advising the department director, mayor, and city council on the development of strategic plans, policies, communications, and evaluation tools that will encourage a food system that promotes health, equity, and the environment. This position has had a significant impact on institutionalizing food systems work within city government.

Spearheaded by the food policy advisor, the IDFT developed the **Seattle Food Action Plan**. This innovative plan was officially adopted in October 2012 (for a detailed description of this plan and an overview of the plan-making process, see the following section).

Beyond these innovative efforts, the Seattle city government supports a number of other food systems related issues through public planning, policy and funding decisions, including but not limited to: urban agriculture zoning regulations, land tenure provisions for farmers markets, the P-Patch Community Gardening Program, the Seattle Market Gardens Program, the Large Tract Gardening Program, the Urban Orchard Stewards Program, the Parks & Green Space Levy for Community Gardens, the Seattle Parks Urban Food Systems Program, the Rainier



Beach Food Innovation District, green building incentives, the Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council, and the Seattle-King County Transfer of Development Rights Program.

DEEP DIVE: THE SEATTLE FOOD ACTION PLAN

The 2008 Local Food Action Initiative resolution (LFAI), spearheaded by former city councilmember Richard Conlin, called for the development of a food system policy plan.^{4,5} Efforts to develop the Food Action Plan began in 2008, but it was not until the food policy advisor position was filled in 2012 that someone was charged with developing the plan. Shortly after the new food policy advisor position was filled, the mayor's office, former councilmember Conlin's office, and the director of the OSE tasked the food policy advisor with the development of the plan.⁴ The IDFT had already been established and meeting for some time, and there was a general desire to realize the LFAI's goal.⁴ The city government recognized "the need to coordinate and integrate the work that was currently happening and also chart a path forwards...and [establish work priorities for city government staff]."

The new food policy advisor was directed to develop a plan that would focus on the short-term, integrate existing work; create priorities for the next 5 years; and steward existing programs and assets. The food policy advisor noted that her superiors recognized the value in articulating the importance in advancing the city government's food system goals and building on some of the existing programs and assets that were built over many years but had not yet been recognized from an overall food policy perspective.⁴

While the LFAI identified a set of policy approaches, the intention of the plan was to integrate these approaches in a more systematic, methodical way,⁵ and generate public interest and activity around healthy local food, including issues such as: ensuring better nutrition, getting more people involved and interested in growing food, and providing more attention to farmland preservation. Another reason for developing the plan was to establish better coordination and integration of Seattle's food systems work within and outside of city government. The hope was to inform the plan development by identifying, gathering, tracking and bringing together separate grassroots and community efforts already happening in the community and include these in the plan.⁵

Public Interest in the Plan

In general, the public was interested in and supportive of the plan. Among Seattleites, there is a general awareness around health and nutrition, and a general appreciation for the local food system.^{4,5} "At the grassroots level, there was pretty diffuse [support] of the plan. At the activist level, there was a small group of organizations and entities who were really passionate about the plan," said Conlin.

For years, the public had asked the city government to take a larger role in the food system. The development of the plan signaled to the public that the city government was "involved, engaged and interested in the food system."⁴ The plan allowed

the city government to clearly articulate food system priorities, and demonstrated to the public that the city government was ready to take action and engage in the broader food system. Prior to the development of the plan, the city government had been involved in various pieces of the food system, but not in an integrated way that felt accessible to the public.⁴ Other than the P-Patch Program, most of the city government's previous work focused on specific issues that were not readily visible to the public. The development of the food policy advisor position and this plan made the city government's engagement in food systems more accessible to the public. The plan clearly communicates the city government's priorities and projects to the public.⁴

OSE was charged with creating the plan and led a collaborative process where departments represented on the IDFT were involved in every step of plan development and helped with:

- Determining the community engagement structure
- Determining the key criteria for evaluation of strategies to be included in plan
- Vetting and reviewing the plan to ensure that it aligned with department priorities⁴

Other departments, such as the Department of Parks and Recreation, initially resisted getting involved in food issues, but the development of the plan changed their reception to the issues. The plan provided a lot of "institutional momentum" for government staff to get involved.⁵

Plan details

The plan includes 4 high-level goals; 10 values or principles to guide, shape and inform on the city government's food systems related work; 15 strategies; and multiple recommended actions for implementing each strategy. Plan values focus on accessibility, affordability of food, the health and well-being of all people, equity, diversity, collaboration, inclusivity, as well as racial and social justice, economic viability and environmental sustainability.

