

Food System Access and 5 Year Comprehensive Plan for Charlottesville, VA

Prepared by the Charlottesville Food Justice Network

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The Need for Food Access Reform in Comprehensive Plan

For Charlottesville, current statistics show that 17%, or 1 in 6 residents, are food insecure and lack access to sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food. Unfortunately, this trend outpaces Virginia's average of 11.9%.¹ Looking more closely at this figure, just 68% of these families are able to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (SNAP) to increase their food supply, while the remaining 32% earn slightly more than the benefits threshold and therefore may require support from charitable response services such as emergency food banks.²

Unfortunately, food insecurity and hunger are not new challenges to Charlottesville and in fact have continued to worsen. Between 2001-2016, the number of households receiving SNAP benefits in Charlottesville increased by 160%.³ Furthermore, food insecurity, hunger, and connected quality of life indicators are experienced disproportionately by people of color and those with low economic resources. While the city of Charlottesville has a median household income of \$54,029 and a majority white population (78%)⁵, within many of our low-resourced neighborhoods, the median household income is \$28,309 and African-Americans and people of color comprise 47%-92% of the population.⁶ These citizens suffer disproportionately high rates of diet-related diseases such as hypertension and diabetes.⁴

Why Now?

The need for a more healthy and equitable food system in our city is clear. But we have been slow to respond to this need, instead relying on federal assistance safety net programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC), and charitable organizations (many of which receive federal funding support) to bridge the hunger gap. However, federal support for anti-hunger programming and nutrition assistance (SNAP, WIC, USDA grants for Community Food Projects) is projected to decrease with the 2018 Farm Bill.⁷ Partners in the Charlottesville Food Justice Network know that we can achieve a food secure city. However, if we don't act now, we can expect the uphill battle to achieve a food secure city to become even more difficult. This is the appropriate moment for the City of Charlottesville to adopt policies to support equitable food access, and to articulate food access language, practices and goals in its 2018 Comprehensive Plan.

Comprehensive Plan—A new Chapter for Food Systems

Currently, the City's 5-year Comprehensive Plan does not include strategies for expanding food access or ending hunger, an urgent problem. Nor have past plans included this perspective, potentially exacerbating current conditions. Partners in the CFJN are here and ready to support the city in creating this new chapter, which we feel is acutely needed in order to achieve healthier schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods for all citizens. Access to food is a multifaceted issue, thus requiring concerted action in

many sectors. Though food is integral to all our lives and is a basic human need which is impacted by the development and planning activities within the City, no chapter mentions food or food access. Below we have suggested additions to chapters 4,5, and 6 of the city's comprehensive plan to introduce food access in meaningful and achievable ways.

Chapter 4: Urban Environmental Sustainability [Clean Draft](#); [Marked Up Draft](#); [2013 Plan](#)

Urban Landscape & Habitat Enhancement

Goal 1: *Pursue a healthy ecosystem, including a robust urban forest, that delivers valuable ecosystem services.*

Comment: This section should include protection of existing, and addition of, urban agricultural spaces. The city bolsters multiple urban agricultural spaces in all 18 neighborhoods regardless of income level, as well as 7 of the 8 public schools. Many of these community gardens are used for food security access, and some are under threat of destruction from redevelopment. Pursuing a healthy ecosystem can also support our food needs by encouraging and supporting the development of urban food production businesses that employ and are owned by residents living in lower income communities.

- **Add 1.10** Establish and enforce a minimum standard for square footage of green space per person in low-income census tracts that preserves (and in some cases increases space where standards are not met) space for urban agriculture production and garden use throughout development.
- **Add 1.11** Promote and protect green and urban agriculture spaces in all 18 neighborhoods (emphasize equity in investment across all neighborhoods) in the city for the sustainable production of locally grown foods or community gardens, by participating in programs or engaging with networks that maintain these spaces.
- **Add 1.12** Streamline and make clear the process by which neighborhoods may create shared gardens.

Water Resources Protection

Goal 2: *Protect, enhance, and restore the integrity of the City's water resources.*

Comment: This section should include goals to ensure adequate protection and availability for water resources in low income housing. Specifically, with initial creation of Westhaven public housing site (which was used as a model for other sites), water resources were not mindfully considered in the design leading to issues resulting in water usage restrictions which impacts maintenance of green space in the area. There should also be language that sets a standard for improved water sources for city gardens. Currently the city gardens do not provide access to water for irrigation which disproportionately impacts the poor and those without vehicular transportation.

- **Add 2.16** Establish and enforce a minimum standard for availability and sustainable management for water resources which is mindful of current and growing needs for maintaining green spaces, including during development and redevelopment projects, in low-income census tracts, and throughout the City.

Chapter 5: Housing [Clean Draft](#); [Marked Up Draft](#); [2013 Plan](#)

Goal 7: *Increase the energy and water efficiency, and environmental sustainability, of the City's housing stock*

- **Add 7.5:** Encourage the incorporation of food access avenues (eg. affordable stores, agriculture space such as greenhouses, school and community gardens, neighborhood farmers markets) in all housing developments to the maximum extent feasible in order to increase self-sufficiency, improve environmental sustainability, and to increase access to food.

Goal 8: *Ensure the City's housing portfolio offers a wide range of choices that are integrated and balanced across the City, and which meet multiple City goals including: community sustainability, walkability, bikeability, public transit use, increased support for families with children, fewer pockets of poverty, access to local jobs, thriving local businesses, and decreased student vehicle use.**

- **Add:** food access to description goal 8.
- **Add to 8.2:** *Link housing options, transportation, **food access (add here)**, and employment opportunities in City land use decisions.**

Chapter 6: Transportation [Clean Draft](#); [Marked Up Draft](#); [2013 Plan](#)

Transit System

Comment: A transit system with no clear goals for expanding citizens' access not only to jobs and economic opportunities, but specifically to food, child care, schools, and the community as a whole for better inclusion, is a weak system.

Goal 6: *Create a transit system that increases local and regional mobility and provides a reliable and efficient alternative for Charlottesville's citizens.*

- o **Add 6.11:** Evaluate transit services to food access points including, emergency food banks, soup kitchens, nutritional services, community and school gardens, farmers markets, and grocery stores.
- o **Add 6.12:** Incorporate bus stops to the maximum extent possible to food access points including, emergency food banks, soup kitchens, nutritional services, community and school gardens, farmers markets, and grocery stores.

Citations

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