

# HUNGER RELIEF IN LOCAL PLANNING

PLAN GOALS AND ACTIONS

How to  
Create Healthy  
& Equitable  
Local Food  
Systems





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Minnesotans are not on a level playing field when it comes to access to healthy food and dealing with diet-related diseases. Statewide, more than 1.6 million Minnesotans—30% of the state’s population—lack easy access to healthy food.<sup>1</sup>

Proper nutrition is critical for good health, disease prevention, maintaining healthy weight, and overall well-being. Persistent food insecurity and hunger can lead to lower quality of life—in general health, in learning capacity, and in employability.

Local plans can bring together citizens, planners, public health professionals, and policymakers, highlighting the need to create healthy, sustainable food systems that improve access to healthy, affordable foods for all. These plans can influence local zoning policies, investments in public infrastructure, development and redevelopment projects, and other ordinances and regulations impacting the local food environment.

These local plans, and the public processes used to create them, are important tools to address food access and hunger relief. Although alleviating hunger and promoting food security are important parts of a thriving community, these issues are rarely specifically addressed in local plans even though many components of local plans impact these issues. At the same time, there are many ways a local municipality can address hunger and food insecurity in a local plan. How a local plan addresses these issues will depend on the unique needs and context of a local community. The following guide gives specific suggestions on how local municipalities can address hunger relief and food insecurity through planning goals and their implementation.

**FOOD INSECURITY**  
generally refers to a lack of available financial resources for personal or household food.<sup>2</sup>

**HUNGER**  
generally refers to “...a potential consequence of food insecurity that, because of prolonged, involuntary lack of food, results in discomfort, illness, weakness, or pain that goes beyond the usual uneasy sensation.”<sup>3</sup>

## LOCAL PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Local planning documents establish long-term goals for a community, provide direction to decision making through recommendations and guidelines, and lay out a framework for implementation actions to reach the overarching goals.

### LOCAL PLANS CAN INCLUDE:

- Comprehensive plans
- Small-area plans
- Food systems plans
- Active transportation plans, master bicycle and pedestrian plans
- Sustainability plans

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ICON REFERENCE KEY

-  GENERAL PLAN GOALS
-  LAND USE
-  TRANSPORTATION
-  COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
-  PARKS + TRAILS
-  HOUSING
-  RESILIENCY + SUSTAINABILITY
-  ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT





# GENERAL PLAN GOALS

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Local planning efforts can have a significant impact on the ability of residents facing hunger and food insecurity to access affordable, healthy food. Local planning efforts can also affect food access by addressing connections between land use, natural resources, transportation, housing, solid waste, parks and open space, economic development, and other areas of physical development in a community.



## GENERAL PLAN GOALS

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Establish a food policy council, food network, or healthy food coalition.

“Research reveals who we are, where we live, and how much we earn are the biggest factors in how likely we are to have obesity and diet-related chronic diseases; fair economic and social conditions for everyone can change this.”

**Minnesota Food Charter Health Equity Guide**

## POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

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### Develop the Food Council/Network

- 📍 Determine the structure and responsibilities of the council/ network.
- 📍 Ensure council/network mission statement specifically includes reducing food insecurity and hunger in the community as central to its work.
- 📍 Include community members with personal experience with hunger and food insecurity on the food council/network.

### Once the Council/Network is Established

- 📍 Prioritize hunger relief goals for council/network.
- 📍 Engage in collaborative efforts that address the root causes of hunger.
- 📍 Conduct a local food assessment, and identify specific neighborhoods and populations at risk of hunger and food insecurity.
- 📍 Raise awareness of food issues, such as the lack of healthy food retailers and residents unable to access or afford healthy food.
- 📍 Establish a communication pathway between the food council/network and planning department to share information.



## GENERAL PLAN GOALS

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**Incorporate access to healthy food in local planning documents and municipal policies.**

**Support economic development by strengthening local food establishments.**

## POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

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- 📍 Systematically assess the impacts of local plans on under-resourced community members, including low-income households, seniors, college students, new immigrants, and others facing hunger or food insecurity.
- 📍 Create partnerships with direct service organizations, community members experiencing hunger or at risk of food insecurity, and other stakeholders, when identifying goals and implementation steps.

- 📍 Support living-wage jobs and higher minimum wages to support the ability of low-income community members to purchase healthy food.



- 📍 Develop partnerships between local public health, planning, and other local government departments working with low-income families and providing basic needs services.
- 📍 Prioritize health equity and access to healthy food when making land use decisions through zoning and planning.

- 📍 Incentivize culturally appropriate, affordable healthy food outlets, particularly in underserved areas.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark grey top, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is standing in front of a table filled with various fresh vegetables, including green beans, purple onions, and leafy greens. The background is slightly blurred, showing more produce and what appears to be a market or community center setting. The overall tone is warm and positive.

