

Comprehensive Plan Work Group Sunset Memo – September 28, 2018

When the Madison Food Policy Council became aware of the Imagine Madison Comprehensive Planning process, it established a Work Group to provide input on food and food systems – an important category of community values not represented through an official department in the City of Madison’s administrative structure. The Work Group met dozens of times since January 2017, generated multiple spreadsheets collecting ideas for potential inclusion, submitted numerous strategies and actions for staff consideration, and advocated its issues to many boards, committees and commissions during the approval process to ensure that food was recognized as an important element in the planning process.

The Work Group was staffed by George Reistad (Food Policy Coordinator), with support in the early stages from Nick Heckman (Public Health Food Policy Analyst) and Milena Bernardinello (Planning). Comp Plan Work Group members, all of whom have expertise in food system issues and planning, included:

- Kyle Richmond (Work Group chair): Former member of the Dane County Board, Dane County Food Council and Madison Local Food Committee; serves as vice-chair of the Madison Food Policy Council
- Lindsey Day Farnsworth: Postdoctoral fellow at the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems with a specialty in Community and Regional Food Systems Policy; she holds a Masters degree from the Department of Urban & Regional Planning and PhD from the Nelson Institute; she serves as a member of the Madison Food Policy Council, Madison Public Market Development Committee and the Community Groundworks board of directors.
- Marcia Caton Campbell: Executive Director, Center for Resilient Cities, with MCRP and PhD degrees in City Planning; she is an expert in community and regional food systems planning with 20 years of experience in research, teaching and practice.
- Martin Bailkey: Project manager at the Center for Resilient Cities and holds a PhD in Urban & Regional Planning with 20 years of research and writing on urban agriculture and community food systems; he was a charter member of the Dane County Food Council and the Madison Food Policy Council.
- Nan Fey (Chair of the Madison Food Policy Council): An attorney by training, has served on the Community Gardens Committee and chaired the City’s Plan Commission during its first Comprehensive Planning process in 2006.

The Work Group reviewed these policy documents for their perspectives on food:

- Madison Food Policy Council Goals & Objectives, and 2015 Progress Report
- Current Comprehensive Plans for Madison & Dane County (2006 & 2012)
- Madison Zoning Code and Sustainability Plan (2012)
- Food Systems Planning white paper (2014)
- Public Health “Hunger & Food Security” brief (2016)

The Work Group reported to the full Madison Food Policy Council at every monthly meeting, and requested input from its members throughout the Imagine Madison process. The City’s Planning Division team of Brian Grady and Kirstie Laatsch made presentations to the full Madison Food Policy Council several times during the public input phases of 2017 (related to Goals, Strategies and Actions) and introduced the complete draft comprehensive plan document in May 2018.

The overall goal was to provide as many ideas as possible, within the constraints of the Imagine Madison process, for Strategies and Actions in the six categories created by staff. When the draft plan was released for public comment and committee review, food was addressed in every category. During the committee review process, the Work Group was able to marshal support for those provisions, and restore some that had been removed from an earlier draft. When the final plan was adopted by the Common Council on July 25th, the following strategies, as well as several important concepts and definitions were included:

Land Use: Strategy 6 - Recognizing that the value of agricultural land was not adequately considered in past Neighborhood Development Planning efforts.

Neighborhoods: Strategy 8 - Restoring the sentence, “Access to healthy food is one of the most basic life-sustaining strategies of the Comprehensive Plan.”

Economy & Opportunity: Strategy 7 - Broadening the focus to include other areas and resources in the city, acknowledging the regional food system and replacing graphic with one that illustrates the importance of the food sector in the local economy.

Culture & Character: Strategy 3 - Adding food to the list of elements that contribute to creating community spaces and events.

Green & Resilient: Strategy 9 - Adding an action to develop guidelines for best practices when growing food in the city, and a definition of “sustainable agriculture” into the Glossary. Language was also added to suggest “agrihoods” (new development that integrates food production within residential neighborhoods) as an approach to balancing development with farmland preservation, and its definition added to the Glossary.

Effective Government: Strategy 1 - Adding a Action that requires the City to work with Dane County to develop a regional food systems plan.

One very important issue was not addressed to the Work Group's satisfaction, the direct conflict between preserving farmland and building development. A simple comparison of the plan's Growth Priority Areas map with the Productive Agricultural Soils and Natural Limitations for Building Site Development maps illustrates the challenge. Work Group memos to the Plan Commission and Common Council requested clear language directing staff and policy makers to balance the strong community values that support local food and the preservation of farmland with development interests as the city grows. However, staff and the ultimate decision-making bodies were not willing to confront this conflict directly in the final document. As the Food Policy Council pursues the Effective Government action to create a future regional food systems plan, it will be important to face this issue.

Another significant issue was raised on September 5th, 2018 at the Madison Food Policy Council meeting during a presentation by Planning Staff on the Milwaukee Street Special Area Plan that includes the 68-acre Voit Farm. Questions and comments from MFPC members made it very clear that there are important land use issues to be addressed from an urban agriculture perspective that have, thus far, only been casually acknowledged although the area provides a unique opportunity for the city to implement some of its newly approved planning recommendations for such developments. The plan is on a fast track for approval by the Plan Commission this fall. While there are important Comprehensive Plan implications for this plan, the Work Group believes these issues can be productively pursued by the Urban Agriculture Work Group, whose membership has significant overlap – Bailkey, Day Farnsworth and Fey.

Having fulfilled its goal of ensuring that Madison's Comprehensive Plan for the next 20 years reflects the importance of food-related issues, the Work Group respectfully requests that the MFPC approve its adjournment "sine die" and submits this memo as a record of its activities for the public record. The Work Group will provide the advocacy memoranda it sent to a number of boards, committees and commissions during the comp plan approval process to further document its efforts.