# MEMORANDUM

**To:**    **Twin Cities Metro Area Healthy Communities Planning Project Team**

**From:** **Anna Crouch and Matthew Gabb, Research Assistants**
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**Re:**    **Indicator Analysis:  Food Access**
         **Healthy Communities Planning Project**

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**Indicator: Food Access**

The following discussion includes key findings and analysis of the reviewed comprehensive plans regarding the food access health indicator. The Project Team defined food access as policies and goals which "[promote] local food production and healthy food retail." These goals also encompass policies and programs related to urban agriculture, community gardens, food shelves/pantries/banks, food (in)security, farmers markets, and small-scale local food production.

**Overall Takeaways**

In total, 32 of the studied communities have food access as part of their comprehensive plan. When taken as a whole, these communities approach food access either through **food production**, which allows residents to cultivate their own healthy foods, or through **food distribution**, which makes it easier for residents to reach places where they can afford to purchase healthy foods. Communities who create goals and policies around both food production and distribution tend to earn higher scores. Additionally, urban communities were more likely to address equity in their plans' approach to food access.

### *Food Production through Community Gardens*

Almost every community that discusses food access in their comprehensive plan has created a policy around food production. One of the most popular ways to create opportunities for resident food production is through community gardens. **Oakdale** and **Maplewood** will both "[s]upport the establishment and maintenance of community gardens throughout the City to provide residents with easy access to healthy food" (Oakdale, 65; Maplewood, 9-165). Some communities, such as **Bloomington**, are more specific, and will "[i]dentify potential locations to create new community gardens, particularly in higher density neighborhoods" (Bloomington, 2.49).

### *Food Distribution*

Policy around food distribution was less common and more varied than goals around food production. Some communities focused on development, like **Columbia Heights,** which will "[s]upport development patterns that decrease the distance between households and healthy retail food options" (Columbia Heights, 32). Other places focus on transportation to food, like **Lake Elmo**, which states "[c]onnection and ease of access are essential components to this objective, so pedestrian, bikeways and other routes to locations with fresh products is important to consider as the City develops and evolves" (Lake Elmo, 3-27). Still others aim to create and attract more grocery stores in areas that are currently poorly serviced. **Minneapolis** demonstrates this by "[taking] proactive steps to attract new grocery stores to locations in low-income communities, including providing financial and technical support for grocery store expansion, remodeling or equipment upgrades," as well as "[building] constructive relationships with store owners to foster improvements in healthy food offerings, as well as to extend general assistance in business planning and technical support" (Minneapolis, 202).

*Equity*

While there were no unifying themes in how different types of communities approach equity in healthy food access, urban communities focus on a few different aspects of how income makes food more or less accessible. These urban equity approaches are discussed in more detail in the community designation section.

## Interesting and Innovative Approaches

Some of the most interesting approaches communities take to address food access include planning for food access around the effects of a changing environment and improving alternative transportation to food sources. Also, in suburban areas, there is an interest in expanding new restaurants.

*Extreme Weather and Climate Change*

Golden Valley and Mahtomedi both recognize that extreme weather and its increasing frequency might have a direct impact on food supplies. **Golden Valley** indicates that "[e]xtreme weather in other parts of the country and the world may have local impacts on the economy of Golden Valley. Changing growing seasons, drought, and heavy rains may impact agriculture, driving up the costs of purchasing food, or making certain foods unavailable" (Golden Valley, 7-16). **Mahtomedi** also realizes that "[c]limate change poses a substantial threat to health, prosperity and security," naming "[t]hreats to food and water supplies" as issues that "put the community's economy, infrastructure, public safety, and health at risk" (Mahtomedi, 131). While these communities do not name strategies for overcoming the difficulties, **St. Louis Park** suggests "[incorporating] diverse cultures into natural resources through community gardens" to "maintain the natural environment of the city" (St. Louis Park, 4-72).

*Food Access and Alternative Transportation*

Some communities also take innovative approaches to improve transportation as part of food access. While some, such as **Bloomington**, have goals to "[e]nhance pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to farmers markets and community gardens in Bloomington" (Bloomington, 2.49), others go beyond this. **Vadnais Heights**, for example, specifically calls out ride sharing services and wants to "revisit the current codes to ensure that ride sharing and taxi services are allowed and will ensure that pedestrian and cyclist routes to sources of healthy foods are accessible and in good condition" (Vadnais Heights, 110). **Maplewood's** plan connects the quality of the sidewalk system to food access. The city states that it will "[a]nalyze and address sidewalk and trail gaps near food stores, hunger relief programs, farmers markets, community gardens, and other healthy food sources" (Maplewood, 9-166).

