

The Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council Report to the City Manager and Chief Public Health Officer



Winter 2022



Cambridge
Public Health
Department



The Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council

The Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council (FFPC) celebrates ten years of collaborative partnership in January 2022. The overarching goal of the council is to promote health through improving access for all residents to healthy and culturally appropriate foods and to physical activity through policy, systems and environmental changes. We have seen much success over the years and Cambridge has had tremendous success in recent years in developing and implementing policy, systems, and infrastructure changes that work towards this goal. Yet, there is still work to do in the areas of food and fitness, particularly in regards to health disparities and access to both healthy food and physical activity. There are opportunities to build on the work that has already been done to provide access and improve the health of every resident of the city. This report is a summary of an evaluation of the FFPC and includes recommendations to the City for continuing the FFPC and building on its success.

Membership

The Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council (FFPC) has up to 25 seats filled by representatives from the Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD), the Community Development Department (CDD), the Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP), the Department of Public Works (DPW), the Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee (CEOC), non-profit and community organizations, and Cambridge residents. The FFPC also includes members who participated in the development of the Community Health Improvement Plan priority area 2021, Healthy Eating and Active Living. There are some vacancies due to retirements and job changes over the last two years. A table with recommended updated membership is found on page 9 for approval.

Background

The FFPC was initiated by a City Council policy order in 2008. An ad hoc council was formed in 2009 to explore a Food and Fitness Policy Council for Cambridge and develop goals and recommendations to improve the city's food and fitness environment for residents. As a result of their report in 2011, a standing FFPC first met in January 2012 with membership approved by the City Manager and Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO). The Food and Fitness Policy Council was tasked with implementing the recommendations of the ad hoc council and with assessing the council's overall progress and efficacy over time.

A 2015 report to the City Manager evaluated the actions of the FFPC from inception ([Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council Evaluation and Recommendations: A Report to the City Manager, 2011-2014](#)). Resulting from this first report, in 2016 the FFPC was approved to continue by the City Manager and Chief Public Health Officer.

Successes of the Food and Fitness Policy Council

A summary of early successes includes:

- SNAP Match Coalition, formed in 2012 that offers matching funds to SNAP customers at select farmers markets and has issued \$181,997 in matching funds to-date.
- Formation of the Tap Water Task Force that promotes tap water as a beverage of choice over sugary drinks, resulting in infrastructure changes that include the routine installation of touchless fountains in parks and public schools.
- Implementation of the International Flavors program in school lunches with cafeteria taste tests that resulted from a series of focus groups with immigrant parents in partnership with the Community Engagement Team.
- A series of focus groups on Cultural Consideration in Physical Activity that resulted in a more representative series of CDD's bicycle workshops for families, influenced planning in the DHSP Recreation division, the CPS Physical Education program, and the Safe Routes to School program of CDD.
- The development of Food and Activity Guidelines that are still used by the CPHD public health nutritionist in training and assistance to out-of-school time programs in snack, meal, and activity planning and implementation.
- The Healthy Markets program provided direct support to corner stores in offering healthier products to customers through 2019. Starting in 2021 the focus has shifted to promotion and support of SNAP and healthier products in retail food stores.

These initiatives continue to be monitored by the FFPC while the implementation is under the purview of city and community organizational staff. Much of this work is included in both the citywide Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and Mass in Motion work plans and continues to evolve and grow.

Other FFPC milestones include:

Following the 2015 FFPC evaluation report, the FFPC launched a planning and monitoring approach, providing oversight to Mass in Motion work plans and participation in development and monitoring of CHIP strategies.

In 2017, the FFPC **adopted the Mass in Motion Leading with Race framework**, and spent much of a year examining Cambridge data and existing reports through a racial lens that resulted in a focus on the systemic needs of vulnerable populations, including Black and Hispanic children and their families. This work is reviewed in a 2018 report, [*Cambridge MA, Going Deep to Grow*](#) with recommendations for community engagement from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC).

The Urban Agriculture Task Force worked with the city and CPHD on adopting an ordinance (City) and public health regulations (CPHD) for beekeeping in 2017, and made recommendations for farming and related initiatives, currently a strategy in the CHIP. Completion of a [*Health Lens Analysis on Urban Agriculture report in 2019*](#) was accomplished in partnership with MAPC which supports the on-going urban agriculture initiative.

An **examination of food access** was started in 2019 with an extensive classification and survey of Cambridge retail grocery stores (and a few within the walkshed in Somerville), neighborhood markets, and convenience stores. This resulted in a detailed analysis of the nutritional quality and affordability of food available by neighborhood, including SNAP and WIC access. The resulting report [*An Analysis of the Cambridge Food Environment: Food Retail Survey & Food Shopping Survey*](#) was completed in 2021. The Urban Agriculture Health Lens Analysis and Food Retail Survey reports have contributed to strategies of both Mass in Motion and the CHIP, and are being built on through a Cambridge Food Action plan, that includes a community food assessment and recommendations, which will be finalized in early 2022.

