

Minutes
Mayor's Initiative for Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems
November 8, 2013
10:00 – 11:30, City Hall, Room 209

1. Welcome introductions of meeting attendees

The mayor welcomed meeting attendees. In attendance were Meaghan Quinn, Nicole Nadeau, Daniel Wallace, Jim Hanna, Ken Morse, Jackie Potter, Jonah Fertig, Jeremy Bloom, Daniel Ongier, Craig Lapine, Hazel Onsurd, Clara Coleman, Lisa Fernandes and Stephanie Pooler.

2. Review and approval of minutes from September 13, 2013 meeting

3. Urban Agriculture Committee Recommendations

a. Community Gardens

The group discussed several issues pertaining to community gardening. Questions arose about the community garden guidelines, the perceived discrepancy between city based and community based gardening initiatives, and the lack of real data describing who in Portland, besides those on the waiting list for a community plot, would grow their own food if they had access to land. Craig Lapine agreed to convene a meeting prior to December with primary stakeholders, including the Public Works Task Force, Parks Department, Cultivating Community and Urban Agriculture to define and streamline the various groups' processes. The group suggested inviting the regional administrator from the EPA as well. Hazel volunteered to put the subcommittee's recommendations into a grant format that includes metrics in the event it is used to request funding. It was suggested that funding could be allocated for soil remediation, raised-bed kits, tax incentives and rain barrels. Lisa volunteered to help facilitate a preliminary survey that would serve to identify citizens' interests, needs, and barriers to growing their own food.

b. Urban Farms

The group briefly discussed urban farming, noting the economic opportunity for unemployed workers, especially immigrants with agrarian backgrounds. Also the opportunity to donate locally raised food to local institutions. The location and size of land parcels have yet to be determined and will be discussed at a later date.

c. Rooftops

The group discussed the opportunity for more rooftop gardens in East Bayside, citing that Coffee by Design is moving into the area and is interested in having a rooftop garden of their own.

4. Food Security Update

Jim Hanna provided the group with a handout stressing access and equity as key components to food security. Maine is ranked third in the nation for people experiencing very low food security, with over 250,000 residents using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Jim suggested that limited income housing complexes might benefit greatly from community gardens. He also encouraged integrating cultural diversity into food systems, and suggested meeting with more immigrant groups to allow their voices to be heard. The group agreed that all efforts of the Mayor's Initiative should be viewed through a food security lens.

Handout attached.

5. New business / Other Updates

Cultivating Community, Culinary Crew Celebration Dinner will be held at Local Sprouts on November 11, 2013 from 5:30-7:30.

Tim Fuller, who was not present, will give a recap of the action themes from the food forum at the next meeting.

6. Confirm date for next meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for December 13, 2013 at 10:00am.

7. Adjourn.

FOOD SECURITY IN MAINE, CUMBERLAND COUNTY & PORTLAND

We all want Maine people, regardless of where they live, to have access to the opportunities that allow them to be healthy. What you might not know is that today, greater numbers of Maine families are having a difficult time putting food on their tables. Further, people are not deprived of food because food is *unavailable* in the market, but rather because the *access* to that food is restricted, most often by limited income.

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) defines *food security* as “access, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.” In 2012, Maine ranked third in the nation for people experiencing very low food security. Very Low Food Security is characterized by occasions when eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food. Previously called “hunger,” the USDA began referring to this condition as very low food security in 2006. The methods used to assess household food security remained the same, so statistics are comparable.

Maine	1996-1998	2004-2006	2007-2009	2009-2011
Food Insecure	9.8%	12.9%	14.8%	14.7%
Very Low Food Security (Hunger)	4%	5.3%	6.7%	6.5%

More recent data from 2012 showed Maine ranked eighth in the percent of its population using the food stamp program—now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The rolls showed 253,496 of Maine’s estimated 1,328,361 people (19.1%) using SNAP. That’s an increase of 54% in just five years.

Recent data for Cumberland County (September 2013) lists 13,159 children in households using SNAP. Nearly one-third of all students live in families whose income qualify them for free and reduced price school meals. In Portland, during the 2012-2013 school year, almost 50% of the students were eligible for free meals. This means that nearly half of Portland Public School students lived in households with annual incomes, e.g., in a family of four, of less than \$30,000. That was a total of 3,459 kids. Recent SNAP data for Portland (September 2013), lists 4,764 children under 18 in households using the benefit program.

Portland School Meal Eligibility	2002-2003	2007-2008	2012-2013
Free (below 130% of poverty)	2,546 (33.6%)	2,792 (39.7%)	3,459 (49.4%)
Total (below 185% of poverty)	2,921 (38.6%)	3,042 (43.3%)	3,722 (53.2%)

It’s Not Just About Food

With food insecurity a daily reality for thousands of children in Portland, we must increase our sense of urgency about how to address the problem. Raw poverty is obvious when we encounter it, but there is a range of experience as we move from food security to those extreme conditions. Understanding that continuum lets us identify and target effective strategies, and make the best investments to increase food security for all members of our community. Understanding the problem makes you part of the solution.

How can we all work together to build strength in our community?

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