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GOALS

Community development chapters focus on measures that add value and maintain people's interest in living, working, recreating and doing business in a community. Community development activities may support infrastructure, economic development projects, public facilities, community centers, public services, and many other identified needs.



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GOALS

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## POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

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### Remove barriers to use of food assistance programs.

- 📍 Extend the use of EBT/WIC assistance programs at local, healthy food retailers and farmers' markets.
- 📍 Encourage food shelves to replace geographic service boundaries with policies that serve all clients, regardless of address.

- 📍 Collaborate with organizations to further the development of programs that increase the ability of shoppers to use electronic forms of payment at farmers' markets and farm stands.

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### Increase donations of healthy food to food shelves/banks, including culturally appropriate foods.

- 📍 Promote donation of local food through home and community gardens, farmers' markets, and small-scale, collaborative food production initiatives.
- 📍 Coordinate with institutions and food/agricultural non-profit organizations for service delivery and program support.

- 📍 Develop a system for donating wholesome food that will otherwise be unused with local grocers, restaurants, schools, and other venues offering food.





# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GOALS

Local plan goals and implementation activities that integrate economic development, hunger relief, and food insecurity improve both economic indicators and community health.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING GOALS

# POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS



Engage in collaborative efforts that address the root causes of hunger.



- 📍 Create a statement of recognition that lower-wage employees need affordable, healthy food to support a healthy workforce, lower health care costs, and further business and economic development.
- 📍 Include goals that discuss the needs of the aging population and those moving into senior housing developments to have access to healthy, affordable food as an economic development issue.
- 📍 Support innovative food distribution models, including grocery delivery services, reduced-cost mobile markets, and mobile food shelf delivery, through partnerships with local businesses and social service agencies.





# HOUSING PLANNING GOALS

Residents spending 30% or more of their income on housing are considered cost-burdened, which may impact their ability to afford other necessities such as food or reliable transportation.<sup>4</sup> To address this problem, communities can focus on improving access to affordable housing, transit-oriented housing, and mixed-use developments. Locating affordable housing near transit routes, food stores, and other services can improve food security for community members and result in accessible gathering places.



## HOUSING PLANNING GOALS

## POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS



**Ensure grocery stores and farmers' markets are located near housing, or in places easily reached by transit, bicycle, or walking from residential neighborhoods.**

**Support multi-unit housing developments that allow vegetable gardening, mobile food delivery services, and mobile food shelf operations on-site.**

**Prioritize mixed use development throughout the municipal zoning code to support co-locating healthy food outlets with multi-family residential developments and other community services.**

📍 Support the creation and operation of farmers' markets and grocery stores near public, low-income, student, and senior housing developments.

📍 Include incentives for green space, gardening, and healthy food outlets in multi-housing developments.

📍 Assess opportunities to increase mixed-use development in areas with low-income, student, and senior housing developments.

📍 Locate transit routes between multi-family residential developments, social service organizations, and affordable

📍 Assess and map the location of current farmers' markets and grocery stores, and determine their proximity to public, low-income, student, and senior housing to identify sites with low food access.

📍 Allow the use of mobile food retailers and mobile food shelves to bring healthy, affordable food to neighborhoods and housing developments serving low-income communities, seniors, and other residents with limited mobility options.

food retail sources and coordinate transit schedules with those sources' hours of operation.

📍 Include incentives for active transportation, green space, gardening, and healthy food outlets in multi-housing developments.





# LAND USE PLANNING GOALS

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Land use planning provides many opportunities to address hunger and food insecurity because it often focuses on zoning, the location of new housing and commercial developments, and other community amenities. Land use plans can include a wide range of priorities that can improve and support the community food environment by including specific food-related priorities, such as establishing new grocery stores, farmers' markets, and community gardens. Land use plans can also encourage broader community smart growth, mixed-use development, and transit-oriented development.



## LAND USE PLANNING GOALS

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Use land use guidance and regulations to improve local households' proximity to healthy food and support food-related businesses and activities.

Promote food security by encouraging increased local-based food production, distribution, and choice.

Include incentives for active transportation, green space, gardening, and healthy food outlets in planned unit developments.

## POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

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- 📍 Ensure access to healthy, affordable food, through grocery stores, mobile food retail, mobile food shelves, and small-scale food production opportunities in areas slated for redevelopment.
- 📍 Monitor neighborhoods to identify areas with food access challenges due to transportation, income, or other barriers.

- 📍 Support home and community gardens, farmers' markets, and other small-scale, collaborative initiatives.

- 📍 Evaluate the accessibility of healthy food sources by transit, active transportation, or mobile food delivery from these neighborhoods.



- 📍 Streamline the permitting process for grocery stores and other healthy food vendors in underserved areas.
- 📍 Identify areas with limited food retail options and assess any local zoning or other local ordinances that may restrict food retail outlets in these areas.

- 📍 Ensure that local ordinances, permits, and licences allow the sale, processing, and distribution of locally grown food.

- 📍 Prioritize mixed-use development throughout the municipal zoning code to support healthy food outlets with multi-unit family residential developments and other community services.