*New Restaurants*

Suburban communities show an interest in encouraging the development of new restaurants. **Eden Prairie** sees "[incentivizing] new restaurants and food suppliers that focus on quality nutrition" as a way "to increase access to healthy foods and promote healthy eating habits throughout the City" (Eden Prairie, 30). **Shakopee** is interested in the economic impacts of "[embracing] new, expanded and/or evolved

businesses which provide interest, entertainment, or unique experiences, such as breweries, local food, rooftop or outdoor dining, independent shops and restaurants" (Shakopee, 68).

## Ranking Analysis

Each community received a score of 1 to 4 on the food access indicator, which ranks it on the extent to which healthy food access is incorporated into its comprehensive plan. If a community scored a 1, that means there is "no mention of improving access to healthy food options." A score of 2 demonstrates that the community mentions improving access to healthy food options in the body of the plan but does not include goals and policies to this end. Level 3 plans include goals and/or policies to address access to healthy food. Communities with the highest score of 4 must include goals and policies in their plans, notably through land use policies that promote healthy food access AND dedicate resources to implementation. The number of communities to receive each score was:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Level 1** | 17 communities |
| **Level 2** | 12 communities |
| **Level 3** | 13 communities |
| **Level 4** | 7   communities |

Differences in themes and focus across the ranking levels show what different communities rely on to provide healthy food access to all their residents. Lower scoring communities tend to outsource the responsibility of healthy food access to other programs/partners such as non-profits, while higher scoring communities focus more on local government policies that make healthy food easier to access, often considering how populations in the community differ regarding current access.

### *Level 1*

Of the 17 communities that have a score of 1, six rural and suburban communities discuss preserving agricultural zoning or land, without connection to food access. The other eleven do not discuss healthy food access at all.

### *Level 2*

Communities that received a score of 2 on this indicator **mention improving access to healthy food options in the body of the plan**, **but do not include goals and policies to this end**.

#### Access Through Programming

In level 2 communities, places like Plymouth and Minnetonka Beach rely on external programming to provide access to food. **Minnetonka Beach** specifically discuss food access for seniors, "[encouraging] other programs that will allow older people to remain in their homes as long as possible including […] home delivered meals, groceries" (Minnetonka Beach, 82). **Plymouth** focuses on "the establishment of nutrition programs that will educate and encourage healthy eating habits" (Plymouth, Appendix 7A: 34).

### *Level 3*

A ranking of 3 on this indicator means that the **plan includes goals and/or policies to address access to healthy food.** Because policies and goals are made in these plans and access to healthy food is not just mentioned in passing, there is a greater variety of policy themes for these communities, including allowing mobile food distribution, supporting chicken keeping by residents, and encouraging local food operations generally, as well as promoting farmers' markets.

#### Supporting Mobile Food Distribution

In an effort to make food easier to get to, some communities are supporting mobile food distribution. **Eden Prairie**'s mobile food distribution takes the form of prepared meals through "the Live Well food truck, a mobile extension of the Community Center's cafeteria. The food truck provides healthy, freshly cooked meals to the public in various public locations around the City" (Eden Prairie, 30). Other cities, such as Shakopee and Columbia Heights, are providing groceries through mobile markets. **Shakopee** intends to use mobile markets as a farmers' market (Shakopee, 364), and **Columbia Heights** explicitly points out why mobile markets may assist with equitable, healthy food access stating that, "innovative practices such as mobile food markets and mobile food pantries/shelves [...] bring food closer to under-resourced consumers" (Columbia Heights, 32).

#### Encouraging Local Food Production

Level 3 communities also focus on encouraging local food production, including the raising of animals such as chickens. For example, one of **Golden Valley**'s policies is to "[p]romote local food production, sales, and consumption by reviewing City Codes to remove barriers for urban farming" (Golden Valley, 7-25). Both **Shakopee** and **Mahtomedi** either have or will have ordinances to permit chicken keeping within the area, with Shakopee extending the list of animals to "goats and bees in specified residential neighborhoods" (Shakopee, 364). **St. Anthony Village** is considering an ordinance that "more clearly allows and regulates urban agriculture, specifically bees and chickens" (St. Anthony Village, 181).