The 4 main goals include:

- **Healthy Food for All:** All Seattle residents should have enough to eat and access to affordable, local, healthy, sustainable, culturally appropriate food.
- **Grow Local:** It should be easy to grow food in Seattle and in our region, for personal use or for business purposes.
- **Strengthen the Local Economy:** Businesses that produce, process, distribute, and sell local and healthy food should grow and thrive in Seattle.
- **Prevent Food Waste:** Food-related waste should be prevented, reused or recycled.²⁷

The plan also recognizes the need for more research to better understand food system opportunities and challenges. The plan identifies 7 areas needing additional research: accessibility of healthy food, engagement of at-risk communities, such as immigrant and refugee communities, city-owned land suitable

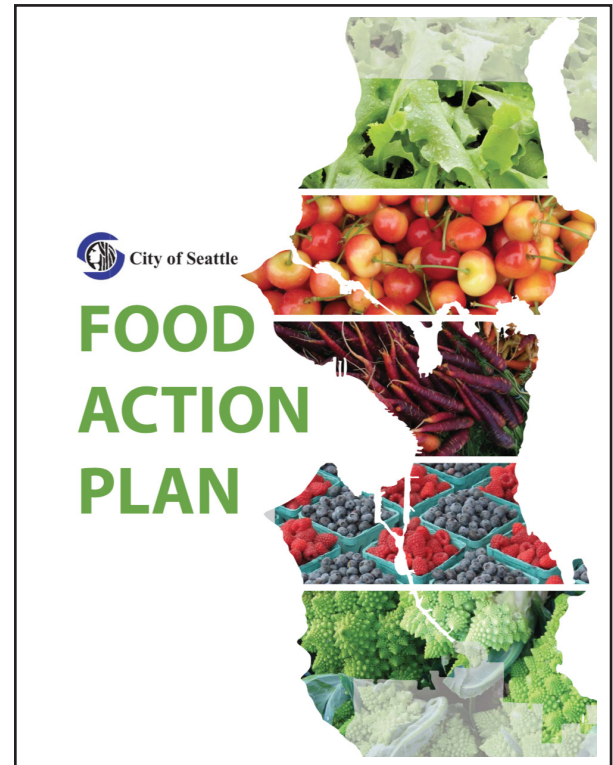


for urban agriculture, ecosystem benefits of urban agriculture, opportunities and challenges for food related businesses, need for food infrastructure in the city and regions.²⁷

To measure and track the city government's progress in meeting the plan's goals, the plan identifies 8 indicators (see Table 2. Seattle Food Action Plan Indicators) and requires the OSE to prepare an annual progress report.

Table 2. Seattle Food Action Plan Indicators

•	% of Seattle residents within one-quarter mile of a healthy food access point
•	% of Seattle residents who are food secure
•	Acres of city-owned land used for food production
•	Value of local food sold at Seattle farmers markets or other direct-to-consumer activities
•	Value of EBT benefits redeemed at Seattle farmers markets
•	Acres of farmland preserved through the Landscape Conservation and Local Infrastructure Program
•	# of businesses increasing availability of healthy foods in stores through Healthy Foods Here
•	% of Seattle's food waste diverted for composting or recycling



Seattle Food Action Plan. Image Source: https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OSE/Seattle_Food_Action_Plan_10-24-12.pdf

Community Engagement

The public outreach strategy for the Food Action Plan focused on listening sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to identify the community's priorities around food. The city government wanted broad input from key stakeholders, organizations, coalitions, but also residents. This included key individuals, non-profit organizations, academics, Extension, the business community, agriculture organizations and groups, and urban farmers. Three listening sessions were held in three areas of the city: north, south and central. The city government provided language interpretation and translation at each meeting. Despite the translation services, city government staff noted that they could have done better outreach to limited English-speaking communities.⁴ There was an effort to encourage individuals and organizations that represented low-income communities and communities of color to attend listening session, however city government staff were more successful in soliciting feedback when they attended various neighborhood meetings (as opposed to inviting representatives to city government hosted meetings). According to Conlin, this is one of the "best practices that we've adopted in working with low-income and minority communities."

