



CAMBRIDGE FOOD ACTION PLAN



FOR THE CAMBRIDGE FOOD AND FITNESS POLICY COUNCIL
PRODUCED BY THE METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL
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Introduction

Food plans guide strategic change in community food systems.

A food plan synthesizes the community's shared vision for their food system and serves as a guide for advocates and municipal officials to make strategic changes. Since the early 2000s, a heightened awareness of issues of food supply chains – food insecurity, accelerating loss of farmland, persistent threats to the livelihoods of farmers and fishermen – have galvanized communities to make systemic changes through food planning. The recommended policies and programmatic changes in food plans provide a framework for action. While their specific actions range from developing farmland preservation policies to supporting business development for markets selling healthy food, food plans recognize that food system improvements support healthy community development more broadly. Some food plans also adopt overarching goals to advance equity, public health, the economy, and ecological sustainability through food system changes.

The Cambridge Food Action Plan (hereafter, “CFAP”) assesses a range of features and efforts of the Cambridge food system and identifies how work might advance healthy and more

equitable food systems. The CFAP includes a Community Food Assessment, within which the following topics are assessed: the neighborhood food environment, the emergency food system, food programs for youth and those for older adults, and ways the city can promote healthy eating at its meetings and events. Each of these sections includes recommendations for improving the Cambridge food system. The Plan is informed by a range of stakeholders, including topical experts and those with lived experiences of the systems addressed.

The CFAP originated from a multi-year food systems assessment process.

In 2018, the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council (FFPC) embarked on a three-year initiative to assess the Cambridge food system. The food systems assessment grew from previous research indicating that food insecurity and associated poor health outcomes were key issues for Cambridge communities.^{1,2,3} The CFAP is a culmination of the FFPC's food systems assessment, drawing together institutional knowledge from key stakeholders, residents, and research conducted over the past

1 City of Cambridge Community Health Assessment (2020): <https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications/Cambridge%20Community%20Health%20Assessment%202020.pdf>

2 Cambridge Youth Weight Surveillance, Grades K-8, 2009-2019: <https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/services/health-data-reports/index.php>

3 Report of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Income Insecurity in Cambridge: https://www2.cambridgema.gov/CityOfCambridge_Content/documents/Income%20Insecurity%20Report%209.24.2015.pdf

three years⁴ to paint a picture of the Cambridge food system in 2021 and map equitable ways forward.

Various partners and programs are responsible for bringing a food systems lens to Cambridge and facilitating the CFAP.

The Healthy Eating Active Living unit (HEAL) of the Cambridge Department of Public Health (CDPH) is a Mass in Motion (MiM) grantee. MiM is a program run by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health that supports HEAL in investigating local social determinants of health and improving food access and physical activity opportunities in Cambridge. The three-year food assessment process facilitated by the FFPC was developed through HEAL's MiM work. It is also through MiM that the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) provides food systems planning technical assistance to Cambridge. In addition to supporting the FFPC throughout its food systems assessment process, MAPC is the lead author of the CFAP.

Identifying food system investments to equitably improve food access is a primary goal of the CFAP.

Older adults, youth, and their families were identified as priority populations facing food insecurity and associated poor health outcomes in Cambridge.⁵ The CFAP outlines the major components, dynamics, and challenges of the Cambridge food

system to lay the groundwork for understanding how to improve food system equity for these priority populations and the greater Cambridge community.

The CFAP marks a transition from HEAL's food system assessment to implementation. It does so by affirming priorities for food systems investment over the next three to five years. By proposing realistic and meaningful recommendations, the CFAP will guide HEAL's policy, systems, and environment changes aimed toward equitably restructuring Cambridge's food system. With these changes, HEAL ultimately strives to make the healthy choice the easy choice for everyone in Cambridge.

Cambridge Context

The local food system affects the people who live, work, and play in Cambridge. At the same time, the Cambridge community affects the form and function of the local food system. Cambridge's community characteristics provide context for the CFAP assessment and recommendations.

Cambridge is the fourth largest City in Massachusetts and growing (Figure 1). More than 118,000 people live in the City,⁶ including students attending one of several higher education institutions, families, young professionals, and older adults.

4 The CFAP builds on a series of research initiatives on specific facets of the Cambridge food system, including the "Health Lens Analysis of Urban Agriculture Policy in Cambridge" and "An Analysis of the Cambridge Food Environment: Food Retail Survey & Food Shopping Survey."

5 City of Cambridge Community Health Assessment (2020): <https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications/Cambridge%20Community%20Health%20Assessment%202020.pdf>
Cambridge Youth Weight Surveillance, Grades K-8, 2009-2019: <https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/services/health-data-reports/index.php>
Report of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Income Insecurity in Cambridge: https://www2.cambridgema.gov/CityOfCambridge_Content/documents/Income%20Insecurity%20Report%209.24.2015.pdf

6 CUBIT Inc, "Massachusetts Demographics": <https://www.massachusetts-demographics.com/cambridge-demographics>

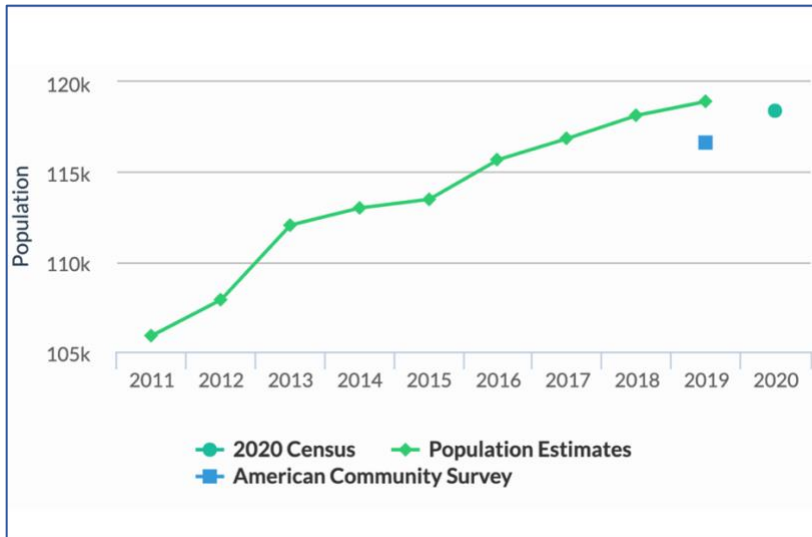


Figure 1. Cambridge's Growing Population
 Source: <https://www.massachusetts-demographics.com/cambridge-demographics>

College-aged adults are a growing cohort of the Cambridge population, while middle-aged adults are a decreasing cohort.

College-aged adults (18-24 years) make up a greater percentage of the Cambridge population than any other age cohort. Relevant to the programs discussed in the CFAP, children 17 years and younger make up just over 12% of the population, and older adults are roughly 11% of the population.

Since 2005 the age distribution of the population has remained relatively consistent, with some notable exceptions. Figure 2 shows the Cambridge population data by age over time. Between 2005 and 2019, college-aged adults (18-24 years)

have increased most significantly (approximately 25%), and middle-aged adults (40-64 years) have decreased the most (approximately 20%). Millennials (25-39 years) and older adults (65+ years) may have experienced increases of 5% and 10%, respectively. The opposite is true for children. Both young children (under 5 years) and school-aged children (5-17 years) may have experienced decreases of approximately 10% each.

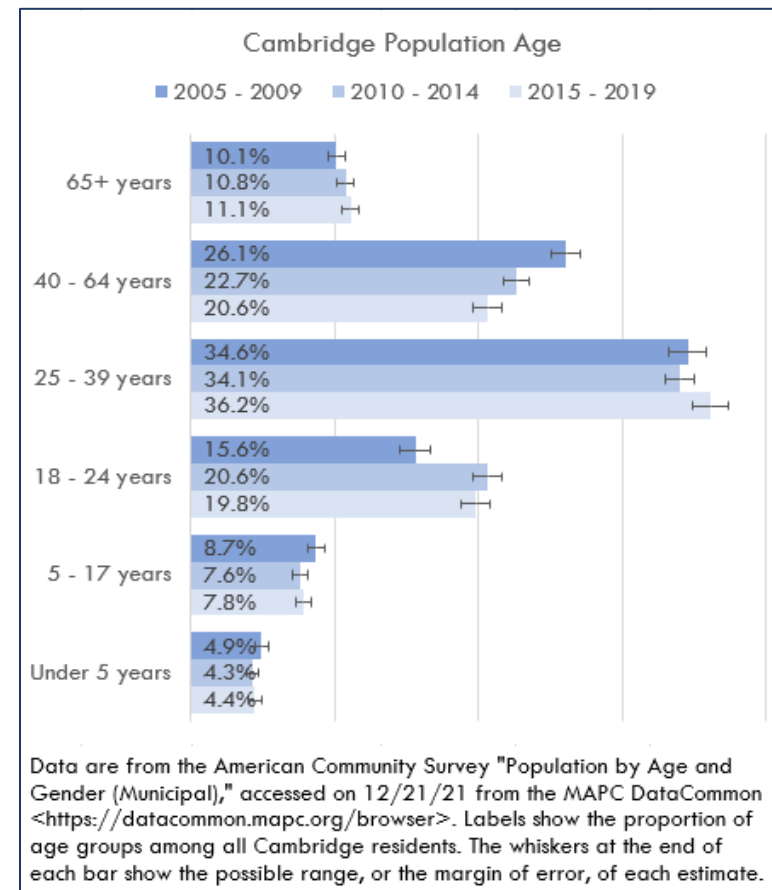


Figure 2. Cambridge Population by Age

Cambridge's population of color makes up a larger percent of the population overall.

The City's racial and ethnic diversity is also changing (Figure 3). In 2015-2019, Cambridge's population was approximately 60% white, 17% Asian, 10% Black, 9% Latinx,⁷ and 4% two or more races. Between 2005 and 2019, Cambridge's Asian and Latinx populations have become a greater portion of the population, while white and Black populations have become a smaller portion of the population.

The City has a relatively high average income, but there is significant income inequality across race.

The median household income from 2015-2019 in Cambridge was \$103,154, compared with \$81,215 statewide.⁸ Disaggregating the data by race and ethnicity shows great variation in income levels (Figure 4). White households had a median income of about \$115,000, whereas the median income of Black households was more than three times less at about \$35,000. Latinx households also had a low median income of approximately \$65,000. Asian households and those households identifying as two or more races had comparably higher median incomes at roughly \$95,000 and \$99,000,⁹ respectively.

Median household incomes have tended to increase over time within each racial and ethnic group, though to widely varying degrees. Over time, Black household incomes, which are the lowest across all race and ethnicity groups, have also increased

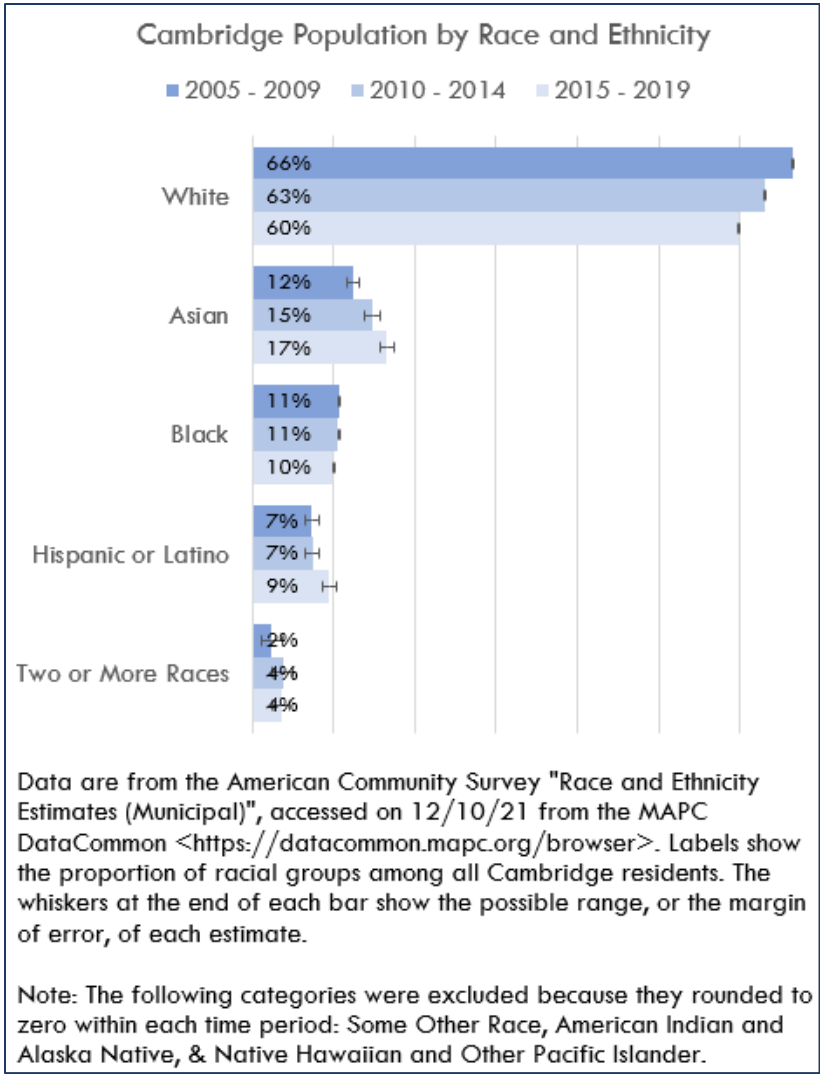


Figure 3. Cambridge Population by Race and Ethnicity

⁷ The term Latinx is increasingly used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino and Hispanic. The definition of Latinx and Latino both refer to the population of Latin American origin or descent.
⁸ City of Cambridge Community Development Department: <https://www.massachusetts-demographics.com/cambridge-demographics>
⁹ The number of residents that identify as "two or more races" is small, and therefore there is a large margin of error, or possible range, in the income estimates.

the least, with a 36% change between 2005-2009 and 2015-2019 period estimates. In the same periods, all other race and ethnicity groups saw increases between 60% and 90%. The median Latinx household income grew over 85% percent in this period, a significant increase, however this population group continues to have the second lowest median household income.

Poverty and income insecurity¹² are experienced most by Latinx and Black residents.

About 13% of all Cambridge residents have incomes that fall below the federal poverty line, compared with 9% across Massachusetts.¹⁰ Figure 5 shows the proportion of each racial and ethnic group in Cambridge that falls below the federal poverty line. Residents of color appear to experience poverty at about two to three times the rate of white residents. The most recent data from 2015-2019 shows that Latinx and Black residents may experience the highest poverty rates (28% and 23%, respectively).

