



Policy Task Force Meeting Notes

Fairfax Food Council

February 20, 2024 at 10:00 am – 11:00 am

Welcome

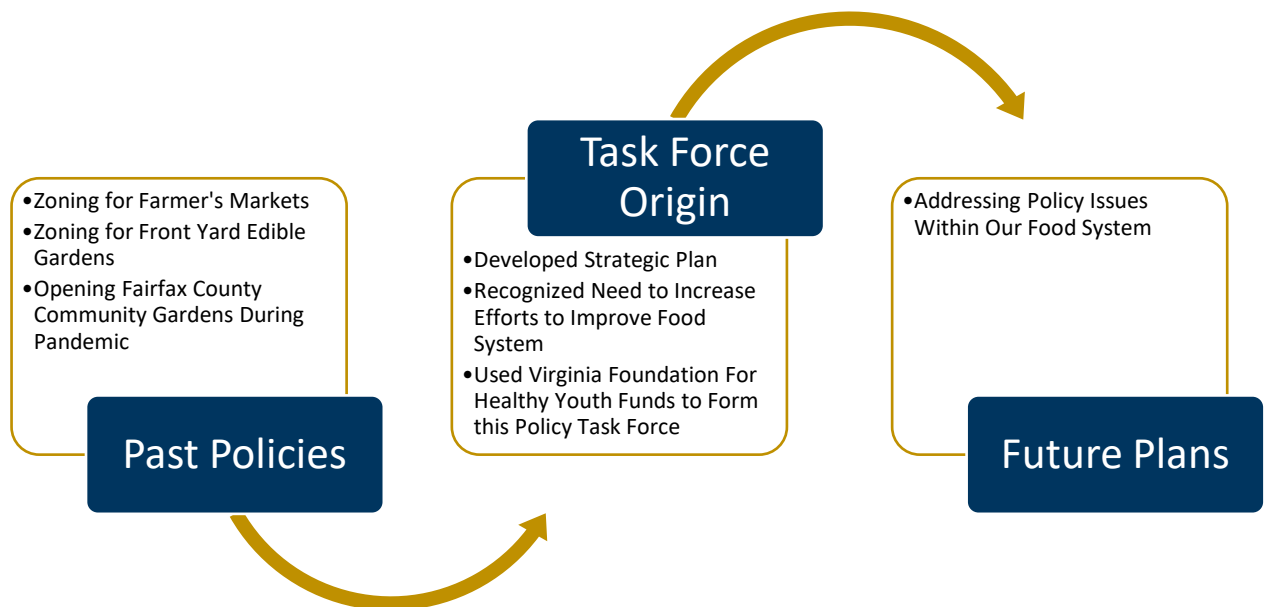
Kerri LaCharite, Policy Task Force Chair

Kerri welcomed all attendees and invited them to introduce themselves in the chat.

A Policy Task Force? How did we get here?

Diane Charles, Fairfax Food Council Project Manager

Diane discussed the FFC's success with policy in the past, how that success helped spark the origin of this Task Force, and where this Task Force is headed.



FFC Policy Task Force Overview

Kerri LaCharite

Kerri spoke about the roles we may play.



She also encouraged the group to be ambitious but realistic by reminding us:

- A policy task force cannot *enact* laws or policies.
- We do not have to exclude regional or national policy pursuits, but local policy is where we will have a bigger impact.
- The process of changing policy at the local, state, and federal levels takes time.

With all of this in mind, Kerri shared some factors for the group to consider when prioritizing policy issues:

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| • Overlap with FFC mission & vision | • Equitability |
| • Meets grant specifications | • Feasibility |
| • Works toward short- & long-term goals | • Allies |
| • Impact on community | • Opponents |
| • Impact on environment | • Beneficiaries |

Policy Issues Within Our Food System

Group discussion led by Kerri LaCharite & Diane Charles

Kerri asked the group, “Policy-wise, what are the county's biggest issues or barriers?”

- **Jenniliz**—Families with kids in Title 1 schools often live in apartments that do not have balconies, and landlords will not allow community gardens. They need food assistance but cannot grow food because of these rules. Fresh produce is not always accessible. There is space that could be dedicated to an edible garden, but landlords generally do not allow the space to be used for that purpose.
- **Casey**—Farmers need to be linked with organizations (e.g., schools, non-profits) that can buy their food and get it to those in need. More meals should be farm to table. This could require policy or programmatic changes.

- **Ben**—Top issues: access to healthy foods, affordability, and consumption. When the pandemic ended, SNAP supplements ended. Now, it is more difficult for families to acquire more nutritious foods. Programs like *SNAP Healthy Incentives* and *Vouchers for Veggies* help. (San Francisco’s program is a good example.) Increased demand helps increase the supply.
- **Anna**—Top issue: Land use. Front yard garden ordinances are great, but HOAs and landlords can limit the actual use of those ordinances. This might require changes to state policy because the county cannot change HOA bylaws. We need the state to tell HOAs they cannot restrict people from growing food. Also, regarding local policies around land use, there are many vacant office buildings. Let’s think about how to repurpose those buildings for urban agriculture. It could be great to pair any policy changes around this issue with a program that links us to colleges/students interested in urban agriculture.
- **Alisa**— Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a non-pricing meal service option that allows schools with a significant number of students from low-income households to eliminate the administrative burden of school meal applications and still serve breakfast and lunch at no charge. A school could qualify as a CEP school if at least 40% of its students were in need of this meal service option. Recently, the USDA decreased this minimum identified student percentage from 40% to 25%. This is great because now only 25% of students must qualify for free meals in order for the whole school to get free meals. However, there was no funding from the USDA to accompany this proclamation. So, in terms of policies, should we consider asking the Board of Supervisors to fill in this new funding gap?
- **Kristie**—Top issue: Increase food scrap-based composting efforts at the community scale, farm scale, and everywhere in between. There are currently no policies for anything below large commercial-scale composting. These changes should be made at the state and county levels.
- **Jo**— Many residents who are disadvantaged don’t speak English. So, we should advocate for improved accessibility to translators and interpreters. Keep this in mind no matter what food policies/issues we choose to prioritize. Also, we should focus on healthy eating/nutrition education policies and/or programs, especially those that help people understand how to eat and cook different vegetables.
- **Harmonie**—We should focus on *Food is Medicine* policies <https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/food-medicine>
- **Kerri**—Maybe we could consider policies that require a certain percentage of school meals to be purchased from local farmers.

Next Steps

Kerri LaCharite

Kerri will share a food policy audit tool to help us prioritize policy issues. If you have more ideas/suggestions for policy issues we should prioritize, email us at HDFairfaxFoodCouncil@fairfaxcounty.gov. Remember, as a group, we want to start with broad policy issues and then narrow down from there.

Also, if you are interested in serving as a co-chair, contact Diane (Diane.Charles@fairfaxcounty.gov) or Kerri (klachari@gmu.edu).

Lastly, Kerri shared that programs are great, but if we want to enact slightly longer changes, policy is the way to go!

Next Policy Task Force Meeting: March 19, 2024 at 10:00 am