Feedback from these engagement events was incorporated into the draft of the plan. The IDFT solicited additional feedback on the development of the draft plan from a smaller group of stakeholders, including businesses, nonprofit organizations, the

regional food policy council, and others.⁴ The IDFT also engaged an informal group of food policy stakeholders, people that participated in the former Acting Food Policy Council and others, including university representatives, Seattle Tilth, Extension, etc. This informal group played a major role in the generation of ideas for the plan as well as its development. Many of these individuals participated as individuals, not necessarily on behalf of the organization for which they worked.⁵

The IDFT tried to actively engage the private food supply chain stakeholders: restaurants (including chefs), wholesale distributors, and processors. They found this sector difficult to engage on a consistent basis, but those that were involved provided valuable input. There was no formal structure, beyond the listening sessions, for engaging food supply chain stakeholders and stakeholder groups. The IDFT invited them to meetings, and contacted them individually for informal conversations.⁵

Few agricultural organizations and groups were engaged, because the focus of the plan was the city of Seattle and not surrounding areas. However, the "farmers' market alliance played a key role in recommendations relating to their work and to some of the agricultural work". Some small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers informally participated as individuals, but not as part of a coalition or organization.⁵

City government staff recognized that more could have been done to encourage better citywide engagement, such as hosting



additional listening sessions scattered across the city; partnering with the City of Seattle's public outreach and engagement liaisons that bring people together and engage people in specific cultural communities;⁴ and engaging the city government's various advisory committees such as the Women's Commission, the LGBT Commission, the Immigrant & Refugee Commission, and the Human Rights Commission in the development of the plan.⁴ However this would have required more resources and a longer plan development timeline. According to city government staff, there were no particular groups that were underrepresented, and that ultimately the three listening sessions were "aligned with what we had the resources and capacity for at the time."⁴

Adoption

The plan was released to the public by the mayor in fall 2012 and then unanimously adopted by city council in spring 2013. City council would have adopted the plan immediately, however there were some logistical and scheduling issues.⁴ The plan faced *no* opposition from city council or the community.^{4,5} The food policy advisor noted that there were stakeholders, particularly from community-based organizations, that wanted the plan to dig deeper and have a longer timespan. However, the plan focused on a 5-year timespan and the role of city government. The food policy advisor said, "We needed to be realistic about what we can do in the next five years. I think there are some organizations that probably would have rather seen a longer-range plan that could have been more visionary. But they were still very supportive of it."

The adoption of the plan by city council automatically made the plan city policy. The LFAI resolution requires the plan to be updated every 5 years. While there is no funding allocated to the plan and the plan is not enforceable, city government staff noted that even as elected officials change, the issues outlined in the plan will remain relevant and important to city government.⁴

According to the food policy advisor, the OSE had developed a number of plans before the Food Action Plan, but this is one of the first OSE plans that was adopted by city council as formal policy. The intended purpose of the plan was to set direction and provide guidance for city government. As with other city-wide plans, the plan itself did not commit resources to implementation. Any resources that would be committed to specific actions in the plan would happen through annual budget processes. Because food policy was considered at the time a new area of work for city government, it was strategic and valuable to adopt a budget-neutral plan that could be used later as a means to guide future budgeting processes. Having the adopted plan in place has been helpful in securing funding for various projects and activities across City departments.⁴

Implementation

Each recommendation in the plan was assigned a lead department to lead implementation. As a result, much of plan implementation is tied to the existing work plans of various departments.⁴

The food policy advisor monitors implementation for each

department, checking in on how progress is unfolding for each recommendation.⁴ High priority goal areas are led by individual city departments including the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Neighborhoods, and Human Services Department.⁵ However, goal areas that are less closely aligned with departmental priorities have required the support of the food policy advisor to move them forward.⁴ These typically require additional staff capacity and/or external funding.⁴