The City has investigated poverty rates and how they relate to life in Cambridge. This investigation found that Cambridge has a cost of living that is four to five times higher than that used by the federal government to define poverty.¹¹ Because of this discrepancy, federal poverty standards fail to capture the true amount of income insecurity¹² in Cambridge. Figure 6 shows the City’s estimates for income insecurity among residents of different racial and ethnic groups as compared to federal poverty standards. The largest difference was found for Black

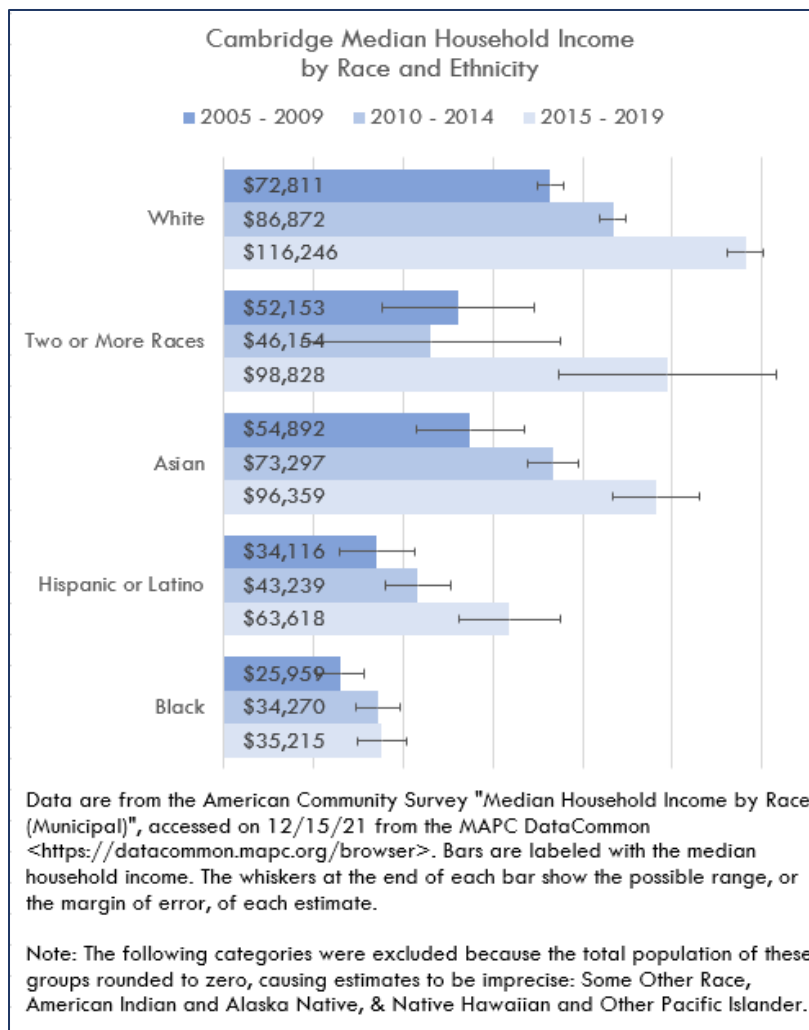


Figure 4. Cambridge Median Household Income by Race and Ethnicity

10 US Census Bureau: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/MA>

City of Cambridge Community Development Department, "Demographics and Statistics FAQ": <https://www.cambridgema.gov/cdd/factsandmaps/demographicfaq>

11 Report of the Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Income Insecurity in Cambridge: https://www2.cambridgema.gov/CityOfCambridge_Content/documents/Income%20Insecurity%20Report%209.24.2015.pdf

12 The City defines income insecurity as the amount of money it takes for a person or persons to meet their basic needs without government assistance.

Cambridge residents: in 2014, while federal poverty standards found that about 20% of Black Cambridge residents were in poverty, the City found that over 60% of Black Cambridge residents were income insecure.

Cambridge’s growing population, demographic shifts, and inequitable distributions of income and poverty signify that increasing demand has been and will continue to be put on the City’s food system. Beyond simply meeting the nutritional needs of residents, the Cambridge food system has potential to support public wellbeing at the intersections of mental health, environmental sustainability, educational opportunity, and social justice. In the below sections, the CFAP recommendations are informed by the Community Food Assessment to make realistic suggestions for how to move Cambridge’s food system towards a thriving and equitable future.

Race	% Income Under Federal Poverty Standard	% Income Under Cambridge Income Security Standard for Single Person Household
Asian	19%	29%
Black	23%	64%
Hispanic	26%	49%
White	11%	26%

Figure 6. A comparison of the Cambridge population falling below the Federal Poverty Standard and the City’s Income Insecurity Standard, by Race. Source: Report of the Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Income Insecurity in Cambridge.

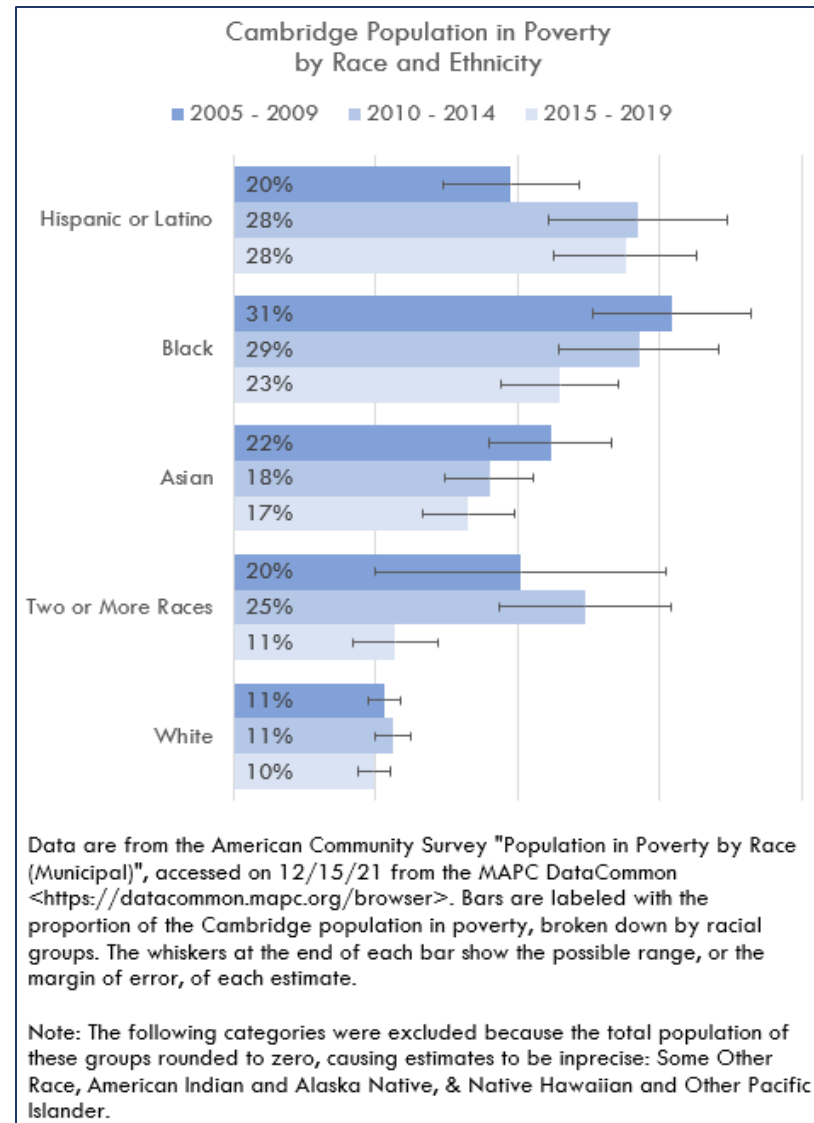


Figure 5. Cambridge Population in Poverty by Race and Ethnicity

Cambridge Food Assessment

The following chapters present information on five areas of the Cambridge food system. The chapters distill the pressing needs of these areas and make recommendations for actionable improvements that promote health and equity. The range of stakeholders currently working in these fields informed the assessment and recommendations. Where the work to promote strong food systems is accomplished now through collaborative and coordinated efforts, the recommendations will also be implemented through such collaboration.

Following the Cambridge Food Assessment chapters, the Implementation chapter describes the efforts that went into developing the CFAP, which included three focus groups and a series of interviews that enabled a broadly informed assessment both by people with a lived experience and expertise of food systems issues in Cambridge. Those engaged in the development of the CFAP will also be engaged in the implementation of its recommendations, and the Implementation

chapter describes some of the processes and partners through which that can be accomplished.

The Appendices include a variety of referenced supporting documents. These resources include a practical action planning workbook to facilitate the coordinated implementation.

Neighborhood Food Environment

The Neighborhood Food Environment is inclusive of the places where groceries can be bought, or where food can be grown. This includes food stores, farmers markets, community gardens and urban farms. This section also includes restaurants that altered their business model during the COVID pandemic to sell groceries.

This assessment synthesizes information on the landscape of Cambridge's neighborhood environment, highlights the programs in place that facilitate increased affordability and access to fresh produce, and articulates the needs and issues for improving access and affordability.

Cambridge Food Retail

The report, **An Analysis of the Cambridge Food Environment**, assessed 29 food stores mostly in Cambridge¹³, including 'supercenters,' 'grocery stores,' and 'neighborhood markets'.¹⁴ The report found that grocery stores in Cambridge tend to be the most affordable and have the greatest variety of nutritious options: a traditional grocery basket of items was *least expensive* at grocery stores and supercenters, and grocery stores had the *best range of healthy food offerings* according to their high Healthy Food Access Index scores. All grocery stores and supercenters, and about 70 percent of neighborhood markets, accept payment with SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program); these include the most affordable types of stores with the greatest variety of healthy options.

Neighborhood markets are typically independently owned, and important to local economies, but their small scale and cost of operations translates into higher prices for the items they sell.¹⁵

Cambridge neighborhood markets are on average 50 percent more expensive than supermarkets and grocery stores.

Healthy food availability and access varies considerably across Cambridge's neighborhoods, and options are the most limited in the neighborhoods of The Port and Mid-Cambridge. An analysis of the food environment across Cambridge found that these neighborhoods have the fewest options for healthy and affordable food stores to which residents can walk. The Cambridge Food Access Map (below) shows the results of this analysis.

Redlining maps provide data on historical neighborhood segregation accomplished through the practice of withholding financial services and resources; patterns of underinvestment and racial segregation caused by redlining led to deteriorating neighborhoods and concentration of poverty in communities of

¹³ A few stores included in the assessment are in Somerville.

¹⁴ For definitions of these terms, please refer to [An Analysis of the Cambridge Food Environment](#) p.6.

¹⁵ Journal article, "Pricing of Staple Foods at Supermarkets versus Small Food Stores": <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5580618/>

Cambridge Food Access

Neighborhood Average Food Access Score

Food Access Scores, by Quintiles

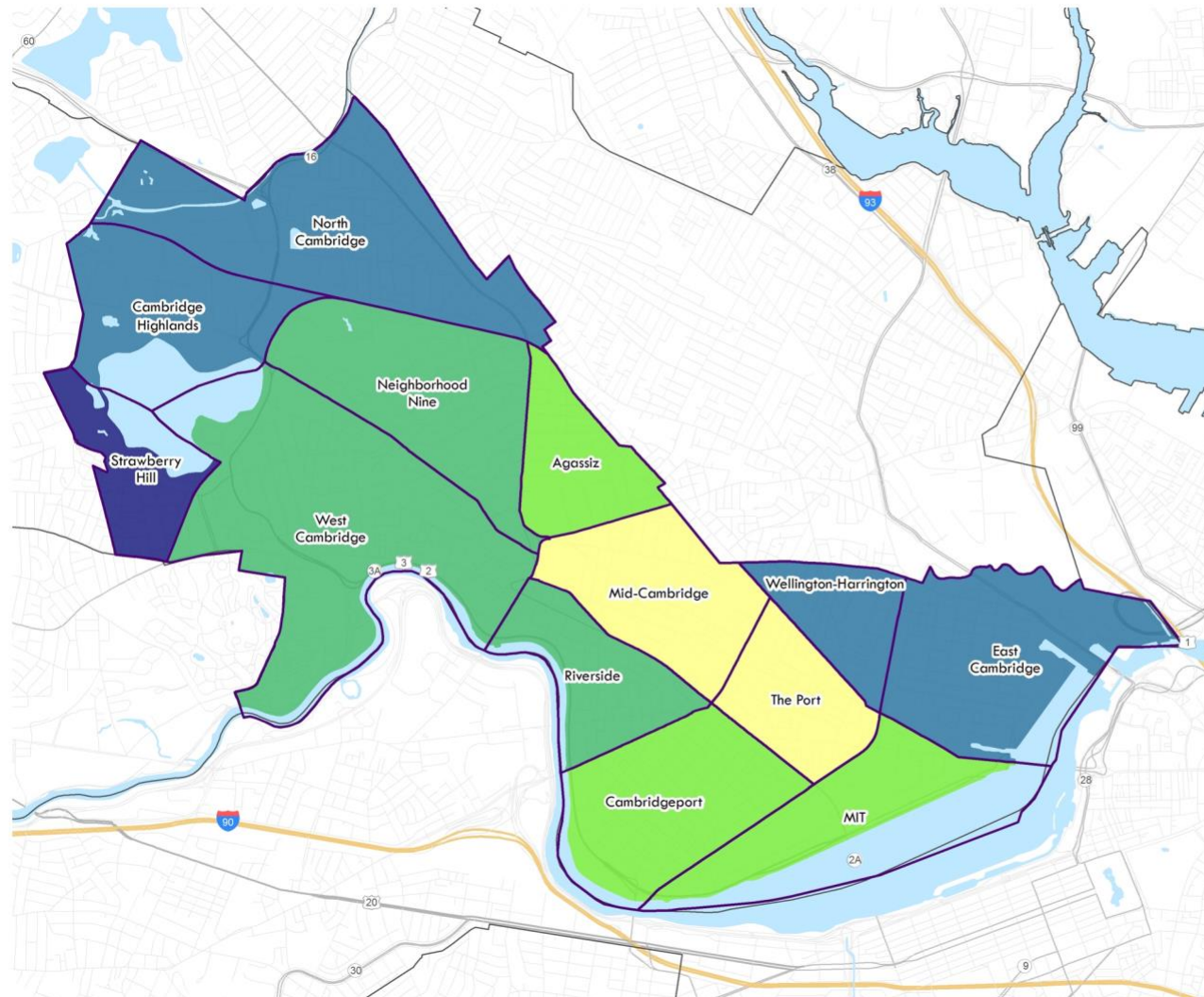
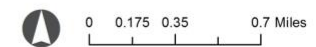
- 1.4 - 1.6
- 1.7 - 2.0
- 2.1 - 2.4
- 2.5 - 3.7
- 3.8 - 6.0

The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It is not adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-level analyses.

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Document Path: K:\DataServices\Projects\Current_Projects\PublicHealth\Cambridge_HFAI-Mapping\Project_Files\CambridgeHFAI_points.mxd

color. Assessed against Cambridge's redlining map,¹⁶ formerly redlined areas overlap substantially with current areas experiencing low food access in The Port neighborhood.

The Port neighborhood experiences inequities in income, health, and other factors, and as such is prioritized by the Cambridge Public Health Department. In its resident food shopping survey of 112 Cambridge residents, roughly half of respondents were from The Port, offering insight into these residents' shopping preferences. Nearly 60 percent of respondents from The Port shop primarily at Market in Somerville. Only 40 percent drove their own car to get groceries, compared with about 60 percent of residents not living in The Port; comparatively more respondents from The Port used Uber, Lyft, or a taxi (17% Port respondents; 0% Other respondents) or got a ride (15% Port respondents; 3% Other respondents). In this neighborhood, there are eight (8) food stores within walking distance (1/4 mile), two (2) of which have high combined food access scores. Across all eight (8) food stores, however, there is on average limited availability of a variety of nutritious foods, and prices are higher than Market Basket.

Cambridge Public Health Department's **Healthy Markets Program** sought to increase the number of healthy food items carried and sold by Cambridge neighborhood markets and convenience stores. Between 2013-2020, the Healthy Markets program worked directly with eight (8) partner stores, which received technical assistance in assessing healthy foods and handling fresh produce, marketing assistance, and supplies,

including reusable shopping bags, produce baskets and signage. These supplies strongly motivated partner store participation, and recent loss of funding for these supplies has made it more difficult to work with stores. Following this loss of funding, program staff pivoted to focus on providing marketing and merchandising support, both with limited impact. In late 2021, CPHD will initiate a **SNAP Neighborhood Accessibility Program** pilot to educate and support food retailers in enrolling as authorized SNAP retailers. Program staff are also considering developing a healthy food retailing and merchandizing guide, and an online training for neighborhood food stores interested in stocking and selling more nutritious food options.