#### Promoting Farmers Market & Local Foods

Finally, level 3 communities are also partnering with local organizations to promote farmers markets and other means of purchasing local foods. **Vadnais Heights** has a goal to "[p]artner with the local organizations to promote food security and public health by encouraging and supporting locally-based food production and distribution, the farmers market and community gardens" (Vadnais Heights, 70). **St. Anthony Village** wants to "[s]upport access to local foods through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and farmers markets" (St. Anthony Village, 181).

### *Level 4*

To score a 4 for this indicator, communities must **include goals and policies in their plans, notably through land use policies that promote healthy food access AND dedicate resources to implementation.** This category shows the widest diversity of policy approaches. Communities focus on

decreasing the distance to healthy food purchases (through transportation planning, land use, and collaboration with local store owners); reducing income barriers to food access; encouraging local food production through urban agriculture ordinances; and creating food security assessments.

### Transportation Planning & Food Access

In order to decrease the distance to healthy food purchases, many plans discuss how transportation planning can assist with the goal of increasing access to healthy food. **Burnsville** indicates that "transportation planning should complement land use planning to increase access to food systems" (Burnsville, 7-401). Other cities, like **Maplewood**, use land use planning to achieve this goal by "[supporting] development patterns that decrease the distance between households and healthy retail food options" (Maplewood, 9-165).

### Collaborating with Business Owners on Healthy Retail

To ensure healthy food is sold near all residents, some cities collaborate with store owners to make sure they are selling healthy food. **Belle Plaine** will "[i]dentify mechanisms to support existing grocery stores while encouraging upgrades in the prominence and marketing of healthy foods they offer" (Belle Plaine, 2-10), and **Minneapolis** aims to "support food-related businesses to improve access to healthy food and advance economic development" (Minneapolis, 204).

### Implementing Urban Agriculture Ordinances

A theme that persists from level 3 communities is the focus on local food production, especially through implementing urban agriculture ordinances. For example, **Burnsville** intends to "[c]ontinue implementation of ordinances and/or zoning district standards that permit Urban Agriculture and local food producers" (Burnsville, 2-113). **Belle Plaine** focuses on food production in residential areas "by encouraging backyard gardening, authorizing community gardens on public property, and expanding the range of allowable urban farming activities" (Belle Plaine, 9-11). **Minneapolis** is a good example of cities who expand scope to think about larger and sometimes commercial food production by "[supporting] tools, structures and processes used in urban agriculture and local food production, such as greenhouses, infrastructure for extending growing seasons, and on-site processing of products through regulatory changes" (Minneapolis, 206).

### Collecting Data on Food Access

Finally, many level 4 communities were interested in collecting data on food access and security through assessments to see where further work and policy is needed. **Osseo** believes that "participation in future regional community food security assessments and planning efforts will allow the community to better understand its residents' ability to access fresh and healthy food" (Osseo, 21). **St. Louis Park** will use their "detailed study to assess food accessibility and security in the community, and determine if there are any gaps" (St. Louis Park, 7-275).

**Community Designation Analysis**

All 49 plans, representing 51 communities, reviewed in the project were sorted into one of three main designations: urban, suburban, or rural. The project researchers analyzed these types of communities separately to see if they approach the task of providing healthy food access in different ways that are more specific to their community type. As indicated, below, these larger categories are combinations of the more narrowly defined categories the Metropolitan Council uses to distinguish communities. The urban category is made up of urban center and urban communities, while the suburban category is made up of towns that Met Council defines as suburban, suburban edge, and emerging suburban edge communities. The rural category is a combination of rural center, diversified rural, rural residential, and agricultural communities.

### *Urban*

Urban communities are the most likely to tackle food access and security in their comprehensive plans, as well as the most likely to consider equity when planning for food access.

#### Equity — Acknowledging Current Inequity

Many urban communities that incorporate equity in their plans start by acknowledging the inequity that currently exists in their city. **Richfield**, for example, notes that within the city, "21.5% of […] higher risk families with children under 5 in the home were food insecure" (Richfield, 35). **Maplewood** does not provide city-specific statistics, but names that "access to services in not the same for all individuals due to a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, age, income, language, and abilities" (Maplewood, 30).