The CHIP HEAL priority area workgroup joined the FFPC when the 2021 CHIP was completed. This was important to do, since the work of strategy development, monitoring, and oversight of both the CHIP and the FFPC has significant overlap, and the majority of people involved are in both groups. With this inclusion, new exciting aspects for the FFPC include the addition of a Health Equity Champion who monitors planning and implementation, as well as paid Community Representatives who provide the lens of lived experience to strategic planning.

Evaluation

An evaluation of the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council was carried out by Connection Lab, LLC over the summer of 2021

Member feedback included:

- The energy of the group is high.
- The group's leadership is strong.
- The council is a wonderful place to share ideas and to collaborate.
- The council's efforts have contributed significantly to the overall health of Cambridge, by:
 - identifying emerging issues,
 - sharing information and resources, and
 - connecting city and non-profit partners to collaboratively respond to community needs.
- Areas for improvement included: 1) more accessible meeting times for community members, 2) more communication and project updates between meetings, 3) more diverse membership and inclusion of relevant city staff, 4) grant funding for the time non-profits partners and community members spend on meetings and project-related activities, like community engagement. These are currently being addressed.

Goal, Objectives, and Recommended Actions

The FFPC Goal, Objectives, and Recommended Actions included here, have been successful over time and have been updated but not significantly changed. See the **FFPC Roadmap** on p.8 for a graphic representation.

Goal: The overarching goal of the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council is to promote health through improving access for all residents to healthy and culturally appropriate foods and physical activity through policy systems and environmental changes

Objectives:

For all residents:

- 1) Improve access to healthy, culturally appropriate, fresh foods, including locally grown food, with a focus on residents who have less access and limited financial resources.
- 2) Facilitate access to food and fitness through coordination and networking among city and school departments, organizations, and businesses.
- 3) Improve access to food and fitness by facilitating education and outreach through city and school programs, organizations, business and the public.

Recommended Actions:

Embark on a citywide approach for healthy eating and physical activity in alignment with the citywide, 5-year Community Health Improvement Plan, including:

- Create a consistent food and activity environment for children throughout the day.
- Develop coordinated communication and marketing strategies for promoting healthy eating and active living opportunities.
- Expand and support sustainable and active transportation citywide.
- Expand access to Cambridge farmers' markets.
- Support the Cambridge Food Pantry and Emergency Food systems.
- Support food and fitness-related businesses in Cambridge.
- Create a healthier neighborhood food and fitness environment.
- Expand urban agriculture.
- Support and enhance existing successful programs.

Council Structure

The Food and Fitness Policy Council (FFPC) operates under the guidance of the Cambridge Public Health Department, with a co-lead from another city department, and assistance from other members. It is an advisory to the Public Health Department and the City on matters pertaining to healthy eating and active living (HEAL) and is the workgroup for the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) HEAL priority area.

Meeting Schedule and Structure

The Council meets five or six times per year. Work groups are formed and disbanded on an as-needed basis to explore or coordinate specific topics or initiatives and may include FFPC non-members, including community members and topic experts.

Staffing

The FFPC meetings are co-facilitated by a Cambridge Public Health Department and another City department staff member who together guide the work of the council in coordination with FFPC membership.

Membership

The FFPC consists of up to 25 people representing city departments, community organizations, and individual community members. Council members are familiar with their respective department or organizations' food and fitness-related policies and programs, and have the authority and/or expertise to make practical assessments regarding strategic planning, policy, and recommendation or implementation of new initiatives. Other stakeholders are invited to share their expertise on specific issues with the council. Membership is on renewable annual terms, as long as members are actively engaged with the work of the council.

Decision-Making

Decision-making occurs by consensus.

Funding

The Cambridge Public Health Department has been responsible for in-kind support in the form of facilitating the Food and Fitness Policy Council. Council members' time is valued as an in-kind contribution, including attendance at five or six meetings annually.

Grant funding from Mass in Motion supports the work of the council from 2012 to the end of the 2022 fiscal year. Two community representatives of the CHIP workgroup receive stipends for their time from a grant to the Public Health Department, as will select non-profit organizations.

Council Evaluation

Progress toward meeting the goal and objectives of the FFPC will be summarized annually and reported to the Chief Public Health Officer and City Manager. After five years, the council will assess the overall progress and efficacy of the group, including further recommendations for moving forward.