Since early 2020, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic increased food insecurity nationally, changed shopping habits, and forced the closure of businesses or altered normal business. During this time, restaurants largely halted table service. In an effort to buoy its restaurants, meet the need of residents to get groceries safely, and to alleviate the stress on grocery stores, the City of Cambridge issued a **temporary order on September 25, 2020, to allow restaurants to sell groceries**, either through pick-up or delivery services, during the Massachusetts State of Emergency.¹⁷ Over 20 restaurants applied for this program and began selling groceries during the pandemic. The temporary order ended with the termination of the State of Emergency on June 15, 2021.

In early 2021, the food retail landscape in Central Square expanded to include **Daily Table**, a non-profit grocery store

¹⁶ Mapping Inequality: <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=13/42.354/-71.116>

¹⁷ City of Cambridge, "Cambridge COVID-19 Response Timeline": <https://www.cambridgema.gov/covid19/timeline>

Neighborhood Food Environment Focus Group

The project team met with representatives of the City's "Agenda for Children, Literacy Ambassadors" to elicit feedback on the Cambridge Community Food Action Plan's (CFAP) neighborhood food environment recommendations.

The purpose of the focus group was to get feedback on the draft "Cambridge Food Retail" recommendations in the Neighborhood Food Environment section with a group of people in close communication with diverse Cambridge families. The feedback allowed the project team to assess whether and which recommendations might make meaningful improvements in food shopping experiences for those living in and around The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods.

Key Takeaway: Almost all participants prioritized a recommendation to engage residents of The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods in defining food access solutions (1.1). The Project Team suggests future engagement of residents of The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods. They also generally liked a recommendation to develop strategies to support access to preferred food stores (1.2).

Key Takeaway: Participants expressed mixed views on the transportation recommendations. The greatest number of participants (two) prioritized a recommendation to make grocery delivery services available (2.4); they thought it would be the "most useful" food environment transportation change. Participants showed least support for a recommendation to make transportation infrastructure improvements (2.5), with one participant suggesting it should be removed due to its failure to address the root cause of transportation barriers to food access.

Key Takeaway: Feedback on the food availability recommendations was mixed. Most participants (three) prioritized a recommendation to support decreasing prices of staple grocery items at neighborhood markets (3.2).

Key Takeaway: Participants prioritized transportation strategies (Recommendation 2) as most important for improving food access in Cambridge. Food availability strategies (Recommendation 3) and The Port & Mid-Cambridge strategies (Recommendation 1) tied in second place.

Key Takeaway: Throughout the focus group discussion, participants emphasized that affordability was the most important factor to address when directing food environment investments, followed by the availability of culturally preferred foods.

Read the full account of the focus group: <https://mapc.sharefile.com/d-sedcdbf0d90974539a5335acd8961425d>

with a mission to make healthy and affordable food available to everyone. Its Massachusetts Avenue location is on the border of The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods. The grocery store chose to locate there after SNAP participant data and other factors confirmed the area as a good fit. It offers fresh produce, meat and dairy, and other grocery staples at prices that are significantly lower than other local markets, and a wide selection of healthy prepared foods that are a fraction of the price of fast food alternatives while also being SNAP-eligible. It offers online shopping and free delivery to customers within a 2-mile radius and is working actively with the USDA to become approved to sell online to SNAP customers.¹⁸ Daily Table started operations after the food retail landscape and resident food shopping survey were conducted, and as such the data on the price and quality of food offerings and customer opinion of Daily Table do not inform this assessment.

Cambridge Food Retail Recommendations:

- 1) Prioritize The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods when making improvements to healthy and affordable food access.
 - a) Continue to engage residents of The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods in identifying and implementing solutions to increase healthy and affordable food access.
 - b) Develop strategies that support access to preferred food stores (i.e., Market Basket); and are informed by any change in customer preferences as a result of the newly-opened or -closed food stores.
- 2) Increase transportation options to get food and offer subsidies where there is an associated cost.
 - a) Subsidize taxi, Uber, Lyft, or similar ride sharing services to and from preferred grocery stores. (Offer to residents who meet income criteria.)
 - b) Establish a fixed-route grocery shuttle that operates on a schedule to bring residents of The Port and Mid-Cambridge to the most popular grocery stores, at no cost to them.
 - c) Make grocery delivery services available and ensure these are offered at no-cost (to residents who meet income criteria).
- 3) Improve healthy and affordable food availability within The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods.
 - a) Increase SNAP and WIC enrollment by neighborhood markets and convenience stores, through the SNAP Neighborhood Accessibility Program.¹⁹
 - b) Support decreasing the price of staple grocery items in neighborhood markets and convenience stores to be comparable to grocery store prices. Explore offering a subsidy similar to SNAP Matching in Farmer's Markets to make this possible.
 - c) Conduct an assessment of the business needs of neighborhood markets and convenience stores and connect them with existing City programs or other resources that facilitate their overall business health.

¹⁸ News article, "Daily Table announces free grocery delivery to customers":

<https://www.wickedlocal.com/story/cambridge-chronicle-tab/2021/03/26/daily-table-announces-free-grocery-delivery-customers/7015071002/>

¹⁹ SNAP recommendations are included in the Cambridge Food Retail and Emergency Food System chapters.

- 4) Further streamline and simplify the City's permitting and licensing process, to enable food and other businesses to adapt their business model and practices more quickly to new opportunities and changing conditions.

Farmers Market

Within Cambridge, there are seven farmers markets. A farmers market **SNAP Match Program** is offered at the Central Square Farmers Market and Harvard University Farmers Market. SNAP Match was also offered at the Cambridge Community Center Winter Market, though this market halted operations during the pandemic, and it is unclear whether it will reopen. A new winter market in Central Square launched in 2020/2021 also offers SNAP Match. In place since 2012, the SNAP Match seeks to 'make healthy, local produce more affordable to low-income shoppers in Cambridge,' by applying a match of up to \$15 to purchases made with SNAP benefits. SNAP Match dollars can be applied to any SNAP-eligible items at farmers markets, including fruits and vegetables as well as meat, fish, dairy, eggs, and bread. The SNAP Match Program is coordinated by the Cambridge SNAP Match Coalition, which includes staff members from the Cambridge Public Health Department, Cambridge Community Development Department, and staff from participating markets.

In all years the SNAP Match has been offered, the Central Square Farmers Market has had the highest SNAP sales, and correspondingly has also issued the most SNAP Match. In 2017, SNAP sales tripled in comparison to 2016, and in years since annual SNAP sales have remained consistently high. The dramatic change was a result of participation in the new statewide **Healthy Incentives Program** (HIP), a dollar-for-

dollar match that is applied to SNAP fruit and vegetable sales, up to a certain threshold. With the introduction of HIP and in the three years following (2017-2019) SNAP sales increased substantially from roughly \$9,000 to \$25,000. The amount of SNAP Match issued generally correlated closely with annual SNAP sales. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, SNAP sales and SNAP Match declined at all participating farmers markets.

SNAP Match and HIP are both important programs that increase farmers market customers' ability to buy from Cambridge's participating farmers markets, but the **SNAP Match Coalition**, which coordinates the SNAP Match program asserts that customers still struggle to put food on the table. The Coalition funds the SNAP Match program from a variety of sources, including donations, grants and the City of Cambridge's Community Development Department and Cambridge Public Health Department. From 2012 to 2021, more than \$180,000 have been distributed through SNAP Match. Total annual distributions have increased substantially in recent years, ranging from \$25,000 to \$35,000. The funds however are insufficient in years where there has been significant demand, and from year-to-year funds are not guaranteed. With consistently increasing redemption of SNAP Match, solutions for more predictable and increased funding should be pursued by the SNAP Match Coalition.

All Cambridge Farmers Markets, but the winter markets, are approved to accept payment with **Farmers Market Nutrition Program** coupons by eligible low-income families and older adults. Through the “Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program,” older adults receive \$25 in coupons, and through the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program,” families receive \$30 in coupons to use for farmers market purchases of fresh fruit, vegetables, herbs and honey. Data for 2019 and 2020 show that coupon redemption data was far less in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Still in both years, the Central Square Farmers Market had the highest redemption rates of both types of coupons.

Farmers Market Recommendations:

- 1) Increase SNAP Match funding and secure sustainable sources of funding²⁰.
- 2) Continue to promote the SNAP Match program, concentrating these efforts to those farmers markets that currently have the highest SNAP Match sales. This should include cross-promotion of HIP and Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, to maximize all farmers market benefits.
- 3) Facilitate easy access to farmers markets by prioritizing nearby public transit and robust pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure when choosing farmers market sites.

Table 1. Accepted Benefits Programs at Cambridge Farmers Markets						
Cambridge Farmers Market	SNAP	SNAP Match	Healthy Incentives Program (HIP)*	Senior Farmers Market Coupons	WIC Coupons	Closed because of COVID (as of fall 2021)
Charles River Farmers Market, Morse School	x		x	x	x	
Kendall Square Farmers Market	x			x	x	x
Kendall Center Farmers Market				x	x	x
Central Square Farmers Market	x	x	x	x	x	
Harvard University Farmers Market	x	x	x	x	x	
Charles River Farmers Market, Charles Hotel	x		x	x	x	
Cambridge Winter Farmers Market	x	x				x
Winter Farmers Market (launched 2020/2021 by Mass Farmers Market)	x	x				

*HIP can be used directly with participating vendors.

²⁰ SNAP recommendations are included in the Cambridge Food Retail and Emergency Food System chapters.

Urban Agriculture

Cambridge has 550 plots across 14 community gardens. These garden plots are available for Cambridge residents to tend and grow food. **The City of Cambridge administers the community garden program.** Volunteer garden coordinators at each location manage operations of the gardens including new gardener orientation, clean-up days, trash disposal, compost delivery, and answering questions and settling disputes. The community gardens are distributed throughout the city on land that is either owned by the City of Cambridge, in some cases within existing public parks, or privately owned and available for public use through agreement with the property owner.

The most recent 2009-2016 Open Space Recreation Plan includes goals for diversifying park features by integrating community gardens in them and developing informational resources for the public to learn about the open space resources in the city, including gardens. In September 2021 the City of Cambridge initiated a process to update its Open Space and Recreation Plan for a coming seven-year period. The planning process and the updated plan will also consider community gardens.

The interest in community garden plots far exceeds their availability, and applicants can expect a wait of two or more years before a plot becomes available. To enable more community members to gain access to a community garden plot, the **Cambridge Community Garden Policy** allows for households to tend a plot for three to five years, at which point it is made available to another household. Further, the policy

prioritizes households with no alternative access to land on which to garden, and those with disabilities are prioritized for raised bed plots. In newly established gardens, lots are assigned by the City via a lottery which prioritizes awarding plots to those with no alternative access.²¹

Whereas in theory the Policy facilitates rotation of new community gardeners, contributors to the CFAP agreed that the term limits for community garden membership is generally not enforced. Because interest in community gardens is greater than the number of plots available, this raises issues regarding equitable access and participation. Recommendations of the CFAP seek to address issues of equitable access.

Unique from the conventional community garden model within which members are assigned and tend one garden plot, **Hurley Street Neighborhood Farm** is a community farm that invites collective participation in growing food on its 3,000 square foot farm. The community farm model has no limitations to membership, and thereby can facilitate access by more people. It was established in 2017 and is operated by the non-profit organization, **Green Cambridge**. The farm is in the East Cambridge neighborhood, where many residents do not have private outdoor space, public parks are limited, and the urban forest canopy is of the sparsest in the City. Hurley Street Neighborhood Farm is run mostly through volunteer efforts of

²¹ City of Cambridge Community Gardens: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/Services/communitygardens>

neighbors and partner organizations.²² Each six-month growing season, more than 100 neighbors work at the farm, and in 2019, over 300 visited the farm. Produce grown is primarily donated to the East End House food pantry, though volunteers are also welcome to the food harvested.

Cambridge City Growers is advancing yet a different model, to establish garden beds on private and commercial as well as public land across the City. Cambridge City Growers was formed in 2020, growing out of the efforts of the Cambridge Mutual Aid group's efforts to address issues related to the pandemic. It has identified over two dozen food growing sites around the city. This volunteer group coordinated the construction of plots and maintained them throughout the year. They have set up the Coast Community Fridge at the Cambridge Community Center to distribute ready-made meals to the community and participated in weekly giveaways of food harvested from the grow sites.

Within schools, Cambridge's students also get to dig in the dirt, grow food and learn. All public elementary and middle schools have a teaching garden for growing vegetables, flowers, and herbs that the nonprofit, **CitySprouts** runs. CitySprouts provides garden educators for both Cambridge and Boston public schools and is a national leader in garden education.

Participating schools each have a part-time garden educator who works with teachers to integrate garden learning into their curricula. Science students can observe and record the entire life cycle of a plant. Geography students map where foods come from, then make dishes like eggplant tacos, Ethiopian collards,

their own creative pizzas, and a big favorite, vegetable sushi. Art students come to the garden to sketch the garden plants and surroundings. Through hands-on gardening activities students become more engaged learners and increase their understanding of where food comes from, which sets them on a path toward life-long healthy food choices.

Efforts are underway to explore the establishment of a **Classroom Farm at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School** (CRLS). The CRLS Health and Physical Education Department is working with local non-profits and universities to redesign its nutrition curriculum to be centered on project-based learning models where students can discover the impact of food and food production. To facilitate this, they will be taking students to local growing spaces and working to add a growing space on the high school campus. Green Cambridge is collaborating with CRLS on this effort and would support the design and management of the farm. The farm is being conceptualized as an outdoor learning space for nutrition education, as well as biology, ecology, carpentry, engineering, and design curriculum at CRLS. According to Wellness Department faculty, Shantu Salvi, a "food garden provides a great foundation for a plethora of civic action projects that students can facilitate that promote equity within the Cambridge community."

Community interest in growing food and food security prompted efforts to establish an **urban agriculture policy** that would allow for a range of food production activities. In 2013, the Cambridge City Council issued an order to investigate developing an urban agriculture ordinance for the city. This

²² Partner organizations that have visited the farm include East End House, the Loop Lab, the Cambridge Preschool for the Arts, Community Charter School of Cambridge, Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, Lesley University, Boston University, and companies in Kendal Square.

Community Agriculture Focus Group

Demand for community gardens and other community agriculture opportunities in Cambridge is high. The project team conducted a focus group with key stakeholders to better understand the dynamics of Cambridge's gardening and farming scene. Focus group participants shared insights about community agriculture demand, motivations for participating, engagement models, major needs, and opportunities for addressing these needs.

Key Takeaway: Of the various community agriculture models discussed, participants seemed to prefer the community garden model¹ and hybrid model 2 (community garden with some space dedicated as a community farm²).

Key Takeaway: Strategies to reduce barriers and increase access to community agriculture – particularly in ways that create opportunities for residents of color, low-income residents, beginner gardeners, and people who lack growing space at home – include:

- Expanding community agriculture space by constructing temporary raised beds on parking lots and land waiting for development.
- More strongly enforcing a 5-year term limit with a Use It or Lose It policy sensitive to beginning gardeners in community gardens.
- Sharing single garden plots among neighbors, especially neighbors identifying as people of color.
- Expanding community agriculture outreach and communication through multiple channels, especially within communities of color.
- Supporting efforts to increase education and knowledge sharing, especially as it meets the needs of youth, beginner gardeners, and gardeners transitioning to Cambridge from other growing environments.
- Making funding available to support gardener needs, particularly where low-income residents of color face financial barriers to gardening.
- Expanding community agriculture models that appeal most to priority groups for inclusion, including Cambridge residents of color.

