

Notes from 10/23/13 Public Forum

On October 23, 2013 the Mayor's Initiative for a Healthy and Sustainable Food System held a public forum at Merrill Auditorium Rehearsal Hall entitled "Shaping Portland's Food System."

Mayor Michael Brennan led the meeting by officially declaring October 24th Food Day in the City of Portland. Mayor Brennan gave a brief summary of the initiative's efforts from the past year, including the School Food subcommittee's goal to increase the amount of locally sourced food in Portland schools from 30% to 50% in the next two years. Other successes cited by the Mayor include a policy passed in July to improve the nutritional value of foods available in city-owned or operated vending machines, and support initiative members gave to a GMO labeling bill that passed the Maine legislature this year.

Following Mayor Brennan, subcommittee chairs had the opportunity to give updates to those in attendance. Jeremy Bloom, Internet Farmer and member of the Urban Agriculture subcommittee shared information on Portland's Adopt a Tree program, city-wide composting, rooftop gardens, expanding Portland community gardens, and the possibility of introducing cooperative style gardening to public plots.

Jim Hanna of Cumberland County's Food Security Council heads the Food Security subcommittee. Hanna spoke to the fact that last year, 50% of Portland households earned less than \$30,000 making each child from those households eligible for free and reduced school lunch.

Craig Lapine of Cultivating Community and Ron Adams, Food Service Director for Portland Public Schools, head the School Food subcommittee. Each spoke of the need to increase the number of students buying school lunches daily in order to fund the cost of using more locally sourced foods in the school system. Lapine and Adams hinted at the possible social and environmental benefits of using more locally sourced foods, citing obesity reductions, improved academic achievements, skill development for people farming the food, and establishing Portland as a local food hub.

Amy Gallant of Preble Street's Maine Hunger Initiative (MHI) and Kyle Moulton of Representative Chellie Pingree's office addressed the importance of policy in a healthy food system. Gallant spoke to the approaching benefit cuts aimed at Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, totaling for some a reduction of 21 meals per month. MHI will be holding a Hunger Memorial on November 1st during First Friday Artwalk. Moulton spoke to the importance of communicating what resources are available to Maine citizens on Federal, State, and local levels.

Daniel Wallace of CEI chairs the Enterprise and Infrastructure subcommittee. Wallace said his committee's focus is to make recommendations of local issues based on an inventory of what resources the city currently holds. Wallace hopes to bring members of Portland's real estate community into the conversation of sustainable food systems by identifying buildings in the area suitable for food service, such as those already having drains installed in the floor. Wallace's subcommittee also hopes to address advocating for a livable wage for restaurant workers.

The purpose of the event was to inform community members of the initiative's efforts that are currently in motion and to help refine the initiative's priorities moving forward.

The following portion of the evening consisted conversation around three questions.

1 – Discussion. As a follow up to the brief presentations made by members of the food initiative in the five topic areas of, Policy Enterprise and Infrastructure, School Food, Urban Agriculture, and Food Security, participants were asked to review the current set of preliminary recommendations* for each and discuss what they see as priorities within that topic.

2 – Reflection. Participants were invited to reflect upon the list of values held by the Mayor's Food Initiative and share both what they think is going well and what could be improved upon regarding each value.

3 – Action. Finally, participants were asked to write down on index cards at least one action they would be willing to take to further the goals of the Mayor's Food Initiative.

Below is the transcription of comments participants recorded regarding the questions above.

As a next step, the Mayor's Initiative membership and staff will review notes from this forum to further refine, inform and, if needed expend its priorities.

*See separate document for list of preliminary recommendations.