Request for Reappointment

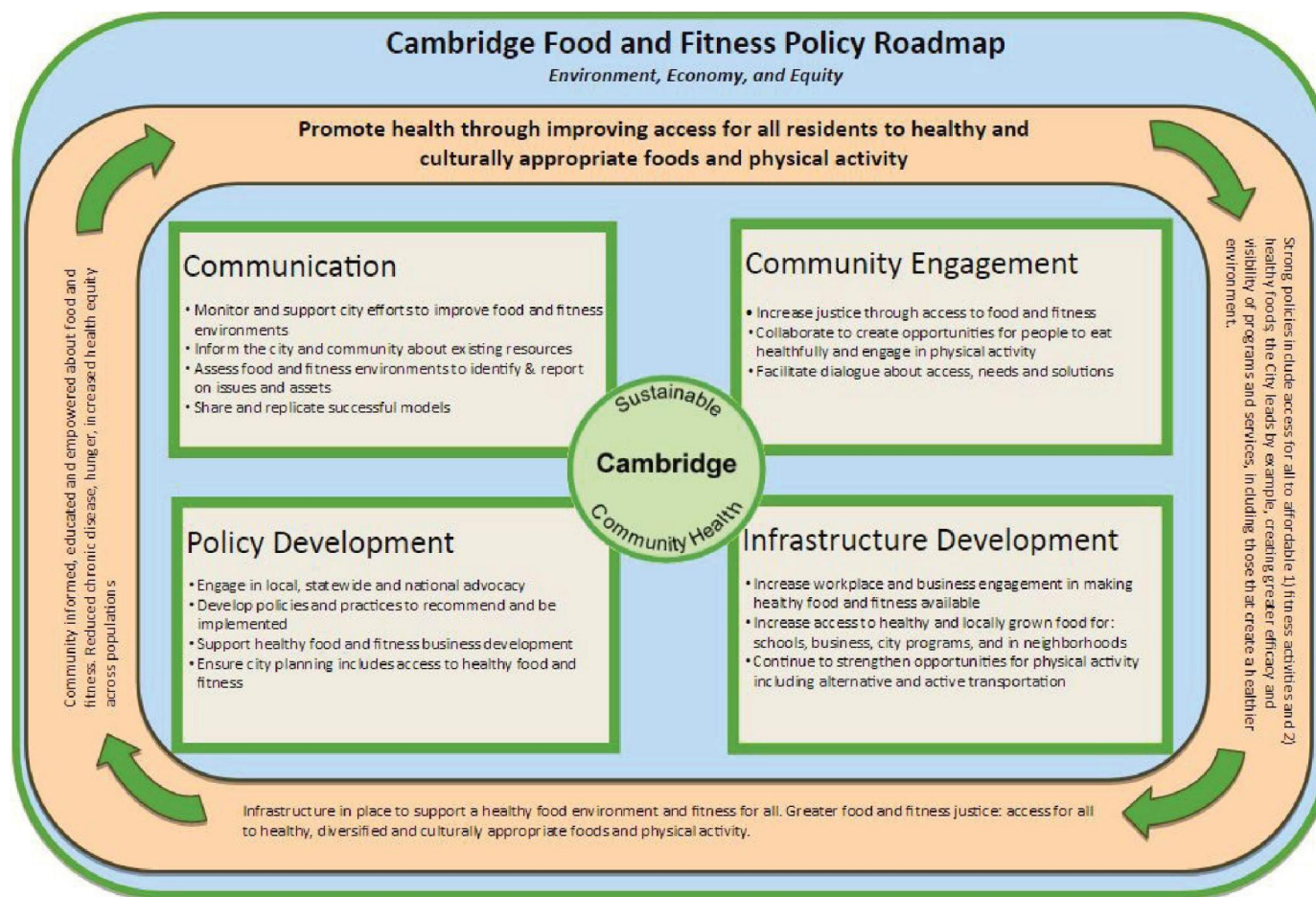
The Food and Fitness Policy Council requests reappointment for a five-year cycle and that the membership be approved by the City Manager and Chief Public Health Officer for renewable annual terms, as long as members are actively engaged with the work of the council. Membership is recommended by the FFPC from applicants at large, Community Health Improvement Plan Healthy Eating and Active Living workgroup participants, community members, non-profits, and city department leadership. (See table on P.9 for membership)

Conclusion

The Food and Fitness Policy Council's efforts have contributed significantly to the overall health of Cambridge, by acting as an advisory for the Community Health Improvement Plan and Mass in Motion strategies, identifying emerging issues, connecting partners to collaboratively respond to community needs, and to share information and resources. Working together in implementing the Community Health Improvement Plan with the sustained participation of community representatives is a significant step forward. For city staff, the council is a way to work across departments; for non-profit members, the council is a way to connect with city partners, and it offers community members an opportunity to shape and enhance collective impact.

One non-profit member explained, "It's been eye-opening to be engaged in this citywide effort and to be aware of the initiatives happening, as well as being able to take part in moving progress forward. It gives our organization context as well as a greater purpose and mission for the work we do and the people we serve."

Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Roadmap



Cambridge
in Motion

Eat healthy. Move often. Live well.



Food and Fitness Policy Council Membership

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