¹ In the community garden model, members tend individual plots and have ownership of the harvest.

² In the community farm model, members use land and labor collectively, and food is shared or donated.

Read the full account of the focus group: <https://mapc.sharefile.com/d-sfe4e2aeefbf42edb198985e6a826596>

action established the Urban Agriculture Task Force and initiated a multi-year process of research, stakeholder engagement, and community outreach. The Task Force set objectives for a comprehensive urban agriculture policy that would support growing fruits and vegetables, raising fish, beekeeping, and henkeeping, and allow for the sale or donation of these agriculture products. Rather than developing and passing these policies all at once, the Task Force set out to address these one at a time.

In 2017, Cambridge successfully passed the **public health regulations and a zoning ordinance for beekeeping**. The beekeeping policy allows the keeping of domestic honeybees to promote pollination, honey production, and increasing public knowledge and education of agricultural practices that maintain public health and safety. Associated public health regulation addresses human health, through best management practices; mitigating environmental hazards, such as pest infestation; promoting public health and mitigating disease; and notifying neighbors. The zoning ordinance specifies in which privately-owned areas of the City beekeeping may take place and allows beekeeping as an accessory use. The ordinance sets standards for signage for notifying those in proximity to bees. The regulation further sets standards for size and placement of beehives and apiaries. With the passage of the beekeeping policy, the City established a permitting procedure for beekeeping, which includes a relatively manageable 3-page permit application and initial \$50 fee, with a \$25 annual renewal fee. Where an objective of the policy is to encourage equitable participation in urban agriculture activities, attention was paid to keeping the process simple and relatively low-cost.

Complementing the urban agriculture policy efforts, the City developed an **urban agriculture guide** which lays out the permitting process steps for beekeeping and opportunities for growing food in gardens. The guide is laid out using plain language (English), engaging storytelling, with colorful photos and design work throughout, making it an accessible read. The guide is presented as the first version, which will be updated and republished as new urban agriculture policy and regulations are passed.

The **Health Lens Analysis of Urban Agriculture Policy (HLA)** makes recommendations for ensuring Cambridge urban agriculture policies are developed and implemented in such a way that they promote health, mitigate negative health impacts, and promote equitable engagement in urban agriculture. Drawing from national literature on urban agriculture, local assessments, and feedback from Cambridge residents and stakeholders, the HLA investigates potential health impacts of urban agriculture as they relate to four determinants of health: social, economic, nutritional, and ecosystem factors. The HLA finds that urban agriculture generally promotes community health, in that it builds social capital, increases access to nutritious foods, and provides opportunities for getting outdoors, which supports mental health. Of these benefits credited to urban agriculture, its ability to deliver social benefits - learning from and building relationships with others while growing food – was consistently cited as the most significant.

Urban agriculture's influence on economic factors is a bit more mixed. Despite the popularity of urban agriculture as a tool for economic development, economic outcomes are the least documented aspect of the field. Those growing their own food

or receiving locally grown food through food pantries may nominally offset grocery costs, but this should not be overstated as the research on this is limited and in the case of growing one's own food doesn't take into consideration the labor costs. Urban agriculture can spur enterprise development (i.e., urban farming operations), but there is little historical evidence for their profitability. High tech food production (i.e., hydroponic and vertical growing) may have the most promising opportunities for commercially viable urban agriculture businesses; this is an emergent area that Cambridge has interest in exploring. Though unlikely a driving factor, urban agriculture has been correlated with higher property values which contribute to gentrification and displacement.

The HLA points out more generally that participation in urban agriculture is not equal for all residents. Most residents rent their homes. Because they are not the property owners there may be limitations or hurdles to engaging in urban agriculture activities at home. For many Cambridge residents, there is simply limited space to produce their own food at home. This experience underscores the importance of publicly accessible community gardens and other spaces for Cambridge residents to either grow their own food, keep bees, or engage in other urban agriculture activities as policies are passed to allow them. The City's system of community gardens and farms is actively used, and the community gardening policies prioritize membership by those who otherwise don't have opportunities to garden. Still the demand for plots is greater than what is available.

In 2021, Cambridge City Council amended the **zoning ordinance on green roofs** (22.30) to require new construction of over 25,000 square feet to include green roofs or biosolar (a combination of vegetation and solar panels). The efforts for this amendment were led by Mothers Out Front and framed as a climate resiliency strategy, though it also presents an opportunity to advance urban agriculture on rooftops.²³

Urban Agriculture Recommendations:

- 1) Develop and implement a community engagement plan and outreach strategy that explicitly informs and engages Cambridge residents that are low-income and identify as Black or Latinx of the opportunities to grow food with community farms and in community gardens in the City.
 - a) The City of Cambridge, Cambridge Public Health Department, and Green Cambridge to partner on this engagement and outreach strategy, beginning with working with Toni B to engage gardeners and neighbors of the Squirrel Brand Community Garden.
 - b) Through a community-informed process, update the Cambridge Community Garden Policy, addressing equity, term limits, and feasible enforcement.
- 2) In the establishment of new food growing spaces, prioritize the community farm model over the conventional community garden model. (The community farm model has no limitations to membership, and thereby can facilitate access by more people.) Ensure equitable expansion, prioritizing neighborhoods with the greatest need, using indicators such as food insecurity estimates.

²³ City of Cambridge City Council Agenda Packet, May 3, 2021, retrieved from: <http://cambridgema.iqm2.com/Citizens/calendar.aspx>

- 3) Review existing Cambridge documents that make recommendations for urban agriculture and community gardens and use these plans to guide a strategy for promoting equitable urban agriculture systems. Some existing plans and documents for review are listed below, and their related recommendations are in the Appendices:
 - a) Health Lens Analysis of Urban Agriculture Policy in Cambridge
 - b) Cambridge Plant and Garden Club memo
 - c) Open Space and Recreation Plan 2009-2016
 - d) Potential Nutrition Curriculum Ideas for a Classroom Farm at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School
- 4) Inform the development of the new Cambridge Open Space and Recreation Plan, the process for which began in September 2021. Encourage inclusion of information and recommendations that promote equitable urban agriculture and community gardening systems.
- 5) Build on the successful passage of the beekeeping policies and the green roofs zoning amendment, and work to pass a comprehensive urban agriculture policy.

City & CPHD Food Best Practices

The City and CPHD Food Best Practices describe the efforts to promote healthy food and beverage options in school and municipal settings. It includes the efforts of CPHD's Tap Water Campaign to influence individual behaviors, expand infrastructure, and promote policies for drinking more water, and thereby also less sugary beverages. It also includes the efforts to develop voluntary nutrition guidelines, recommended vendor lists, and menu ideas to encourage City of Cambridge departments or partners to be leaders in offering healthy options at departmental or public meetings or catered events.

This assessment summarizes the efforts to promote healthy food and beverage options in schools and municipal settings and makes recommendations for building on the efforts already done. This assessment also describes the impact of COVID-19 on these efforts.

Promoting Drinking Water

Interested in promoting drinking water as the healthiest beverage choice, CPHD initiated a **Tap Water Campaign** in 2014. The campaign has engaged city departments, including establishing a multi-department Tap Water Task Force.

Campaign efforts have focused on education and outreach, the distribution of supplies, and the installation of infrastructure to build a more robust system for drinking water consumption.

The Tap Water Campaign efforts complement current policies and practices within the city and schools. The school district wellness policy promotes drinking water access at lunch and throughout the day. Water is often the beverage of choice in city department meetings, events and feeding programs. And, the Cambridge Health Alliance has a beverage policy that promotes tap water consumption and limits the sale of sugary beverages.

The COVID-19 pandemic put some practices on pause, such as self-serve water pitchers and meetings or events, but the

pandemic has also served to promote the use of safer touchless water bottle fillers in public fountains in schools, municipal buildings, and parks.

The Tap Water Campaign is reinforcing practices to serve water. CPHD observes that nearly all school, preschool, after school, and community programs that it assists never serve soda or sugary beverages. Exceptions to this include schools that serve juice with meals, and some other programs that serve juice at meetings or events where breakfasts are served.

Generally, water is served as the beverage option with meals and snacks. Beverage consumption data (Table 2) shows that over recent years a greater percentage of youth are drinking tap water, and a smaller percentage of youth are drinking 100% fruit juice and regular soda. It is unclear how the installation of touchless water fillers is impacting water consumption, but the campaign is tracking the number of fillers installed since the beginning of the initiative.

Tap Water Campaign Efforts To-Date

Education and Outreach:

- Used the tagline “Cambridge Water, Wicked Good” across outreach materials to promote Cambridge tap water.
- Developed a text-based PSA, flyers, and other materials to share information that promotes Cambridge tap water.
- Developed a translated flyer with information describing what “tap water” is, and that it is safe, for immigrant residents that are not familiar with the phrase “tap water” or come from a place where it is not safe to drink.
- Engaged with schools by providing educational posters to hang in the nurse’s office, and by handing out cups of water during lunch to students
- Out-of-school-time (OST) and Early Education Childcare program engagement has included workshops and training for staff on healthy foods and beverages, making menus, and communicating to families.
- Tabled at community events, which includes performing water taste tests; demonstrations showing how much sugar is in soda; and providing educational materials about the benefits of drinking water and the safety of Cambridge tap water.

Supplies and Infrastructure:

- Purchased and distributed water pitchers for use in CPHD and city department conference rooms, with a “Cambridge Water, Wicked Good” sticker.
- Distributed free water bottles at educational and outreach events.
- At schools, put self-serve water dispensers in the cafeterias in schools where water fountains were absent.
- With OST and Early Education Childcare programs, developed healthy snack and meal menus, which always include tap water, and exclude sugary drinks and juice.
- Through the work of the Tap Water Task Force, monitoring the number of touchless water bottle fillers in parks and schools. All 17 school buildings have at least one, some have four fillers. At least 15 touchless water bottle fillers are in parks (includes sports fields, playgrounds, parks, tot lots), with more planned, including the installation of touchless water bottle fillers in major city squares. The installation of touchless water bottle fillers was supported by participatory budgeting processes that dedicated these funds. City Hall Annex will replace regular water fountains with touchless water bottle filling stations.

Coordination:

- Met with school administrators to ensure installation of water bottle filler fountains in the construction of a new school.
- With OST and Early Education Childcare programs, developed guidelines and wellness policies for programs to promote water consumption (see the chapter on Food Programs for Youth, Early Childhood Programs section for more).
- Established the Tap Water Task Force, including the School District Facilities Manager, Department of Public Works’ Communications Manager, the Water Department, and CPHD staff. The Tap Water Task Force is a workgroup of the FFPC and is coordinated by CPHD staff.

Table 2. Beverage Consumption Data, Youth Surveys			
Middle Grade Survey 2018-2019	2015	2017	2019
Yesterday Drank:			
Tap Water	69.9	73.4	80.3
Unflavored bottled water	65.9	59.9	60.9
100% fruit juice	58.6	47.3	47.6
Sweetened drinks	-	-	42.3
Sports drinks	-	-	25.8
Regular soda	33.1	29.9	27.5
Diet soda	-	-	8.6
Caffeine drink (tea, coffee, soda)	33.8	31.5	30.6
Energy drink (Red Bull)	7.6	5.3	5.6

Teen Health Survey 2017-2018	2014	2016	2018
Yesterday Drank:			
Tap Water	76.4	76.3	82.2
Unflavored bottled water	49.8	61.6	57.1
100% fruit juice	54.7	48	38.4
Sweetened drinks	54.6	46.6	45.4
Regular soda	41.7	33.6	32.9
Caffeine drink (tea, coffee, soda)	51.3	47.3	46.7
Energy drink (Red Bull)	9	11.1	8.6

Drinking Water Recommendation:

- 1) Promote tap water consumption by continuing to develop and share educational materials to promote the health benefits and safety of Cambridge tap water. Ensure these efforts are paired with water quality monitoring.
- 2) Continue the installation of touchless water bottle fillers in public spaces and develop a public-facing Story Map to share the locations of these.
- 3) Identify a second pick-up and drop-off location for free home lead testing kits.

Nutrition Standards for Municipal Meetings & Public Events

Local governments purchase food and beverages for meals and snacks for a variety of different settings, often including schools, senior centers, afterschool programs, childcare centers, emergency food centers, meetings of municipal departments, and public events, among others. Where nutrition standards are adopted, local governments can ensure their food and beverage purchases are promoting healthy eating and better health.

The **Cambridge Public Health Department** has led efforts to promote healthier options in municipal meetings and at public events. The purpose of these efforts is to support a culture of public health across city departments and to make it easier for participants – whether municipal staff, partners, or residents – to choose healthy drink, snack, and meal options in these settings.

Efforts to develop a consistent healthy food environment across department began with interviews of managers of the Cambridge Public Health Department, Population Health Initiatives division, to build an understanding of how and within which contexts food and beverages are purchased and served. Interviewees represented the Men's Health League, Agenda for Children, and Substance Use Prevention Programs. Through these interviews, CPHD learned that managers would appreciate and use:

- nutrition guidance for meetings and events
- food vendors list (approved by CHA purchase orders)
- menu examples to complement the nutrition guidance.

CPHD and partners of the Cambridge Community Health Improvement Plan Healthy Eating and Active Living Work Group began developing these resources, until early 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Draft nutrition guidelines were outlined, though not completed. These draft nutrition guidelines include suggestions for beverages without sugar, promoting drinking water, and serving whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and including vegetarian protein options. They also reference approved food vendor lists, one for the City and one for CPHD, (which falls under the Cambridge Health Alliance administration) and menu ideas resources. When completed, these nutrition guidelines will be available for Cambridge departments for voluntary adoption. Work was paused because of the public health crisis and because events and staff gatherings were prohibited.

Nutrition Standards Recommendations:

- 1) Complete the nutrition guidelines, approved food vendor lists, for both CPHD and the City, and menu ideas resources, then pilot these resources with the Cambridge Public Health Department, Population Health Initiatives division managers interviewed for this process, and enlist a City Department to also try the guidelines. In parallel or following a pilot, disseminate final resources to municipal departments.

Food Programs for Youth

Food programs for youth are inclusive of the snack and meal programs for children of a range of ages in a variety of childcare, school, and out-of-school settings. These include meals and snacks for children; after school and summer meals, which fosters developing lifelong nutrition habits; and policies, which describe the standards and guidelines for nutrition and nutrition education. This section also highlights the impact of the COVID pandemic on these programs and the adaptations they made to respond to changing needs.

This assessment synthesizes information on the range of food programs for youth (and their families), highlights the programs in place that provide nutritious foods and foster healthy eating habits in children, and articulates recommendations for improving or sustaining these efforts.

Early Childhood Program

Early childhood programs foster healthy childhood development starting from birth through the first several years of life. In addition to providing early education and care, through the meals and snacks they serve providers also play an important role in supporting healthy nutrition of children and their families.

Early childhood providers are supported by and follow guidance on childhood nutrition from several entities. The federal **Child and Adult Care Food Program** (CACFP) provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children who are enrolled for care at participating childcare centers. CACFP also provides reimbursements for meals served to children and youth participating in afterschool care programs and children residing in emergency shelters. Participating providers are required to follow CACFP's nutrition standards, which include serving vegetables and fruit, whole grains, and

minimal added sugar and saturated fat in the meals and snacks provided. CACFP guidelines also encourage promotion of breastfeeding. The **National Association for the Education of Young Children** (NAEYC) is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality learning for all young children from birth through age 8, through policy, research, and practical guidance for its member early childhood providers. NAEYC promotes best practices in early childhood programming, including how to best support childhood nutrition.

