

Healthy Food Retail for Community Food Security

Few Halifax area residents are eating enough vegetables and fruits on a daily basis. Only 27% of residents over the age of 12 are eating the minimum recommended amount of vegetables and fruits every day as a foundation for health¹. There are many reasons why an individual might not eat enough vegetables and fruits, but access to healthy food¹ is an important starting place.

Access to healthy food is influenced by many factors such as the:

- **built environment**, including transportation systems, neighbourhood design, and location of food stores.
- **food retail environment**, including availability and accessibility of places to buy food and the types of foods offered at these locations.
- **community food assets**, such as places where people can grow, prepare, share, receive, or learn about food.
- **social and economic factors**, such as health status, income, housing, and transportation.

A network of places to get food that provide healthy options, such as grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, and speciality food stores (e.g., bakeries), can increase the accessibility and availability of healthy food. By improving the accessibility of all residents to healthy food, we can improve our health and create healthy and liveable neighbourhoods.

How Halifax can support Healthy Food Retail?

[Halifax Municipality's Regional Plan](#) includes an objective to “design communities that promote community food security.”

The municipality can play a role in shaping healthy food retail through zoning and community plans, regulations and policies, and support of economic activities related to food retail. It can bring together different groups and organizations to encourage creative ways to improve food access. Some of the changes may require provincial support, so Halifax Municipality will need to work in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia.

The City of Vancouver uses a “food systems checklist” when city staff review proposed decisions about new developments, zoning, and community plans. This helps the City of Vancouver understand how each proposal or plan could shape community food security.

¹ For the purposes of this document, **healthy food** includes foods in [Canada's Food Guide](#) that are **low** in sodium, sugar and saturated fat and **unhealthy food** includes foods **high** in sodium, sugar, and saturated fat, such as sugar sweetened beverages, cookies, cakes or other sweets, potato chips etc.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Assess the food retail environment

We first need to understand how residents access food in Halifax. Neighbourhoods vary in the number and quality of food retail outlets. Individuals' food experiences vary based on their location and access to transportation and income, among other factors.

- 1.1 Work with stakeholders to better understand the food retail environment and identify gaps and opportunities for healthy food retail across the Halifax region.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Promote healthy food retail

Land-use planning can influence the quality and accessibility of healthy food within the Halifax region by taking into account the different kinds of food retail outlets, the availability and promotion of healthy food within them, and how people get there.

- 2.1 Review and revise zoning by-laws and plans to improve food distribution and access.
 - Ensure that regulations enable and encourage grocery stores and other healthy food retail outlets, requiring them in neighbourhoods with poor access and availability of healthy food.
 - Work with other levels of government to permit and reduce barriers to healthy food retail models such as farmers' markets, mobile food markets, and community markets.
 - Update home-based business provisions to enable small-scale food enterprises.
 - Facilitate access to food retail supports, such as food processing and storage.
- 2.2 Adopt a guiding principle of equitable access to fresh and healthy food (locally produced, as available) and create a review process to ensure that access to healthy food is considered in community planning, development applications, subdivisions, planning amendments, and other planning initiatives.
- 2.3 Adopt and implement policies to ensure that all municipal facilities provide healthy food options and limit the sale of unhealthy food and beverages
- 2.4 Adopt and implement a policy to limit food and beverage marketing to children and reduce the influence of food companies on food preferences.
 - Restrict all food and beverage marketing in municipal settings, such as recreation centres, transit stations, and libraries.
 - Restrict sponsorship of municipal facilities or events by food and beverage companies selling unhealthy food.



RECOMMENDATION #3: Support creative models of healthy food retail

Community organizations and food entrepreneurs are finding new ways of bringing healthy and fresh food to residents. These include initiatives like community food markets, mobile produce stands, healthy corner stores, and pop-up farmers markets.



- 3.1 Investigate options for Halifax to support healthy food retail initiatives and pursue additional legislative authority, if needed.
- 3.2 Promote the development of food businesses through business supports², such as property tax incentives, training, modified licensing and permit processes.
- 3.3 Develop programs that encourage access to healthy food in places where people live, work, learn and play, such as corner stores and transit locations.
- 3.4 Provide continued support for the [Halifax Mobile Food Market](#) and encourage new partnerships that work with communities to address neighbourhood food access and use existing resources to promote health.

REFERENCES

- i. Halifax Food Policy Alliance. (2014). Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment. <https://halifaxfoodpolicy.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/foodcounts-assessment-web-fin4.pdf>

² The City of Toronto helped to create, and continues to support, Food Starter (<http://foodstarter.ca>), a non-profit that provides access to shared food production equipment, business advice and training to help build great food businesses.