
Food and the City – Background

Our current food system does not sustain our most vulnerable populations or the people who produce our food. Over 15% of Nova Scotians are facing food insecurity, and approximately 1 in 5 children live in food insecure households. Meanwhile, we have an aging farm population, struggling to earn a fair price for the food they grow.

Across Canada, municipalities are increasingly engaging in strategies and policies that support healthy, just, and sustainable food systems. This includes developing community and municipal plans that promote urban agriculture and encourage healthy and innovative food retail; building on municipal assets like libraries, community centers and transit systems; adopting procurement practices and waste recovery initiatives; and championing food charters and strategies. Furthermore, municipalities are well positioned to foster collaborations within and across sectors that support food systems innovation.

In Halifax, the Regional Plan recognizes the importance of preserving agricultural land and requires that the design of communities promotes food security. Halifax leads a strong community garden program and has been a key player in the 2016 pilot of the Mobile Food Market, which brings fresh produce to underserved communities. Additionally, the city has played an active role in the Halifax Food Policy Alliance, which produced Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment. This is a solid foundation upon which we can take the next steps toward building lasting community food security.

Across the Halifax Region, there are a variety of policies, plans and programs that support CFS in Halifax. Each of these offer opportunities to learn from and build upon:

- HRM's Community Garden Program promotes development and expansion of community gardens on municipal land:
<http://www.halifax.ca/rec/CommunityGardens.php>
- Halifax Regional Plan: Outlines an objective to design communities that are “attractive and healthy places to live”, and “promote community food security”.
- Regional Council adopted “Healthy Communities” as a core priority and the Mayor’s Conversation on a “Healthy and Livable Community” (October 2013) identified food production and promotion as one of three key priority themes for Halifax.
- 2014/15 Priority Outcomes, Economic Development: Local food production supports rural economic development, which is “an integral component of HRM’s overall economic prosperity”.
- Halifax’s recently adopted Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP) includes an action item to develop urban orchards:

<http://www.halifax.ca/RealPropertyPlanning/UFMP/documents/SecondEditionHRMUFMP.pdf>

- HRMs Integrated Mobility Plan includes food security as a component of Public Health: <http://www.halifax.ca/boardscom/SCtransp/documents/160623tsc1213.pdf>
- In May 2016 Halifax co-led the launch of the Mobile Food Market pilot, which included the use of a Halifax Transit bus.

Examples of how municipal planning can directly impact food security and the health of the local food environment:

- measures that support preservation of agricultural land;
- improving transit, walkability and connectivity to food outlets;
- reducing barriers to the growing, selling and processing of food;
- encouraging healthy food services in areas where there is a shortage; and
- maximizing opportunities for increased food awareness and access to food through land/infrastructure uses such as community gardens and kitchens.

Regional municipalities can support food systems change through a mix of municipal policies, programs and civil-society interventions. In Halifax, examples include:

- dedicate municipal staff time to support the development of supportive food policies and community food initiatives;
- integrate sustainable food systems initiatives into municipal plans and activities;
- employ food systems thinking to design structures, policies, and activities (e.g. The City of Vancouver's food system checklist for planning staff to review development applications, rezoning proposals, and community plans.);
- reduce licensing and permitting barriers for entrepreneurs who want to start mobile food markets and other forms of alternative food retail;
- increase access to space across the city for community gardens, market gardens, orchards and urban farms;
- work closely with recreation facilities, organizations and schools to ensure that community-led food programs have satisfactory, secure and sustainable facilities to operate out of.

Specific changes to municipal planning documents can work to support and promote Community Food Security. For Example:

- identify accessible and suitable sites for food retail (farm markets/stands, grocery, etc.), agriculture, processing facilities and distribution centres and zone accordingly;

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- develop plans that recognize community gardens, urban agriculture, farm stands and markets as desirable uses and ensure that there is space, infrastructure and access to support these uses;
 - consider supports for larger scale food production and processing in rural communities and supports for smaller scale food enterprises in urban communities;
 - plan for mixed-use neighborhoods that include and encourage small and mid-scale food outlets, seasonal markets and open space for gardens and urban agriculture;
 - design infrastructure (particularly active transportation and transit) to support safe and convenient access to food sources and services;
 - maximize publicly owned lands and buildings to support urban agriculture, food production and food skills/awareness;
 - integrate local agriculture such as community gardens, urban agriculture and small farms into existing settlements and new areas of development;
 - include zoning that promotes facilities such as community kitchens and spaces such as community gardens which support food entrepreneurship and awareness;
 - update home-based business provisions to enable small scale food enterprises.

Recommended Reading

1. Municipal; Food Entrepreneurs Report: <http://tfpc.to/canadian-food-policy-initiatives/municipal-food-policy-report>
2. Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment: <http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/public-health/halifax-food-assessment>
3. Food Strategies across Canada such as:
 - a. Vancouver Food Strategy- <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/vancouver-food-strategy.aspx>
 - b. Toronto Food Strategy- <http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=75ab044e17e32410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>
4. Planning Regional Food Systems: A guide for municipal planning and development in the greater horseshoe: https://ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Planning_Regional_Food_Systems_FinalJanuary25.pdf
5. Best Practices in Local Food- A guide for municipalities: <https://www.amo.on.ca/AMO-PDFs/Reports/2013/2013BestPracticesinLocalFoodAGuideforMunicipalities.aspx>
6. Planning for food friendly municipalities in Waterloo: <http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/en/researchResourcesPublications/resources/FoodFriendlyMunicipalities.pdf>
7. <http://www.ryerson.ca/foodsecurity/whoweare/index/WendyMendes.html>