The 2016 needs assessment of the **Cambridge Early Childhood Task Force** made recommendations for promoting childhood and family nutrition and active living. In response, in 2019 the **Cambridge Public Health Department** (CPHD) and a **Birth to 3rd Grade Partnership (B3)**²⁴ collaborated on the development

²⁴ The Birth to Third Grade Partnership (B-3) was launched in 2016 in response to a needs assessment of the Cambridge Early Childhood Task Force which found that families and service providers wanted better information regarding available services, and that the community's services were not coordinated and aligned in ways that lead to maximum impact for young children. B-3 facilitates information sharing and quality improvement of education and care services and programs that extend from prenatal care through third grade.

of age-specific guidelines for early education and care providers to promote healthy eating, physical activity, and other health-promoting activities, in alignment with CAFCP guidelines. Once the Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines were complete (see the Appendices for the final guidelines), education and care provider sites were enlisted to pilot the guidelines. During the pilots, the public health nutritionist worked with each site to assess current physical activity, nutrition and screen time practices and cooperatively set a roadmap for implementing stronger wellness practices and policies. Two early care sites (Nurtury and Violeta Montessori) piloted the guidelines to assess feasibility and impact.²⁵ Following the pilot, participating early care sites set goals for improving nutrition and physical activity.

Of the nutrition-related goals set, Nurtury sought to improve breastfeeding support, infant feeding communication, menu offerings, and garden and food education. Progress on these goals was made from February 2019 through March 2020 (start of the pandemic) including:

- Established a room for breastfeeding caregivers.
- Established a breastfeeding policy following WIC protocols.
- Hired a cook for on-site daily scratch cooking of meals for children (Cambridge Public Schools shared “International Flavors” recipes with Nurtury, which include culturally diverse meal recipes).
- Secured grant funding and establishing a large garden. This garden was planted at the center and gardening lessons began in the classroom to support hands-on learning.

In 2021, Nurtury was also awarded a Cambridge in Motion mini-grant to expand the educational aspects of the garden program, which included the families of the children.

Violeta Montessori set nutrition-related goals to improve food-related education materials, outdoor drinking water access, parent education on nutrition and food, and the creation of a wellness policy for the center. Progress on these goals included:

- Bring a large container of drinking water on all park visits during seasons when water fountain access is unavailable.
- Incorporate food into math and English work.
- Purchased planters and matching garden tools cards (children help tend the planters).
- Involve children in snack preparation (where allowed by Inspectional Services Department).
- Introduced parent nutrition education through once-annual parent night (in collaboration with the public health nutritionist).
- Created a healthy lunch packing guide for caregivers.
- Drafted a wellness policy (started but will likely take another year or more to complete fully and implement).

Pilots ran for 1.5 years to implement these goals, with direct public health nutrition support that provided insights into implementation and impact of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines, including the need for staff capacity and budget to implement new practices, training, and educational components that enable more inclusion of healthier food and activity.

²⁵ A third site was identified to join as a pilot in fall 2020, however COVID-19 resulted in all pilot work being paused in March 2020.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the guidelines were updated to reflect changes in guidance from the Department of Early Education and Care and the CDC (see the Appendices for these guidelines), and these guides were provided to centers through the B3 newsletters. These modified guidelines were included in a Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health assessment of state operating guidelines during COVID-19. The Cambridge Public Health Department revised the guidelines as a result of this collaborative partnership and created a set of Best Practices from what was learned.

Early Childhood Programs Recommendations

- 1) Support early childhood programs' capacity to implement nutrition guidelines.
 - a) Operationalize existing nutrition guidelines of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) by leveraging resources and support provided through mini-grants, training, and coaching. (B3 can support implementation through existing coaches who already spend a lot of time in programs and with FCC providers).
 - b) Review the Nutrition and Physical Activity Best Practices against the CACFP and NAEYC nutrition guidelines and assess the potential use and application of these guidelines as a simplified resource to support nutrition guideline compliance.
- 2) Build on the Early Childhood Programs services by conducting a fuller assessment that includes a broader range of early childhood providers and programs across

the City, and the available nutrition resources and programs.

School Food

Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) of Cambridge Public Schools District (CPSD) serves meals and snacks to the district's nearly 6,700 students from Pre-K through 12th grade. Within the district's 17 schools, FNS has 13 scratch-cooking kitchens that are operated by over 65 staff. Through City of Cambridge funding, breakfast is provided to all students in the district at no cost to them or their families. Cambridge also covers the cost of lunch for those that qualify for the "reduced-price" category. For students that pay for lunch, students are never turned away if they have a negative balance on their account, and instead parents/guardians are simply notified of the need to pay. In the 2019-2020 school year FNS served 217,331 breakfasts, and 554,592 lunches.²⁶

FNS's vision statement recognizes its role in providing healthy meals to students so that they are ready to learn. It also sees itself as a leader in school food service and has a mission to be a model for other districts. Its departmental objectives include building menus that are informed by students and the community, and in alignment with USDA child nutrition standards; purchasing local foods and using produce grown in school gardens; providing training to food service employees that builds their capacities in management and culinary skills (10 hours of professional development annually); and reaching and maintaining financial solvency for the department. FNS's efforts are also guided by the CPSD Wellness Policy, which

²⁶ Source: shared by Cambridge Public Health Department, 2019-2020 school year data.

outlines policies for providing nutritious, affordable, and appealing food; maximizing participation in reimbursable federal school food programs; and providing nutrition education programming in collaboration with CPHD. FNS has worked diligently on these objectives, and provides nutritious, culturally diverse, and delicious food for students. Their commitment is unmatched when it comes to promoting local foods, providing fresh produce options like salad bars, sourcing culturally representative meals, and being a true community partner. Some key accomplishments follow.

FNS includes **local foods** in the meals it serves through partnerships with local farms and their distributors. Russo's had provided much of the fresh produce that the schools used, until it closed in mid-2021. Russo's closure, along with other supply chain issues have been challenging for the school district. In response to these challenges, the school district is issuing produce bids every 4-6 weeks to give produce vendors flexibility. World Farmers in Lancaster provides a smaller share of local produce and specialty items to the school district. World Farmers supports refugee and immigrant farmers in planting native crops and then distributing them through farmers markets and vendors. Working with the Massachusetts Farm to School's "Harvest of the Month" program, the FNS team promotes a local food or food group each month through menu options and programming with Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD).

Understanding the importance of breakfast for students, the FNS team has been working to **increase student participation in breakfast** at school. In 2019-2020 they partnered with a local chef and taste-tested his chickpea-based breakfast bars with students during National School Breakfast Week. Along

similar lines, they also sourced 88 Acres breakfast bars for their menu, which is a local Massachusetts company specializing in foods made from whole seeds and simple ingredients. During National School Breakfast Week, the team partners with school librarians, CPHD and others to emphasize the importance of breakfast for children before they begin their learning day.

Through the **Tasty Choices** program, each year FNS partners with CPHD to source new recipes from the community, taste-test dishes with students, and incorporate the recipe into the regular menu cycle. These recipes are a way of celebrating cultural cuisines that reflect students' heritage, and ensuring students see themselves in meals served in school. These recipes have also been used in food-based events with local families, provided in handouts at school and local events, and used by childcare providers looking to expand their menu offerings. In this way the work being done at schools can be spread into the larger community. Students get the opportunity to taste-test each recipe and vote on whether to add it to the school menu, which builds excitement and eases the introduction of new menu items.

The FNS team is involved in many **food-related programs and activities for children and families**. Not only do they act as a caterer to many events, serving school menu items and others, they also source and provide ingredients for special family cooking events. Often, they are not just providing ingredients and meals, team members are participating in and deeply engaged with the events. In this way they are building community around the school and around food.

FNS collaborates with Food For Free on the **Cambridge Weekend Eats Food Program**, a food assistance program for students of Cambridge Public Schools and their families. Please

see the Emergency Food System chapter for a description of this program.

When schools announced they would close after Friday, March 13th, 2020, due to COVID-19 the FNS team came together with community stakeholders to **ensure meals would be available for families who needed them during the pandemic**. After completely reinventing meal preparation, safety procedures, and service style the FNS team resumed meal operations on Monday, March 16th without missing a beat. The FNS team opened a meal pickup operation at 8 sites throughout the city including sites near public housing and public transportation. Eventually expanding to 15 meal sites as school reopened in the fall. When some children began the transition to in-person learning, they were able to maintain the pickup sites while also doing classroom delivery of meals as cafeterias remained closed for much of the year.

FNS prioritized transparency and access for students, educators and families while providing meals during this time. It created daily lunch videos so students were still able to see their meal options, at a time when they couldn't go through the cafeteria line. In collaboration with school administration and technology coordinators they adapted existing software to allow teachers to enter student meal orders in advance. In collaboration with city officials and anti-hunger organizations, they published a map listing all meal pickup sites for families. FNS promoted remote meal sites to families using social media, website updates, and other resources circulated by partners working with Cambridge families.

FNS has a longstanding reputation for managing a strong school food service program. In addition to the daily work of providing students healthy meals, it also works on initiatives to educate and excite students about the food they eat. Its efforts are strengthened by the partners it works with. When conditions changed with the COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020, FNS proved highly adaptable, as it quickly developed new systems of serving meals to students and their families

School Food Recommendation:

- The assessment did not identify current needs to inform recommendations. Schools are at capacity with their efforts to operate school food services due to the pandemic, and a full needs assessment was not feasible.

Out-of-School-Time Programming

Young people live in the intersection of three major spheres: family, school, and out-of-school time. Out-of-School Time (OST) programs refer to learning and enrichment programs for children and youth, provided during times when they are not in school or with family. More than a decade of research and evaluation indicates that young people who consistently participate in quality OST programs benefit in terms of school connectedness, better attendance, stronger work habits, increased assessment scores, and academic performance. They also develop positive relationships with caring adults and peer groups as well as increase their social and emotional learning, self-confidence, critical thinking skills, resiliency, health, and wellness.²⁷

²⁷ Cambridge Agenda for Children, "OST-School Partnership Support": <https://www.agendaforchildren.org/ost-school-partnerships.html>

Agenda for Children Out of School Time is a public-private initiative that fosters a network of Cambridge OST stakeholders with the objective of increasing access, efficiency, quality improvement, and positive student outcomes. Agenda for Children is coordinated by the Department of Human Services Program (DHSP) and Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), the two largest youth-serving departments in Cambridge. The OST coalition is made up of over 60 non-profit organizations and publicly run programs, the largest portion of which are the DHSP-operated Afterschool Programs and Community Schools.

Most OST programs serve snacks as part of their programming, and some serve dinner. The Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD) has partnered with some of these programs to support them in providing nutritious snacks and light meals. Public schools have wellness policies in place that outline how they will promote healthy eating, physical activity, and overall health of students. In contrast, OST programs lack such a unifying policy. Through a collaborative effort, the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council (CPHD-led), the Agenda for Children, and city staff sought to fill this gap, and developed the **Cambridge Out-of-School Time Food and Activity Guidelines**. These voluntary guidelines lay out concise and simple ways for OST providers to promote healthy eating, drinking water, physical activity, and minimal sedentary activities. The guidelines are based on practices from the Harvard School of Public Health and Tufts University and adhere to the requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP), a federal program that provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks at participating OST programs. The guidelines include links to complementary resources including Cambridge OST program listings, a Healthy Kids curriculum, local resources from City Sprout for gardening

with children, and state resources for local farmers markets and farms.

In recent years, CPHD worked with two after school programs in the Port neighborhood to promote healthy food offerings. The efforts engaged between 30-50 children at each program in cooking, taste testing, and nutrition lessons. CPHD also provided training and resources to OST cooks and teachers to support them in planning, preparing, and serving healthy and appealing food to the children they serve.

Taste tests were offered weekly at the two After School programs. Tasting sessions were designed to be fun and allow children to try foods prepared in new ways in a low-pressure environment with their friends. Participation by the children was voluntary. Teachers encouraged children to follow rules to avoid negative words (i.e., yuck, gross, hate, nasty), and express likes and dislikes with kindness. Teachers focused discussion on how children are experiencing the food with their five senses and minimize discussing nutrition. Following the taste test, children vote on whether recipes should be incorporated into snack time menus.

One of the programs used the featured “**Massachusetts Harvest of the Month**” food as a key ingredient in its taste tests. Recipes provided are easy to prepare, use few ingredients, and are low-cost - sensitive to staff time constraints and children’s taste preferences.

The other program initially requested **nutrition lessons** for children at their center. These lessons and related materials were developed for teachers to use in subsequent years. Lessons were less successful in the after-school environment,

after homework time was completed. As such, in the second year of the partnership, CPHD pivoted to **cooking and taste-testing**, engaging children more naturally. Using simple ingredients, children assembled snacks themselves with minimal cooking equipment, and then tasted their snacks as a group.

Complementing the work it did with children, at one of its partner After School program sites, CPHD worked with cooks and teachers to build their capacity to create a healthy eating environment in the After School programs. Typically cooks at After School programs have no formal culinary arts training nor experience with CACFP requirements. Recognizing the need, CPHD **trained cooks** on CACFP basics and food ordering, and provided them with food safety posters and CACFP-friendly recipes on a menu-rotation.

Teachers play an important role in serving snacks and light meals to children and making it a positive experience for them. At the same site it engaged cooks, CPHD **trained teachers** on CACFP basics and proper serving techniques and coached them in talking with children about food in a low-pressure and appropriate manner. CPHD felt their training and collaboration with cooks and teachers met a critical need in delivering a successful nutritious meal program, and it is interested in exploring creating a training series that could be used at other After School programs.

CPHD also compiled complementary resources for these sites, including **scratch-cooking recipes and a rotating menu**. The recipes are tailored to the needs of OST programs, and are scaled to serve 25, 50, or 100 children, and adhere to the CACFP requirements. Most recipes came from the Institute of Child Nutrition and the Chef Ann Foundation. Along with these

resources, CPHD also provided food safety guides for storing and cooking food, kitchen maintenance, handwashing, and allergen awareness. CPHD developed a **snack menu** using items with whole grains, yogurts with little sugar added, and fruits and vegetables. Snack ingredients were mostly available at grocery stores or through vendors, to ensure getting them would be easy. CPHD felt OST partners benefited from recipe and menu resources, and it is interested in exploring updating these resources and developing more universal cycle menus for OST programs that include recipes for snacks, light meals, and meals that meet CACFP requirements and can be made in facilities with or without scratch-cooking abilities.

OST Programming Recommendations:

- 1) Explore creating a training series for cooks, teachers and administrators of OST Programs that build their capacity to create a healthy eating environment for the children they serve. Trainings should be provided to member OST providers of the Agenda For Children coalition. Lead: Cambridge Public Health Department.
- 2) Explore regular updates and broader dissemination of the resources it has developed, including the recipe collections, menus, and Cambridge Out-of-School Time Food and Activity Guidelines. CPHD should also develop more universal cycle menus for OST programs, that include recipes for snacks, light meals, and meals recipes that meet CACFP requirements, and can be made in facilities with or without scratch-cooking abilities. Lead: Cambridge Public Health Department.