<u>DISCUSSION</u>	
Food Enterprise and Infrastructure	Linking: Diverse people to diverse resources and Entrepreneurs to facilities space etc. Post recommendations for feedback Warehousing; processing; branding Regulation inked to branding i.e. 90% sourced in NY Breweries Diversity & New entrepreneurs
Policy	Connecting with active politically focused groups – MPHA, AGCOM Identify coalitions and networks to share info and resources Identify barriers Better communication / education Make policy efforts more formal/structured

School Food	Service learning in schools Café environment changes How to overcome school lunch stigma Compete with open campus SNAP-Ed / Nutrition education Breakfast on the Bus Student input Promote with strong media campaign Parent invitation Staffing incentives SMCC Student experiences in kitchens @ school + gardens Nutrition education Tie in Maine Harvest Lunch How to open up for public at lunch in addition to parents awareness Food in the cafeteria reflects the diversity of Portland's student population
Urban Agriculture	Tool and heavy equipment sharing Use city resources – make more available EPA Brownfields Program - \$ @ City level and Greater Portland Council of Governments Religious organizations that may have space to grow on
Food Security	Involve campuses and students Local food accessible for people with limited \$\$ Mapping of Producers Season extension Gleaning and processing Facilities/labor to preserve Faith Communities

REFLECTION ON VALUES

Thriving Local Economies	
Working Well	Improve Upon
Coop taking off Increasing local food awareness through many food outlets Many food based jobs	Everyone sign up for Affordable Health Care More local and community ownership Those jobs pay better Higher graduation rates Farming and food service as viable career More local processing

Vibrant Farms and Gardens	
Working Well	Improve Upon
Lots of energy around gardening and agriculture Increased interest in garden by families who want to grow own food	Establish more gardens to meet demand for garden plots Cumberland county commission to initiate regional policy Would love to recruit a tenant farmer for my apartment building
Equal Food Access for Disadvantaged People	
Working Well	Improve Upon
SNAP at Farmers' Markets The players that can solve it already meet Snap dollars at farmers' markets	Make it so farmers' market can accept General Assistance Judgmental attitudes toward people using EBT to purchase food Better quality food at pantries More awareness about the hidden costs of 'cheap food' Dignified community dinners as an alternative to over-capacity soup kitchens Providing food access becomes the norm – it's what we do
Strong Neighborhoods and Communities	
Working Well	Improve Upon
Buy Local community is well established The Deering Oaks Farmers' Market is an amazing community gathering place Increased availability of garden plots	More garden plots in public City-owned places including school grounds (PATHS) Public support for local spending by the schools More local neighborhood groups around local food
Justice and Fairness in the Food System	
Working Well	Improve Upon
Business owners are engaged in this issue This council (us) Walking the talk Communications Marketing and building links	Communications Marketing and building links Community garden signs in multiple languages Better quality food available at food pantries and soup kitchens More attention to health disparities among restaurant workers More diversity in the room
Sustainable Ecosystems	
Working Well	Improve Upon
Momentum around the issue Fruit trees Lots of great open spaces Green spaces	More community gardens Fund to pay for school garden coordinators Less mowed space – allow more naturalized spaces

Healthy People	
Working Well	Improve Upon
Strong support from community leaders	Exercise flash mobs throughout the City X-Country Skiing at Deering Oaks Park

ACTION

The following is a list of action comments participants wrote on index cards:

I will be more active with writing my congress person on issues that are important to food security in Maine

Tool library so people can grow food

Work with Urban Agriculture Committee to complete recommendation s

I will be more proactive in communicating with my congress people to support the initiative's cause

Identify and implement policies and ordinances to create and support more robust urban agriculture

Engaging area colleges and universities in addressing hunger in the region

I will reach out to cooperative extensions to assist and coordinate with SMCC Food Pantry

Work on RFP process for Urban Farm

I will remain actively involved in initiative meetings and utilize information gained through my graduate studies to help contribute to the cause

I am available to help with nutrition education in school relating to local foods – especially during harvest lunch week

Engage students with school food service staff

I have a good amount of experience in and knowledge of student voice and leadership initiatives and would love to get involved in enlisting kids as leaders in this awesome program!

How to get more diversity in the room? Need intentional effort

Teens promote local school lunches

I will contribute my time technical assistance to promoting the marketing and communications of health initiatives identified within the mayor's council (campaigns, press releases, web support list serves, facebook page etc)