#### Equity — Food and Health Disparities

Urban communities also tend to discuss how lack of access to healthy food leads to a few different health disparities, such as disease, poor nutrition, obesity, and climate vulnerability. For example, **Maplewood** points out that "[f]ostering healthy communities through better access to local, healthy foods will strengthen Maplewood's vulnerable populations and reduce the impact of climate related events" (Maplewood, 9-153). **Minneapolis** wants to "continue healthy-living and disease-prevention activities, including the promotion of equitable access to and distribution of healthy food sources" (Minneapolis, 29). Meanwhile, **Richfield** acknowledges that while "[i]t is particularly important to address food insecurity in low income children and adults to address poor nutrition and prevent obesity […food] insecurity is just one example of a health inequity that impacts Richfield" (35).

#### Equity — Acknowledging Income's Role in Food Access

Urban communities also include an acknowledgement that lower incomes make healthy food harder to access. **Maplewood**'s goal is to "[c]reate a healthy, walkable community by providing healthy food options and accessibility for all people, regardless of income" (Maplewood, 9-165). **Minneapolis** names low income as a barrier to healthy food access: "[t]he link between economic and social inequities and

health disparities is also clearly evident in the issue of access to healthy food. Insufficient income is one of two primary barriers to healthy food access" (Minneapolis, 28).

## Residential Food Production & Urban Agriculture

While cities take multiple approaches, across all urban communities one common approach is a focus on finding ways to increase residential food production and urban agriculture. **Osseo**'s plan states that:

> "In addition to primary use as a home, residential properties in Osseo can also be used in producing fresh food.  Residential areas may be used to raise fruit and vegetable crops as well as small and unobtrusive livestock (e.g., chickens or ducks). Food growing opportunities do not need to be limited to residents in single-family homes" (Osseo, 55).

**Golden Valley** mentions it will improve food access through the city code itself to "[p]romote local food production, sales, and consumption by reviewing City Codes to remove barriers for urban farming" (Golden Valley, 7-25).

## Access to Farmers Markets & CSA Drop-Offs

The other approach common to urban communities was to improve access to farmers markets and Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) drop-off sites. While not too specific as to how, **St. Anthony Village**'s plan will "[s]upport access to local foods through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and farmers markets" (St. Anthony Village, 181). **Columbia Heights** uses markets to improve healthy retail options in the city accessible by multiple modes of transit to "[e]ncourage healthy retail food options such as food stores and farmers markets that are located in places easily reached by bus, bike or foot" (Columbia Heights, 32).

### *Suburban*

## Programs & Partnerships to Encourage Healthy Eating

The Metro's suburban communities that address food access do so by relying on programming and partnerships to encourage healthy eating. **Burnsville** is emblematic of this approach, indicating that it would "[c]oordinate with school districts, agencies, entertainment venues and others, such as Burnsville Center and the YMCA, to offer healthy food and recreation alternatives" (Burnsville, 6-315).

**Plymouth** also includes a focus on behavior, by "[enhancing] programs and services that promote and encourage healthy lifestyles for the entire family. Wellness (fitness, health and nutrition) opportunities will be focused on: [...] 3) the establishment of nutrition programs that will educate and encourage healthy eating habits" (Plymouth, Appendix 7A, 34). **Shakopee** takes a more specific approach by leveraging its partnerships with local schools to "[e]ncourage coordination between schools and growers to provide fresh foods to schoolchildren" and to "[e]ncourage partnerships between local restaurants and growers" (Shakopee, 364).

### *Rural*

Many of the rural communities did not include food access at all in their comprehensive plans. Of those that did, many focused specifically on preserving the agricultural land on which to grow food.

#### Preserving Agricultural Land

Those rural communities that include food access have a common goal of preserving agricultural land. **Corcoran** wants to "[s]upport development patterns that preserve agricultural land [and] [e]ncourage landowners to reenroll in agricultural conservation and preservation programs in the non-MUSA area" (Corcoran, 141). **Belle Plaine** is working to "[m]anage urban growth so as to preserve farmland to maintain capacity of local food production" (Belle Plaine, 2-10).