Summer Meals Program

The Summer Food Program (SFP) provides free, balanced meals to children under 18 during the summer. In 2021, the SFP offered breakfasts and lunch at 11 mostly school-based sites around the City. It offered dinners for any youth at four Youth Basketball Leagues locations, which were co-located with the Book Bike and Food For Free programs. Meals were also provided to summer camps operated in Cambridge Youth Centers and Cambridge Schools. Meals offered include both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, and lunches include both hot and cold options. Meals can be eaten at the site or brought home. The program in Cambridge is run by the Department of Human Services Programs (DHSP), and in addition to providing meals, DHSP also provides activities and programs for youth including whiffle ball, kick ball, board games, and sidewalk chalk at parks located next to the meal sites. Funding for the program comes from the City, as well as the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (\$380,250 in FY21) and Project Bread (\$4,000 in FY21).

Summer Meals Program Recommendation:

- The assessment did not identify current needs to inform recommendations.

Food Programs for Seniors

Food Programs for seniors are inclusive of the grocery and meal programs and other nutritional support for older adults, typically 60 years and older, and other qualifying individuals such as those with disabilities, or caregivers of these populations. Programs are offered at senior centers, congregate meal sites, or through home delivery. Food programs promote good nutrition for older adults and others they serve and support independent living. Meal programs can include medically tailored menus, a selection of culturally preferred dishes, and when public health conditions are safe to allow for congregate meals, they can also support socializing and connection. In highlighting these programs, this section also describes the impact of the COVID pandemic on them, and adaptations made as a result.

This section synthesizes information on the efforts across Cambridge to meet the nutritional needs of older adults and describes the needs of entities engaged in this work. Portions of this section relate to the Emergency Food System section.

Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, the Cambridge Council on Aging, and Food For Free are the primary agencies coordinating and providing food programs for seniors in Cambridge.

Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services

Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services (SCES) provides a range of supportive services to Cambridge and Somerville older adults, people of all ages with disabilities, and their caregivers, supporting them to remain living in their homes for as long as they choose. SCES is a state-designated Aging Services Access Point²⁸ (ASAP) and a federally designated Area Agency on Aging²⁹ (AAA).

SCES's food and nutrition programs and services are central to its efforts, and it provides roughly 1,000 meals daily to

residents in its service area. The **Meals on Wheels** program home-delivers prepared lunches and dinners Monday through Friday. Meals are delivered hot, cold, or frozen so that they can be eaten that day or heated and eaten over the weekend. SCES also prepares and delivers **meals to congregate sites**. The pandemic required stopping congregate meals, eight of which are in Cambridge. In late 2021, SCES is again serving lunches at two of these sites: the Cambridge Senior Center (806 Mass. Ave) and the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers.³⁰ In its meal programs, SCES provides medically

28 Mass.gov, "Aging Services Access Points (ASAP)": <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/aging-services-access-points-asap>

29 Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, "Area Agency on Aging": <https://eldercare.org/about/area-agency-on-aging-aaa/>

30 This references the congregate meal sites SCES makes meals for. In their October 2021 nutrition newsletter, they highlight those sites which are open and closed.

Older Americans Act Core Programs Goals and Objectives

- Goal: Meet evolving nutritional needs of our local population
 - Objective: Increase nutritional options for underserved groups such as ethnic minorities and younger people living with disabilities
- Nutrition Strategies:
 - Continue to provide culturally-appropriate meal options to consumers via home-delivered meals and congregate meal sites.
 - Increase food access by expanding support for and partnerships with local food providers such as food pantries, the Councils on Aging, and other local food distributors such as Food For Free.
- Goal: Improve the health status of older people in Cambridge and Somerville
 - Objective: Promote evidence-based health and wellness programs, as well as programs that address mental health and social isolation
- Disease Prevention/Health Promotion Strategies:
 - Offer Exercise/Strength Training/Mindfulness/Nutrition Programs in senior buildings.

tailored meals, and prioritizes accommodating cultural (i.e., Portuguese, Caribbean, Chinese cuisines) and other dietary preferences where possible. It also provided a monthly LGBT meal site that regularly attracted 50 to 85 individuals before the pandemic, though this has been paused and has yet to restart.³¹

In addition to its meal programs, SCES provides **monthly deliveries of two bags of groceries** to over 150 income-eligible seniors, through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, in partnership with the Greater Boston Food Bank; **nutrition supplements** of Ensure for those who need supplemental calories; **nutrition counseling services** by a Registered Dietician; and **Senior Farmers Market Coupons** that can be used to buy fruits and vegetables at area farmers markets.³² SCES also partners with the Somerville High School Culinary Program, through which it makes 50 meals once monthly. These meals are picked up at the SCES office free of charge.

SCES's 2022-2025 Area Plan³³ includes an assessment and goals for addressing senior nutrition and bolstering the programming it currently offers. Food access was newly identified as an issue in the needs assessment, as well as social isolation, mental and behavioral health, and technology needs, all of which were not previously expressed in assessments and are needs that resulted or were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Focus group conversations during the needs assessment highlighted the loss of family income due to the

31 Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, "Meals and Nutrition": https://eldercare.org/find-what-you-need/nutrition_and_meals/

32 Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, "Meals and Nutrition": https://eldercare.org/find-what-you-need/nutrition_and_meals/

33 As a federally designated Area Agency on Aging, Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services is mandated to develop a multi-year Area Plan to address the range of needs of older adults in its service area. This process involved Cambridge stakeholders including representatives from the Council on Aging and the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers.

pandemic, and caused worry about being able to pay for rent and food. The Mount Auburn Hospital (Beth Israel Lahey Health) community health needs assessment, in process during the writing of the Area Plan, included preliminary community survey results that reiterated residents' concerns about mental health, affordable housing, and food access, and it named people of color, those with mental health issues, and older adults as populations most likely to experience health disparities. SCES's call data from FY2020 and the first two quarters of FY2021 reflect the needs for food access during the pandemic, showing a rapid increase in calls in FY20 for home-delivered meals (118 calls in the fourth quarter of FY20), though very few calls for congregate meal sites. The calls also included questions about grocery delivery.

The SCES 2022-2025 Area Plan responds to these food access needs, by identifying how, despite funding cuts, it will strengthen its nutrition programs, which are part of its "Older Americans Act Core Programs." Select goals of the Area Plan that relate to senior nutrition programming appear in the previous call out box.

Cambridge Council on Aging

The **Cambridge Council on Aging**³⁴ (COA) promotes the health and independence of Cambridge seniors over the age of 60, by providing a range of services and engaging social and recreational programming, as well as resources for caregivers. Part of the City of Cambridge Department of Human Services Programs, the COA connects with over 1,300 of Cambridge

older adults through its site-based and virtual programs.³⁵ The COA has two Senior Centers, the Cambridge Senior Center at 806 Massachusetts Avenue, and the North Cambridge Senior Center at 2050 Massachusetts Avenue, which are the hubs of its activities and programs. Both senior centers offer food programs, for which they have made adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Until the closure of its programs, required by the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Cambridge Senior Center** had been operating a food pantry and served breakfast and lunch five days a week. These congregate meals were prepared on site, with the oversight of a food service manager. On average, six people participated in breakfast, and 20 people participated in lunch. The **North Cambridge Senior Center** also served congregate lunches before the pandemic required operations to stop. Three days a week, the meals were prepared by the Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, and then delivered to the Senior Center. Between 3 and 7 people typically joined these meals. Though the numbers were small, participation would be at its highest when older adults were at the senior center for other programming and would stay for a meal.

Twenty years prior, senior center meals had been popular and often operated at maximum capacity, however, several years prior to the pandemic participation had been declining. This trend – consistent with national trends – reflects a change in the ways senior centers are used. Previously, people would stay all day at the senior centers, coming early for breakfast, and staying for programming and socializing. In recent years,

³⁴ Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs, "Senior Centers & Council on Aging": <https://www.cambridgema.gov/dhsp/programsforadults/seniorscouncilonaging>

³⁵ Cambridge FY22 Budget Book, Elderly Services & Council on Aging section:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/budgetdepartment/FinancePDFs/fy22submittedbudget/fy22submittedbudgetbook.pdf>

people had gone to the senior centers for specific classes or programs, occasionally with a few friends. At times they would stay for a meal, but less often. Few people came to the senior centers specifically for a meal.

With the pandemic, the Cambridge Senior Center paused the food pantry and congregate meals programs and shifted to other food programs for older adults and others in need of food. In spring of 2020, it served as a hub for the **COVID-19 Relief Grocery Delivery** program, managed by Food For Free (see the Emergency Food System section for more). It partnered on this program in several ways. Cambridge Council on Aging staff coordinated and vetted the incoming phone requests, registered those eligible for grocery delivery, made referrals to Meals on Wheels programs, made space for and received food deliveries from the Greater Boston Food Bank, and twice a week packed between 1,200 and 4,000 bags of groceries for eligible residents. The COVID-19 Relief Grocery Delivery program and other services were a lifeline for many older residents and greatly appreciated. Feedback to improve the program included having smaller amounts of groceries (i.e., the whole bag of potatoes provided could not be eaten by one person), and food that met medical dietary needs or preferences (i.e., vegetarian or cultural preferences).

During the pandemic, the COA also regularly promoted through its newsletter the Cambridge Food Resources Guide, which includes a detailed list of food pantry and community meals sites, as well as other information on the Healthy Eats Home Delivery Program managed by Food For Free, nutrition and meals services offered by the Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services (including Meals on Wheels) and other food assistance resources (i.e., SNAP).

In September 2021, in partnership with the Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, the Cambridge Senior Center began a Grab-and-Go lunch program. Participants can take their meal home or eat in the Cambridge Senior Center dining room. This effectively re-started the meal program, but in an adapted form that allows senior residents to take their meal with them if they prefer to not eat in a congregate meal setting. For those 60 years and older, there is a suggested payment of \$3 for a Grab-and-Go lunch and anyone younger is asked to pay \$5. This program is available Monday through Thursday and requires pre-registration.

As public health conditions allow for more programming to happen at the Senior Centers, the COA is reconsidering and planning how it will shape its food programs going forward to best meet the needs and interests of its senior community. Demand for the congregate meals had been low prior to the pandemic, and now their older adult participants are not requesting a return to them. These congregate meal programs are expensive to maintain and require a certain level of participation in order for them to be feasible. As such, the COA is considering alternative ideas. They are hearing from older adults an interest in more café-style dining with more menu choices, though it's unclear if this would be feasible; they are considering continuing with the Grab-and-Go model, as well as hosting occasional special dinners, which had been offered previously and were popular.

Food For Free

Another important food program for seniors is the **Healthy Eats Home Delivery Program** offered by Food For Free. This program delivers groceries bi-monthly to eligible Cambridge

residents who face barriers to accessing food pantries because of age, illness, or disability, and do not have relatives or caretakers who would otherwise be able to assist with groceries. Grocery boxes are delivered twice monthly to participants, which supports them in cooking meals at home. The Healthy Eats Home Delivery program served 160 clients before the pandemic, and now serves about 400 clients. This program is also discussed in the Emergency Food Systems chapter, along with other programs provided by Food For Free.

Food Programs for Seniors Recommendations:

- 1) Define and implement new models of food programs for seniors that are responsive to their changing needs, interests, and are protective of their health and safety. This includes successful models that emerged or were expanded in the food security response of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as home delivery and grab-and-go programs. Models should be responsive to the decreased demand for everyday congregate meals, and to the popularity of special-occasion meals. Where possible, models should also attempt to foster social connections with peers.
- 2) In all food programs expand efforts that prioritize seniors' nutritional needs and cultural preferences. This includes expanding efforts to provide medically tailored foods and nutritional supports; and meals and groceries options for cuisines that represent the client population's preferences and cultures. Where possible, engage food retailers in offering a variety of food options that meet cultural and dietary food needs of older adults, in appropriately-sized portions.
- 3) Encourage healthy eating through a variety of supportive programming, such as nutrition and health education, building herb gardens, coaching on using herbs and healthy foods in low-sodium cooking.

Emergency Food System

The Emergency Food System is inclusive of the programs that provide groceries or meals to people for free. This includes food pantries and meals programs for populations that are low-income, students, older adults, or unhoused individuals. This section also includes efforts to connect users of the emergency food system with resources like SNAP, a federal food assistance program.

This assessment synthesizes information on the efforts across Cambridge to decrease hunger and food insecurity and articulates the needs of the entities engaged in this work to increase their capacity.

Food Insecurity in Cambridge

Food insecurity refers to the state of having inadequate access to nutritious food to live a healthy and active life. Food insecurity touches every community in Massachusetts, disproportionately impacting families with children, and Black and Latinx residents. **The economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic reversed the previous several years of declining food insecurity rates;** and with the pandemic the inequitable impacts of it were exacerbated.

Food insecurity estimates show in 2019, 8.2% of Massachusetts residents experienced food insecurity; during 2020, this jumped to an estimated 12.1% of residents, a nearly 50% increase in the population experiencing food insecurity. Statewide food insecurity rates in 2021 are estimated to have improved (9.9%), but this is still higher than pre-pandemic levels. Childhood food insecurity jumped nearly 80% from 2019 to

2020 (8.9% to 15.9%) and continues to remain at higher than average pre-pandemic levels (12.1 %).³⁶

These recent food insecurity estimates (from 2019-2021) are not available on more granular level for municipalities, but the Cambridge Community Health Assessment survey results show that in 2019 roughly 7% of respondents reported worrying about making food last, while roughly 6% reported worrying about affording food after running out.³⁷

Similar to national trends, **people of color in Cambridge experience comparatively higher food insecurity.** Again, in the Cambridge Community Health Assessment survey, results show more than one in 10 respondents who identified as a racial or ethnic minority worried about making food last before getting money to purchase more compared to less than one in 20 respondents who identified as White, non-Hispanic

³⁶ Feeding America, "State-By-State Resource: The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity":

<https://feedingamericaaction.org/resources/state-by-state-resource-the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity>

³⁷ City of Cambridge Community Health Assessment (2020): <https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications/Cambridge%20Community%20Health%20Assessment%202020.pdf>

(13.1% vs. 4.1%, respectively). Similarly, more than one in 10 respondents who identified as a racial/ethnic minority worried about being able to afford food when they run out compared to less than one in 30 respondents who identified as White, non-Hispanic (12.3% vs. 2.7%, respectively).³⁸

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP Enrollment

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income people to buy food, and plays a critical role in reducing hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, and improving food security and child and adult health outcomes. The percent of Cambridge households participating in SNAP has generally increased over the years, though many households likely qualify but are not receiving this benefit.

According to analysis of SNAP enrollment compared with Mass Health enrollment data³⁹ from December 2020, while nearly 7,500 people in Cambridge were enrolled in SNAP, roughly 7,000 were likely eligible for but unenrolled in SNAP. This represents **a roughly 48% SNAP Gap**.

CEOC and the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House are Cambridge-based SNAP outreach partners, and support

Cambridge residents in applying for SNAP benefits. (There are other SNAP outreach partners that serve but are not located in Cambridge.)

CEOC applies its bundled services approach when assisting clients in enrolling in SNAP, and as an example, if a client received SNAP benefits, CEOC will also offer them financial education and coaching to help them work toward greater financial stability. In its strategic plan, CEOC sets annual goals for providing SNAP outreach, education, enrollment, and advocacy to 100 households in 2018 (115 in 2019; 125 in 2020).

CEOC also participates in the Statewide SNAP Coalition that works with the Commissioner of the Department of Transitional Assistance and Massachusetts Law Reform Institute to advance legislation to improve access to SNAP and to remove barriers in the system that make accessing SNAP benefits difficult.