The implementation of many plan actions are being led by city government, in partnership with a non-governmental organization, particularly those "actions that involve investments or on-the-ground work as differentiated from policy proposals, which go through the city."⁵ For example, The Rainier Beach Urban Farm was originally a Department of Parks and Recreation surplus property. After a community engagement process, the Department of Parks and Recreation agreed that the property should be converted to a farm. Through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, DPR selected Seattle Tilth to operate the farm, under contract with the City. While the city government provided some funds for the conversion of the property to a farm, Seattle Tilth assumed the leadership role in raising funding for a full site renovation and managing the on-going operations of the farm.²⁸

If funding is required, a funding source is identified as each recommendation of the plan is being implemented. For example, because the 2008 Parks Levy designated \$2 million for the development of community gardens, this funding source was identified to implement community garden related recommendations.⁵ The majority of funding for plan implementation is coming from the general fund, which funds staff positions and the work plans of various departments. The general fund has also funded specific projects, such as the Fresh Bucks program and the Farm to Table program. There is also funding coming from a number of non-governmental sources. For example, various non-governmental partners, such as Seattle Tilth and NABC, fundraise independently for their pieces of the Farm to Table program.⁴

In 2017, the City of Seattle passed the Sweetened Beverage Tax Ordinance (SBT Ord 125324), which is projected to raise roughly \$15 million per year.²⁹ Among other things, services funded by the proceeds of the tax are intended to "expand access to healthy and affordable food, close the food security gap, promote healthy nutrition choices..." through programs such as Fresh Bucks, Fresh Bucks to go, and implementation of the Seattle Food Action Plan.²⁹

Major Outcomes

Beyond embedding food systems work across city departments, the plan also led to the development of two important programs: Fresh Bucks and Farm to Table. The **Fresh Bucks Program** is a double value redemption program aimed at increasing the buying power of food stamp recipients by matching SNAP dollars spent at one of the city's 21 participating farmers markets and farm stands. The program was initially funded by grant support. Due to its success, however, the program has grown, and the city government now contributes to the pro-



gram budget. With the passage of the SBT Ordinance, the City is proposing to contribute over \$2 million annually to expand the program to additional locations, additional delivery mechanisms (i.e. Fresh Bucks Rx), and to expand program eligibility to people who do not qualify for SNAP but still cannot afford access to healthy food.²⁸ The Fresh Bucks Program is being led and implemented by the OSE, in part because the program concept was new to the city government and there were no existing resources for it. The program required leadership – someone to invest and to champion the concept.⁴ While the program required internal city government commitment and leadership, the food policy advisor said that “what really propelled the program forward was community interest and advocacy” and recognition of the importance of the program. One organization in particular, Got Green (an environmental justice membership organization of low-income people, mostly people of color), pushed the city government to continue funding and investing in Fresh Bucks.

There are other areas of policy work and areas of integration that are led by the food policy advisor and the OSE. In 2017, OSE piloted a “Fresh Bucks to Go” program at preschools participating in the city government’s subsidized preschool programs. This program allowed families to take home low-cost or free bags of fresh fruits and vegetables. In 2017, \$140K was allocated for this program. OSE managed the program in early 2017, but transitioned the program to HSD, who will manage the program starting in fall 2017 and into the future. Expansion of this program with SBT funds is included in the 2018 proposed budget.²⁸ And, the OSE currently manages the new SBT Ordinance Community Advisory Board, and may take on additional work as the city government begins SBT Ordinance implementation.²⁸

The **Farm to Table Partnership Program** is a project that links senior meal sites and child care programs to local farms, with the goal of providing access to local, organic produce in some of Seattle’s most under-served neighborhoods. Funded in part by the city government, the project focused on identifying and developing sustainable purchasing models for fresh local produce, and providing meal program providers with necessary education and training to implement the purchasing models. This project was thought of as a necessary step to help test the feasibility of a local food procurement policy within the city. The program was initially established with seed funding from a federal grant, however the growth of the program is a result of the Food Action Plan. The plan provided a rationale and a framework for the continued funding of the program and provided more visibility of the role of the program within the operations of the city government.⁴

