



Policy Task Force Meeting Notes

Fairfax Food Council

July 16, 2024

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Welcome:

Kerri LaCharite and Matthew Carlos, the FFC Policy Task Force Co-Chairs, welcomed all attendees.

Group Discussion

Big Group

Groups reported out where they left off last time.

What we are working on...

Access

SNAP enrollment/eligibility gap, addressing barriers to retailers, increasing the size & magnitude of benefits, and supplementing SNAP benefits

Agriculture/ Food Production & Waste

Zoning changes to allow and encourage small-scale agriculture intended for sale

Procurement/ Business/ Labor

Permitting & licensing of new food businesses

Group Discussion

Breakout Rooms

Attendees joined the breakout rooms to talk to invited experts and further develop their policy ideas.

Group Discussion

Big Group

Each breakout group reported what they discussed with the larger group.

Access

Wes Garrit from the Department of Family Services (DFS) was the guest speaker in the Food Access group. He shared that DFS gets over 10,000 calls per month about SNAP, Medicaid, or other assistance programs. Wes and two other people help with outreach, but there is only one dedicated outreach worker. DFS frequently participates in and hosts info sessions to increase clients' awareness and access to resources.

The access group is interested in a SNAP Navigator program in which (perhaps) DFS could train navigators. A navigator is someone who helps people enroll in SNAP. This is a more involved, hands-on role than a SNAP ambassador who knows about SNAP and eligibility requirements and encourages people to enroll.

Wes said it would be helpful to DFS to have SNAP navigators. DFS' small outreach team of three often plays this role when they visit food pantries or other outreach events. Having SNAP navigators could help them increase their bandwidth and impact. DFS does not have the time or resources to do this work on its own, so they are open to serving as a hub and "training the trainer."

A potential barrier to the Policy:

- Many people who are eligible for SNAP are discouraged by online enrollment because of technical barriers. If a navigator were to help them with the online enrollment process, it could be challenging to maintain the client's privacy. For example, password and security question set up is the very first enrollment process. Is there a way for a navigator to walk a client through that process without infringing on their privacy?

Next steps:

- Form a list of potential community partners.
- Gather data on areas not receiving SNAP enrollment outreach.

- Note: Data gathering needs to be improved, especially as it relates to the Penetration Access Index. This index indicates the rate at which those eligible for SNAP are enrolled/accessing the program. The method in which this index is calculated needs to be modified. For example, does it measure the number of SNAP recipients or the number of those eligible yet unenrolled? Therefore, the index needs to be adjusted before we can know the areas that need to be targeted and what populations are there.

The group also discussed two other policy ideas:

1. Supplement SNAP benefits with a monetary amount that is dedicated to purchasing produce.
2. Using county funds, expand Fresh Match to all sites that accept EBT. That expansion would include grocery stores and farmers markets.

Wes says these ideas have not been implemented yet because of a lack of funding. SNAP has been supplemented on a state level before, but it fluctuates (as was observed during and after the pandemic).

Agriculture/Food Production & Waste and Institutional Procurement/ Business/Labor

These two groups combined and heard from Casandra Lawson, a Co-Chair of the FFC's Urban Agriculture work group. Casandra shared her experience from 2021 attempting to obtain permits to grow produce at her home for selling at offsite events. She explained that zoning issues arise when an individual attempts to sell items from a home garden, which, based on the zoning interpretation, changes the garden from personal use to a home business. The challenge is that Fairfax County does not distinguish agriculture from other businesses.

The 2021 Fairfax County Planning & Development response she received about selling produce she had grown was that the selling of produce offsite is considered a small-scale production establishment which is not permitted in the residential zone in which she resides – because the use would not be considered a home occupation because the zoning ordinance prohibits any outdoor storage of goods or materials and requires that all home occupations be conducted *within* a dwelling.

The county's most recent zoning update did not include small-scale agriculture. (FYI, Small-Scale agriculture in PG County is allowed in most residential zones.) Kerri shared with the group that staff at Planning & Zoning who work on these issues are aware of this quagmire. There is potential for the FFC Policy Task Force and Planning & Zoning to collaborate on this issue to make changes.

There was a very informative discussion on this topic, including the reality that a change such as this, even if it did not directly impact a large segment of the population, could have other

equally valuable impacts, like education around growing one's own food, the community benefits of gardening in neighborhoods, etc.

Next steps:

- Invite Austin Gastrell, from the Department of Planning and Development to the September meeting to discuss agricultural and home business zoning regulations.
- Matt will send a follow-up email to the group with links to zoning regulations discussed during the meeting.

Closing remarks

Kerri

The Policy Task Force will not meet in August. Therefore, by September, the goal is to have reviewed policy criteria and set timeline goals/deadlines.

Setting Food Policy Agenda

- To mission of the food council
- To the grant
- To short term goals of the food council
- To long term goals of the food council
- Feasibility and ease
- Resource requirements
- On community health
- On economic development
- On development of community
- On resilience
- On environment
- On equity
- On ability to make long term change
- Who are/ might be allies?
- Who are/might be opponents?
- Who are the beneficiaries?

Next Policy Task Force Meeting: September 17, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.