SNAP Online Purchasing

Nationally, online grocery sales saw a threefold increase between 2019 and 2020, and many industry experts expect that the shift to online grocery delivery and pick up will continue beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁰ This method of grocery shopping is increasingly another method of food access. In Massachusetts, customers can also now buy their groceries using their SNAP benefits, when shopping online with Amazon, Stop & Shop, Walmart, ALDI, Hannaford, and Price Chopper.⁴¹

38 City of Cambridge Community Health Assessment (2020): <https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications/Cambridge%20Community%20Health%20Assessment%202020.pdf>

39 Food Bank of Western MA, Tableau, "The SNAP Gap in Massachusetts": <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/food.bank.of.western.ma/viz/SNAPGAP2021/AllDistricts>

40 MAPC, "New Research: Impacts of Online Shopping in Massachusetts": <https://www.mapc.org/planning101/new-research-impacts-of-online-shopping-in-massachusetts/>

41 Mass.gov, "SNAP Online Purchasing Program": <https://www.mass.gov/snap-online-purchasing-program>

SNAP Recommendations:

- 1) Maximize SNAP enrollment and close the (48%) SNAP Gap through current and expanded efforts⁴²
 - a) Identify which populations are eligible for and not currently receiving SNAP.
 - b) Do targeted outreach to enroll eligible populations in SNAP. Provide SNAP enrollment support in person, when feasible, and at key locations such as senior housing, farmers markets, or food pantries (including those part of the Food Pantry Network).
 - c) When children of undocumented parents are eligible for SNAP, assist parents in enrolling in SNAP on their behalf.
 - d) Enroll those eligible in SNAP and concurrently assess other needs and connect them with additional programs, education, and services. CEOC applies such a bundled services approach.
 - e) Share information on SNAP and SNAP enrollment support services when individuals enroll in income-eligible BlueBikes memberships.
 - f) For entities that are able to, join the SNAP Gap Coalition efforts to advocate for a Common Application, a system that would allow those applying for MassHealth can concurrently assess their eligibility for SNAP.
- 2) Share information about online SNAP purchasing options with SNAP customers.

⁴² SNAP recommendations are included in the Cambridge Food Retail and Emergency Food System chapters.

Meals & Groceries

Meals

Community Meals

Cambridge serves hot meals at 13 community meals sites. The appendices include a list of community meal sites and their operating hours and locations; this “Cambridge Food Resource Guide” was produced by CPHD and updated in October 2021. Due to the pandemic, most locations are providing to-go bag meals, rather than sit-down meals.

Cambridge Weekend Eats Food Program⁴³ (formerly the “Backpack Program”)

All K-8 Cambridge Public Schools typically offer weekend meals to identified students facing hunger or food insecurity. This program is a partnership between Food For Free and the Student Family Liaisons at each school. Weekend Eats sends home two lunches, two breakfasts, and snacks, including fresh fruit. Prior to the pandemic it served nearly 600 students in grades K-8; with the advent of the pandemic this number increased to over 1 200. Until COVID more steadily subsides, instead of sending food home, students and their families now receive monthly “Carrot Cards” (cash cards for groceries). The Weekend Eats program aspires to go back to physical food distribution in the fall of 2022.

Heat-n-Eats Program

(formerly the “Family Meals Program”)

Launched in the spring of 2016, Food For Free’s Heat-n-Eats program re-purposes prepared foods into single-serving meals

Cambridge Food Pantries

- Cambridge Community Center (opened April 2020 in response to COVID-19)
- Helping Hand Food Pantry (St. James)
- Salvation Army
- CEOC Inman Street
- CEOC North Cambridge, Rindge Avenue (opened September 2021)
- Cambridge Senior Center
- Cambridgeport Baptist Church
- Common Care/St. Peter’s
- East End House
- Margaret Fuller House
- Massachusetts Avenue Baptist Church/ Project Manna
- Pentecostal Tabernacle
- St. Paul’s AME

Food Pantry Network Member Pantries are underlined.

for people with limited access to kitchens. Created from prepared food rescued from local university and corporate dining halls, each heat-and-eat meal is a balanced, tasty individual meal for one. Every meal includes a serving of vegetables, protein, and grain or starch. Food For Free provided many service agencies with these meals, which they in turn distributed, until the program was put on pause during the pandemic.

⁴³ The Cambridge Weekend Eats Food Program is a food assistance program for students of Cambridge Public Schools and their families. Please see the School Food section in the Food Programs for Youth chapter for more on

Meals for the homeless community during COVID-19

In March 2020, the City of Cambridge launched an innovative project to contract with local restaurants to provide food to the City's homeless community during the COVID-19 public health crisis. The CPHD developed nutrition guidelines for the bid process to ensure healthy meals were provided. As of August 23, 2021, over 235,000 meals had been provided, and more than 2,700 meals were being delivered each week to 16 shelters and programs across the City. Since the program started, the City of Cambridge spent over \$1.6 million on meals provided by over 65 participating local Cambridge restaurants. The program has been extended several times,⁴⁴ and most recently to January 30, 2022.

Groceries

Community Food Pantries

Food pantries are centers that distribute groceries to individuals and families at no cost to them. Cambridge has more than a dozen food pantries, 10 of which are members of the Cambridge Food Pantry Network. The appendices include a list of food pantries and their operating hours and locations; this "Cambridge Food Resource Guide" was produced by CPHD and updated in October 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of food pantries. As people experienced new and sudden economic hardships due to the public health crisis, food pantries saw unprecedented need for food. Simultaneously, its mostly volunteer workforce of largely older adults shrunk, as the public health risks became apparent. At the time food pantries were

also figuring out how to operate safely – both determining the best public health practices for food distribution, and coordinating procurement of personal protective equipment and supplies, which were in short supply. Food chain supply shortages impacted the Greater Boston Food Bank's distribution to food pantries and other emergency food providers. The increased demand for food also overwhelmed many food pantries' already limited storage and refrigeration capacity. The combination of these vulnerabilities meant that many food pantries had to close their doors during the COVID-19 pandemic for at least some time. Notably, in response to increasing food needs during the pandemic, the Cambridge Community Center and CEOC each started a new pantry at least for a period. Following are the food pantries that operated without service interruption during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Cambridge Community Center
- East End House
- Margaret Fuller House
- St. Paul's AME

CEOC conducted a 2021 **Food Pantry Evaluation** to inform best practices and to facilitate a robust, resilient, and responsive emergency food system in Cambridge. The assessment identified systems, infrastructure, and operational challenges and needs of food pantries. It identified a need for increased funding for food pantries and paying volunteers. To maximize the efficacy of food pantries in Cambridge, it presented systemic ideas for food pantries to consolidate into fewer pantry sites, pool resources, and coordinate more with

⁴⁴ City of Cambridge, "City Partnership with Local Restaurants Providing Meals to Homeless Residents Extended through October 3, 2021": <https://www.cambridgema.gov/covid19/News/2021/08/mealsprogram>

Food Pantry Focus Group Summary

In the process of understanding Cambridge's emergency food system and the barriers and opportunities it experiences, the project team conducted a food pantry focus group. Seven stakeholders representing three food pantries and one regional meals distribution organization participated in the focus group. They shared experiences from their food aid organizations, all of which are involved with Cambridge's Food Pantry Network.

Key Takeaway: Pantries in the Food Pantry Network benefit from bulk procurement and translation services. These benefits allow them to serve more clients and clients who speak languages other than English.

Key Takeaway: The Food Pantry Network engages in limited activities, and there is low awareness about Network membership and services among members. To operate at a higher potential, the Food Pantry Network could engage in additional activities.

Key Takeaway: To more equitably serve clients and improve organizational capacities, participants suggested the following activities for the Food Pantry Network to organize. Most participants seemed to resonate with activities revolving around client engagement and communication. Establishing paid food pantry positions and transportation services were also suggested.

- **Client Engagement:** Engage clients to understand their needs, particularly regarding culturally preferred foods, non-Christian religious holiday foods, dietary preferences, and other needs that cause clients to travel to multiple pantries in a single day.
- **Internal Communication:** Enable and encourage close contact between Food Pantry Network members for resource sharing, proactive schedule coordination, and knowledge sharing about non-traditional, high-demand items.
- **External Communication:** Coordinate and manage a client-facing guide with information on which food and staple items are available at which pantries. Coordinate and manage a food donor-facing guide with information on which food and staple items are accepted at which pantries.
- **Workforce Development:** Work to create more paid positions for food pantry volunteers.
- **Transportation:** Coordinate transportation to and from member pantries for clients, especially clients with limited mobility.

Read the full account of the focus group: <https://mapc.sharefile.com/d-s875e8d0e75fa4d59993276f87412a94a>

each other. Infrastructure needs included larger food pantry distribution and storage spaces. Operational needs included solutions to increase client access and dignity: extended operational hours and days; models that allow clients

to select food items (rather than having prescribed or pre-bagged foods); ensuring space allows clients to wait inside the building (rather than in a line outside the building); providing complementary services (i.e., housing, legal, nutrition education) at food pantries; and providing free rides to pantries. The food pantry assessment presents a set of recommendations that address many of these needs.

Grocery Delivery

Through its **Healthy Eats Home Delivery Program**, Food For Free delivers groceries bi-monthly to eligible Cambridge residents who face barriers to accessing food pantries because of age, illness, or disability, and do not have relatives or caretakers who would otherwise be able to assist with groceries. Grocery boxes are delivered twice monthly to participants, which supports them in cooking meals at home. The Healthy Eats Home Delivery program served 160 clients before the pandemic, and now serves about 400 clients.

For 15 weeks in the spring of 2020, Food For Free provided grocery deliveries to nearly 2,300 Cambridge households who lost access to food programs via the **COVID-19 Relief Grocery Delivery** program.

Food For Free responded to the need caused by COVID for increased grab-n-go style grocery boxes by creating the **Just**

Eats Grocery Box program during the pandemic. There was also a need for accessible distribution locations, while not complicating or adding infrastructure to locations where food-insecure residents reside. Just Eats boxes contained about 25 lb. of fresh produce, as well as a protein and a grain. These boxes were dropped in bulk year-round and weekly to multiple locations throughout Cambridge, including several low-income housing sites in partnership with Cambridge Housing Authority as well as Homeowner's Rehab, Inc. Sites include Walden Square Apartments, Roosevelt Towers, Newtowne Court, Inman Square, Columbia Terrace, Memorial Drive, and Corcoran Park.

School and Summer Markets

Cambridge Public Schools and Food For Free partner to run six food markets at CPS schools, that distribute free, fresh and shelf-stable food to anyone in the eight school communities served and surrounding neighbors.⁴⁵ These "**School Markets**" function as food pantries, but look like farmers markets, and many may also share recipes and food samples. Several also connect parents with other resources and services, like clothing, fuel assistance, and WIC. The markets meet people where they are and make it easy for families to pick up healthy nutritious food during their usual schedules picking up their kids from school.

The format of the School Markets has changed due to the pandemic, and **Just Eats Grocery Boxes** are now offered monthly as a grab and go option to students and their families. These boxes are no longer offered to the general community, but only to students and their families. These boxes are distributed outside at schools, and parents may pick up a

45 Cambridge Public Schools, "Feeding Families, Feeding Minds": <https://www.cpsd.us/cms/one.aspx?portalId=3042869&pageId=32432084>

grocery box at the site most convenient to them. Supplies from the Greater Boston Food Bank during the pandemic have been limited, and as such the grocery boxes do not have the variety the School Markets did pre-COVID.

Prior to the pandemic, Food For Free ran outdoor food pantries, called “**Summer Markets**”. These operated when school was out of session and were open to the whole community. In 2019 nine Summer Markets were held at 6 locations. With the pandemic shutdown, Summer Markets were modified, and instead, Just Eats Grocery Boxes were offered in 2020 and 2021.

Cambridge School Markets (pre-pandemic)

- G&P Market serves Graham and Park Elementary School
- K-Lo Market serves Kennedy-Longfellow Elementary and Cambridge Street Upper Schools
- MLK Market serves Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary and Putnam Avenue Upper Schools
- Peabody Market serves Peabody Elementary School and Rindge Avenue Upper Campus.
- FMA Market
- Falcons Food Project is a food pantry that serves Cambridge Rindge and Latin School

Meals and Groceries Recommendation:

- 1) Secure more funding for capital and operational costs for food pantries and other emergency food providers.
 - a) Prioritize establishing paid food pantry positions. The Food Pantry Network should begin by exploring funding sources, on behalf of its pantry members.
 - b) Expand school operational and staff capacity to meet the food needs of students and their families, in coordination with programs like the Food For Free School Markets. Food For Free and school partners should begin by exploring funding sources for this.
 - c) Seek grant funding to expand storage and refrigeration capacity or other infrastructural needs of food pantries through the Massachusetts Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program,⁴⁶ or similar programs.
- 2) Support collaboration between Cambridge food pantries and emergency food providers through the Food Pantry Network.
 - a) Provide CEOC with funding to coordinate the Food Pantry Network.
 - b) Coordinate implementation of the CEOC Food Pantry Evaluation
 - c) The Food Pantry Network should continue to provide bulk purchasing and storage services, which member food pantries find valuable, and it should expand the work of the Network relative to the members’ interests.
 - d) Convene the Food Pantry Network on a quarterly basis and as needed, to facilitate greater coordination, collaboration, and knowledge sharing (i.e., regarding

46 Mass.gov, “Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program”: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/food-security-infrastructure-grant-program>

client choice models, online ordering systems.)⁴⁷ Use these meetings as a forum to discuss and inform parallel efforts, like the Cambridge Community Health Improvement Plan.

- e) Offer paid trainings to food pantry volunteers and staff that build transferrable skills.
 - f) Regularly update the Food Resource Guide and disseminate it to food pantries, school family liaisons, housing resident coordinators and Food For Free truck drivers. Translate this guide into priority languages. This will require coordination between CPHD, which updates and manages the guide, and the food pantry manager, who are responsible for providing updated information. CPHD can lead translation of the guide into priority languages. All parties described here should help disseminate the guide.
 - g) Create a shared file listing the items food pantries offer or need, so that distributors can better meet the inventory needs of pantries, and so that food pantry clients can know what is available at food pantries. This list should be updated regularly, and should be formatted as a public facing document, and as an internal document for coordination.
- 3) Remove transportation barriers in emergency food efforts.

- a) Increase free and simple transportation options to food pantries and meal sites for residents.
 - b) Explore a mobile food pantry model for Cambridge, including funding, operationalization, maintenance and where it would be housed.
 - c) Create dedicated parking spots or provide emergency food delivery vehicles with parking permits so that they can provide reliable and efficient deliveries and distribution.
 - d) Site new food pantries or meal sites in accessible locations, prioritizing access to public transit, distribution across the City, and proximity to housing developments.
- 4) Remove barriers to accessing hot meals, and ensure that those without kitchens, unable to cook, or those unable to get to community meal sites can access prepared meals.
- a) Increase resources for home-delivered meals.
 - b) Conduct an evaluation of the City program that contracted restaurants to prepare hot meals for homeless shelters, and apply lessons learned to continue to meet the food access needs of homeless individuals.

⁴⁷ The Open Door's food pantries in Ipswich and Gloucester have recently established an online ordering option. The Salem News, "Food pantry launches online ordering system": https://www.salemnews.com/news/local_news/food-pantry-launches-online-ordering-system/article_5628bf7c-7a60-5593-951c-6c4545f9a708.html

Implementation

Developing the Cambridge Food Action Plan

The Cambridge Food Action Plan (hereafter “CFAP”) was developed through a process led by the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council (FFPC). The Food Planning Task Force was established as a subcommittee of the FFPC to guide the planning process. Members of the Food Planning Task Force are staff of Cambridge municipal departments, non-profit organizations, and residents. The Cambridge Public Health Department convenes the FFPC, which facilitated the planning process with the Food Planning Task Force. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) served as the planning technical assistance provider.