Plan Impact

The intended impact of the plan was to “create a [systematic] work plan for city government in advancing the production, distribution and consumption of local healthy food” to:⁵

- advance the city government’s work on food system issues,

- bring greater recognition/attention to those issues, and to
- ensure city departments adopted those issues within their work plans.⁴

But also to:

- make an impact on community goals;
- prioritize actions that impact residents, particularly low-income residents and people of color, over actions that are more internal to city government;
- improve access to healthy food for low-income residents;
- support people’s desire to grow food local and in the city;
- prevent food-related waste;
- support local farmers⁴

The city government is achieving this intended impact by working with more people and groups within city government and delving deeper into the issues. There has been some resistance by various individuals and groups within city government to adopt food systems work, because they perceive it as such a broad, nonspecific topic. However, the OSE has successfully worked closely with these people on particular pieces and helped them to recognize that these components are part of a greater, large whole. By embedding the food system work within city government work, the OSE is able to increase staff’s understanding of the issues. While the plan is not necessarily enforceable, and a new administration would not necessarily have to assign dollars to the implementation of the plan, the priorities and strategies of the plan have been thoroughly embedded in various departments’ work plans, effectively institutionalizing food system issues within city government.⁴

DISCUSSION

Through interviews conducted with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, a portrait emerges of the Seattle city government as a leader and supporter of food systems policy change. The Seattle city government’s experience in food systems planning and policy lends several insights and observations to other cities across North America. Both city government and non-governmental stakeholders in Seattle emphasize the importance of institutionalizing food systems work within city government via the creation of an interdepartmental food system team, a permanent food policy advisor position, an overarching food policy plan, and funding supports. This approach allows city government respond to long-term community food systems issues, support the long-standing community and grass-roots organizations that have addressed these issues, as well as play a leading role when appropriate.

Key factors that have contributed to the success of the city government have been the leadership of multiple local champions within and outside of city government, the combination of formal and informal structures for cross-departmental coordination on food systems work, the institutionalization of food systems issues into the work plans of various city government depart-



ments, and the flexibility that a food plan (without immediate budgetary implications) can provide.

Multiple Champions

Over the years, Seattle has had multiple champions at various levels within and outside of city government that have led or influenced the city government's food systems work. From the Acting Food Policy Council, an elected official and his staffer, to a city government staff position, all have been instrumental in the city government's food systems planning and policy work. An elected official brings leadership, vision and gravitas to an issue, but staff, as well as non-governmental organizations, have the time, capacity and charge to implement and take ideas forward. The Acting Food Policy Council was instrumental in pushing the city government to play a bigger role in food policy.⁴ Both former city councilmember, Richard Conlin, and his staffer, Phyllis Shulman, acted as internal champions and pushed the city government to tackle food policy.⁴ Conlin was a key champion in motivating the local government to address the community food system.^{6,7} Conlin helped others see the importance of [food system] work.⁶

Prior to the creation of the position, Conlin's key staffer, Phyllis Shulman, acted as the unofficial food policy advisor. Her position as staff for an elected official provided the political clout to convene external stakeholders, and work within the city government bureaucracy. She was able to execute Conlin's vision and have a significant impact on how to advance and support work on the ground and develop innovative policies and programs and decide how to allocate funds.

The food policy advisor has been essential to guiding food work across city departments. Prior to the advisor position and the Food Action Plan the city government's food policy work was scattered and piecemeal. The food policy advisor has been instrumental in encouraging various city departments to understand the connection between food and other issues; and leading the development of an innovative food policy plan that provided a coherent vision and blueprint for food policy action of the city government.⁵

Informal and formal structures for coordination

Of utmost importance to the food systems planning and policy work of the Seattle city government have been the informal and formal structures that enable effective collaboration and coordination within and outside of government. Both formal and informal structures serve an important purpose.⁴ Formal structures help departments engage in food systems work, when they may not see food systems as a central part of their work, while informal structures allow the development of personal relationships within and outside of government.