Food Planning Task Force

In the development of the Cambridge Food Action Plan, the role of the Food Planning Task Force was to advise on the FFPC food planning efforts to identify data and reports, report on work accomplished in Cambridge, identify qualitative and quantitative gaps, assist in engaging stakeholders, and develop recommendations for the City’s food system and food environment. A brief update is regularly provided to the FFPC.

Members of the work group were drawn from the FFPC with additional topic expert members depending on content area or lived experience and expertise.

Member Name	Organization or City Department
Dawn Olcott	Cambridge Public Health Department
Rachael Cross	Cambridge Public Health Department
Brad Pillen	Cambridge Public Health Department
Sandra Fairbank	Food and Fitness Policy Council resident member
Stephanie Smith	Food For Free
Amy Meyers	Mass Farmers Markets
Steven Nutter	Green Cambridge, Inc.
Cameron Ingram	Mass Farmers Markets
Tina Alu	Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee
Mellissa Honeywood	Cambridge Public Schools, Food Service Director
Christina DiLisio	City of Cambridge, Economic Development Specialist

Engagement Strategy

In addition to the Food Planning Task Force, the CFAP was informed by a range of stakeholders. The following table outlines the community engagement strategy and timeline. The community engagement plan included three (3) focus groups, four (4) informational interviews, and collecting feedback from three (3) meetings of the Food Planning Task Force. The CFAP also included coordination meetings with partners and allied groups.

Purpose	Methods	Who	When
Solicit Input on Current Conditions, Needs and Opportunities	Meeting #1	Food Planning Task Force	June 8
	Focus Group #1: Urban Ag	Community Gardeners and Farmers and Community Program manager	October 13
	Meeting #2	Food Planning Task Force	October 6
	Focus Group #2 - Food Pantry Systems	Those involved in the food pantry assessment; explore upstream interventions.	November 16
Solicit Input on the Draft Recommendations and Identify Implementers of Recommendations	Interview	Urban Agriculture: Steven Nutter, Green Cambridge, Inc.	November 12
	Interview	Early Childhood: Director of Birth to 3 rd Grade: Lisa Grant, Megan Postal	November 17
	Interview	Urban Agriculture: Jen Letourneau, City of Cambridge, Community Gardens	November 19
	Focus Group #3 - Neighborhood Food Environment	Agenda for Children, Literacy Ambassadors.	December 9
	Interview	Emergency Food Systems: Tina Alu, Stephanie Smith, Brad Pillen, Dawn Olcott	December 10
	Meeting #3	Food Planning Task Force	December 14

Reviews of preliminary drafts were ongoing between MAPC and CPHD, the Food Planning Task Force, interviewees, and other expert informants.

Reviewer	Affiliation
Amy Myers	Mass Farmers Markets
Jen Letourneau	City of Cambridge, Community Gardens
Steven Nutter	Green Cambridge, Inc., Executive Director
Stephanie Smith	Food For Free
Meghan Ostrander	Director of Nutrition, Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services
Christina DiLisio	City of Cambridge, Economic Development Specialist
Barbara MacEachern	Cambridge STEAM Initiative, program quality manager
Melissa Honeywood	Cambridge Public Schools, Food Service Director
Brad Pillen	Cambridge Public Health Department
Dawn Olcott	Cambridge Public Health Department
Susan Pacheco	Cambridge Council on Aging, Director
Lisa Grant	Birth to 3 rd Grade Partnership
Meghan Postal	Birth to 3 rd Grade Partnership

Implementing the Cambridge Food Action Plan

The CFAP will be implemented through the coordination of and engagement by a range of stakeholders that share interests in promoting a healthier and more just food system in the City.

The Food Planning Task Force will remain active in support of The CFAP implementation. The CFAP's recommendations, in part, identify the stakeholders that should be engaged in their implementation. Additional stakeholders are welcome to join the implementation process.

As of the writing of the CFAP, a few processes and partners have been identified through which implementation will happen. Additional avenues for implementation can also be pursued.

Cambridge Health Improvement Plan

Adopted in 2021, the Cambridge Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is a five-year roadmap that partners from across the city use to improve the community's health and wellbeing. (The 2021 CHIP is the second such plan; the first CHIP was adopted in 2015.) Cambridge's 2021 CHIP focuses on three goals identified as most important to residents:

- **Community & Social Resilience** - Foster an equitable community for all that, during difficult times, can prepare, respond, recover, and thrive.
- **Healthy Eating & Active Living** - Make sure Cambridge is a city where ALL people can access and enjoy safe, healthy, and affordable foods and physically active lives that celebrate our diverse cultures and needs.
- **Mental Health** - Make sure that all Cambridge residents have equitable access to knowledge, education, and services to protect, support and advance mental wellness.

The strategies and actions of the Healthy Eating & Active Living goal align with recommendations of the CFAP regarding food pantries, farmers markets, food security, and tap water access. The FFPC, which serves as the Healthy Eating & Active Living working group of the CHIP, is implementing the Healthy Eating & Active Living strategy and actions.

The CFAP recommendations should be integrated with the implementation of the CHIP Healthy Eating & Active Living priority area. Ideas for coordinated implementation follow:

- The FFPC can review and identify the recommendations of the CFAP that have alignment with the CHIP Healthy Eating & Active Living goal. Aligned CFAP recommendations will then be prioritized for the coming year and integrated into the CHIP Year 3 Action Plan. This process can be repeated

in subsequent years of CHIP implementation. The FFPC should strongly consider prioritizing the following recommendations from the Cambridge Food Retail section, as ones that would promote equitable food access:

- Recommendation 1: Prioritize The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods when making improvements to healthy and affordable food access.
 - Recommendation 3: Improve healthy and affordable food availability within The Port and Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods
- The FFPC will seek to advance equity in their work and in implementation. The prioritization process will assess recommendations for their potential to advance equity. This can be guided by the work of the CHIP Health Equity Champion, and through engagement of residents and Community Based Organizations (which can be offered a stipend for their engagement.)

Cambridge Public Health Department Mass in Motion Program

The Cambridge Public Health Department manages Cambridge’s Mass in Motion (MiM) Program grant, which currently ends in July 2022. An application for continuation is being submitted. MiM is a program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health that promotes healthy eating and active living opportunities in cities and towns throughout Massachusetts. Across Massachusetts, MiM is made up of 27 programs representing 60 cities and towns. Working with a diverse network of partners, MiM grantee communities

implement proven policies and practices to create environments that support healthy eating and physical activity.

The CPHD will include at least three (3) policy recommendations of the CFAP that it will include in its CHIP which will be aligned with future MiM work plans if the grant is renewed in 2022. It will coordinate their implementation as a result of the CHIP action steps.

Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee

The Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee (CEOC) is Cambridge’s anti-poverty agency. Its mission is to “empower people and mobilize resources to fight poverty’s causes and impacts through education and organizing.” Its work over the years has included affordable housing preservation and development; improving access to affordable, quality health care; anti-hunger efforts; building economic equality for families to move out of poverty; and fostering community leadership and civic engagement by impacted people. It is a multi-service organization that works with its clients to assess their needs holistically, providing coordinated, bundled services that respond to their needs, which is an approach that is considered a best practice. Among its anti-hunger services, it is a SNAP outreach and enrollment agency, it operates two food pantries, and coordinates the Cambridge Food Pantry Network.

In its 2018-2020 strategic plan, CEOC identified the following anti-hunger strategies to work toward its goal, “Individuals have increased access to nutritious healthy food.”

- CEOC will secure city food funding to purchase food for the members of the Cambridge Food Pantry Network and the school pantries (\$151,000 in 2018; \$165,000 in 2019; \$175,000 in 2020).
- CEOC will operate the CEOC Food Pantry to provide nutritious food to pantry patrons. (Households: 1,900 in 2018; 1,900 in 2019, and 2,000 in 2020).
- CEOC will provide SNAP outreach, education, enrollment, and follow-up advocacy (Households: 100 in 2018, 115 in 2019, and 125 in 2020).

CEOC's work aligns with several of the recommendations of the CFAP, particularly those in the Emergency Food System Section. CEOC is an active entity in the work to address food insecurity in Cambridge, and an important partner in implementing the CFAP.

Food Pantry Network

The Food Pantry Network, convened by the CEOC, serves to facilitate bulk purchasing of foods for food pantries. It includes 10 member food pantries and emergency food providers. In 2021, a Food Pantry Assessment was completed that articulated recommendations for systems, infrastructure, and operational challenges and needs that food pantries face. The food pantry focus group conducted as a part of the CFAP built on this assessment and sought to better understand 1) how its members value the services of the Food Pantry Network, 2) what their interests were in expanded services and activities, and 3) opportunities for greater collaboration.

The Emergency Food System section of the CFAP synthesizes the interests of the Food Pantry Network members and makes

recommendations for the Food Pantry Network. The Food Pantry Network will work with its members and partners in implementation of these recommendations.

Food For Free

Food For Free works to improve access to healthy food through a combination of food rescue, transportation services, and grocery and meal distribution programs through partners that bring food to students, seniors, and others most at risk of hunger. Food For Free” serves Cambridge and Somerville, while their food rescue and transportation services expand out to Arlington, Boston, Chelsea, Lynn, Malden, Medford, Revere, and Watertown. Its efforts in Cambridge are described in greater detail in the assessment.

Food For Free's work aligns with several of the recommendations of the CFAP, particularly those in the Emergency Food System Section. Food For Free is an active entity in the work to address food insecurity in Cambridge, and an important partner in implementing the CFAP.

Urban Agriculture

The **City of Cambridge**, **Cambridge Public Health Department**, and **Green Cambridge** are active in efforts within Cambridge to promote opportunities for growing food. In the CFAP's planning efforts, they have been key partners and informants of the urban agriculture assessment and are eager to engage with each other and other stakeholders and partners in urban agriculture recommendations.

Open Space Recreation Plan

In September 2021, the City of Cambridge started a planning process to guide its work around parks and open spaces. Through this process, the City will update its Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Once its seven (7) year OSRP is approved by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Cambridge will be eligible for open space grant funding.

Community gardens and growing spaces are elements of Cambridge parks and open spaces. The CFAP recommendations

regarding urban agriculture seek to inform maintaining, improving, and expanding these public resources.

The OSRP planning process includes engagement activities, through which it seeks to solicit community feedback on their interests and priorities. It will also include data collection through other sources and analysis to inform the plan development.

Where there are opportunities, stakeholders will engage in the OSRP planning process to facilitate integration of the CFAP recommendations regarding urban agriculture.

Appendices

The Cambridge Food Action Plan (CFAP) Appendices are a digital resource library that can be accessed [here](#).

Descriptions of each resource included in the Appendices follow. **Clicking on the document titles will link you directly to the resource.**

[A. Recommendations Cambridge Food Action Plan](#)

A compilation of all recommendations included in CFAP, related to the following sections:

- Neighborhood Food Environment
 - Cambridge Food Retail
 - Farmers Market
 - Urban Agriculture
- City and CPHD Best Practices
 - Drinking Water
 - Nutrition Standards
- Food Programs for Youth
 - Early Childhood Programs
 - Out-of-School Programming
- Food Programs for Seniors
- Emergency Food System
 - SNAP
 - Meals and Groceries

[B. Workbook Cambridge Food Action Plan](#)

An implementation aid for the CFAP recommendations.

Download and edit this template to collaborate with partners in assigning a Lead, Support, Timeline, Resources, and Priority for each CFAP recommendation.

[C. Cambridge Food Resource Guide](#)

An October 2021 version of the Cambridge Food Resource

Guide, which lists active emergency food resources in Cambridge. It includes the operating hours of food pantries and meal sites, a description of the Food For Free Home Delivery Program, and contact information for SNAP, WIC, older adult nutrition and meals services, and other food assistance resources.

D. Cambridge Urban Agriculture Recommendations from Aligned Sources

Compilation of recommendations related to urban agriculture in Cambridge from groups and processes preceding the CFAP, including the Health Lens Analysis of Urban Agriculture in Cambridge, the Cambridge Plant and Garden Club, the Cambridge Open Space and Recreation Plan (2009-2016), and the Curriculum Ideas for a Classroom Farm at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School.

E. About Food & Activity OST Guidelines

An informational flier describing the rationale and process behind the Cambridge Out of School Time Food & Activity Guidelines and providing additional resources.

F. Food & Activity OST Guidelines

Cambridge's Out of School Time Food & Activity Guidelines.

G. Cambridge in Motion Birth to Third Grade Nutrition & Physical Activity Guidelines

Cambridge in Motion's nutrition and physical activity guidelines for children from birth to grade 3. Includes an introduction and guidance aimed at the following groups: Infants Ages 0 – 12 months, Older Infants and Toddlers Ages 12 – 36 months, Preschoolers Ages 3 – 5 years, out of school time guidelines for Elementary School: Kindergarten – 3rd Grade, and parents packing lunches.

H. Tip Sheet: Food and Nutrition During COVID-19

Tips to support safe and healthy child nutrition during COVID-19 for caregivers, educators, childcare centers, and schools. Tip sheet was created by Cambridge in Motion and aligns with requirements from the MA Department of Early Education and Care (EEC).

I. Tip Sheet: Physical Activity During COVID-19

Tips to support safe child physical activity during COVID-19 for caregivers, educators, childcare centers, and schools. Tip sheet was created by Cambridge in Motion and aligns with requirements from the MA Department of Early Education and Care (EEC).

J: Tip Sheet: Supporting Breastfeeding During COVID-19

Tips to support a positive breastfeeding environment during COVID-19 for caregivers and childcare centers. Tip sheet was created by Cambridge in Motion and aligns with requirements from the MA Department of Early Education and Care (EEC).

K. HEAL Flyer: International Flavors Program

An informational flier published by Cambridge in Motion describing a collaboration between Cambridge Public Schools Food & Nutrition Services and the Cambridge Public Health Department to bring culturally diverse recipes to the school lunch program.

L. HEAL Flyer: Building on Healthy Habits

An informational flier published by Cambridge in Motion describing healthy school meal practices typically undertaken by Cambridge Public Schools. The flier contains QR codes for further information and a recipe example.

M. Community Agriculture Focus Group Summary & Facilitation Guide

A summary of the Community Agriculture Focus Group that was one component of the CFAP's community engagement process. This focus group informed the urban agriculture discussion and recommendations in the Neighborhood Food Environment section. The focus group facilitation guide is also included.

N. Food Pantry System Focus Group Summary & Facilitation Guide

A summary of the Food Pantry System Focus Group that was one component of the CFAP's community engagement process. This focus group informed the food pantry network discussion and recommendations in the Emergency Food System section. The focus group facilitation guide is also included.

O. Neighborhood Food Environment Focus Group Summary & Facilitation Guide

A summary of the Neighborhood Food Environment Focus Group that was one component of the CFAP's community engagement process. This focus group informed the food retail discussion and recommendations in the Neighborhood Food Environment section. The focus group facilitation guide is also included.

P. An Analysis of the Cambridge Food Environment

A 2020 report analyzing primary survey data on available food retail and grocery shopping in Cambridge neighborhoods. Findings relate to food affordability, food quality, the Combined Food Access Score, and interactions between food access, historical redlining, and environmental justice. The recommendations of this report inform the Neighborhood Food Environment section of the CFAP. This report was authored by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, in partnership with the Cambridge Department of Public Health and the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council (<https://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/policy-practice/Food-Fitness-Policy-Council/Publications-Videos.php>).