Key to enabling this collaboration and coordination has been the food policy advisor position and the IDFT. Coordination of food systems work is often a primary challenge of local governments, however the City of Seattle is unique in having a staff position dedicated to coordination. Much of the food systems coordination work happens because of the personal and informal rela-

tionships between the food policy advisor and various individuals in the city departments, including departments that do not attend IDFT meetings. While the IDFT meets monthly, most of the coordination work happens in smaller groups or one-on-one meetings. These informal relationships are crucial for understanding the context of various departments and identifying the opportunities to move the food policy portfolio forward.⁴ The food policy advisor's work often involves bringing specific people together and fostering relationships between them. "I do a lot of the connecting of people, but I don't always stay in the middle. Often I can connect and then get out of the way. In some cases, when there are ongoing projects that aren't directly related to someone else's work, then I'll continue to provide a coordination role," said the food policy advisor. The food policy advisor noted that her role as advisor typically lasts 2 years, until the project or activity is embedded within the work plan of a department. She will often steward the process until this happens or outside funding is secured. A department may not have the staff or time capacity to take on another project, or a particular project does not align well with their work plan. In these cases, the food policy advisor stewards the project, finds outside funding for the project, or identifies how to embed it in a different department's work plan.⁴

Informal discussions between the food policy advisor and city department staff act as a "spark" that encourages a city department to begin thinking about the connections between their work and food policy. Once a spark occurs, people get energized and excited. Because of this internal process, the Parks Department became a champion of the Food Action Plan.⁵

Having the formal structure of the IDFT, provides a method for formally engaging various city government departments.⁴ "The [IDFT] has also been a good structure for people to learn [about the food system] and to [better] understand what's happening, to connect their work to things happening in other departments and also around the region."⁴ Beyond the IDFT, formal structures also include the King County Local Food Initiative and the Regional Food Policy Council.

Embedding Food Planning and Policy Work into Non-Food Work

Due to a number of factors, the Seattle city government has effectively embedded food systems work into the work plans of numerous city departments. This is largely due to the trifecta of people, policy, and plan. Elected official leadership was largely responsible for the adoption of the LFAI and subsequently the establishment of the food policy advisor position, IDFT, and development of the Food Action Plan. The combination of these factors has enabled the city government's food work to weather changes in elected leadership. For example, in 2013, councilmember Conlin was not reelected. However, by then food work was already embedded in the city government, primarily through the work of the IDFT and the food policy advisor. While Conlin, as an elected official, brought leadership to the Seattle food system, embedding food system work within the day-to-day work of city government staff enabled the city government to have the capacity to realize elected officials' ideas and vision.



The food policy advisor position has provided the means to institutionalize food systems work within city government. The position has had a significant impact in identifying opportunities within the existing work of various city government staff; establishing partnerships, coordinating efforts, and convening stakeholders within and outside government; bringing the city government's voice to the table within and outside the municipality; and allowing the opportunity for the city government to look deeply within own programs to identify gaps.

A Plan without Immediate Budgetary Implications

The Seattle city government has developed and adopted a number of policy plans, however the Food Action Plan was one of the first plans that OSE took to city council to be adopted as formal policy. The intended purpose of the plan was to set direction and provide guidance for city government, but not include any commitment of resources. This allowed for the unanimous adoption of a food systems policy blueprint for the city government and also provided the means to guide future, rather than immediate, budgeting processes. For the OSE, having the adopted plan in place has been helpful in securing funding for various activities.⁴

CONCLUSION

While some feel that the food systems as a policy issue is still not a high priority for the Seattle city government, leaders within and outside of the city government have paved the way forward and created a legacy for lasting food systems planning and policy work across city departments. The initial pressure and encouragement of the Acting Food Policy Council and the landmark Local Food Action Initiative resolution to provide city-wide guidance on food systems planning and policy established the foundation for food systems change by requiring interdepartmental communication and coordination through the IDFT; providing the staff capacity to make the coordination happen through the development of the food policy advisor position; and calling for the development of a comprehensive, stand-alone food systems plan that provides a systematic work plan for city government related to food issues. The Seattle city government provides an example of how innovative policy, planning, coordination and staffing decisions can effectively embed and institutionalize food systems work within city government.



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