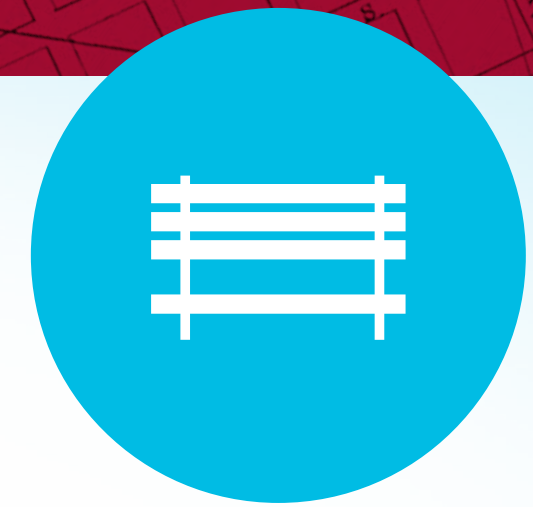
# PARKS AND RECREATION PLANNING GOALS

Parks can increase access to healthy food when they include community gardens, permanent space for farmers' markets, allow mobile food pantries, provide summer food service programs for children and teens,<sup>5</sup> and provide older adult nutrition programs.<sup>6</sup> Both children and the elderly can be very vulnerable to low food access and its effects and may benefit greatly from improved food access in parks and recreation centers due to their high levels of park and recreation center usage.



# PARKS & RECREATION PLANNING GOALS

# POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS



**Support the creation and ongoing operation of farmers' markets in public parks.**

- Assess and map the proximity of current farmers' markets to public, low-income, and senior housing.
- Identify park sites that could be used for farmers' markets.

- Ensure that farmers' markets are accessible by foot, bike, and public transit, and that public transit schedules align with farmers' market hours of operation.

**Develop public, private, and non-profit partnerships to create and sustain local food initiatives.**

- Coordinate with institutions and food/agricultural non-profit organizations for service delivery and program support in parks.

- Offer free or reduced price cooking, food preparation, and gardening classes that teach residents how to prepare and grow healthy foods.

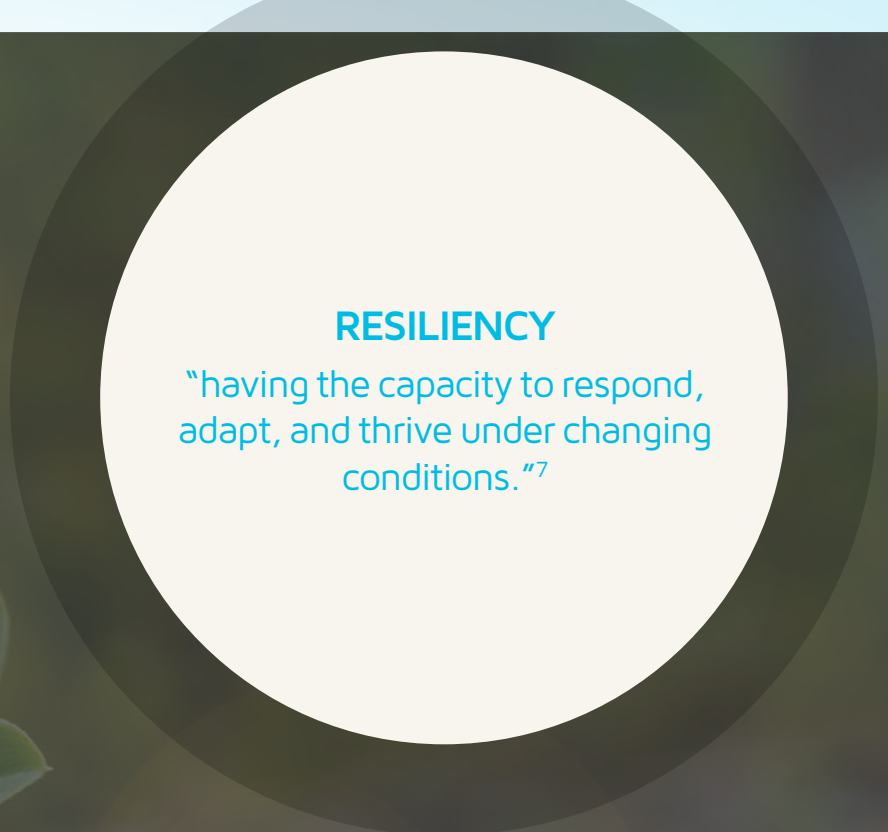
**Prioritize park and recreation programming that helps build and support a sustainable, equitable, and resilient local food system.**

- Allow use of public park property for community gardens.
- Support the creation and ongoing operation of community gardens that are accessible to people of all economic backgrounds.
- Allow and support the establishment of a mobile food pantry in local parks that allows people with low food access to obtain affordable or free healthy food.

- Continue to support the Summer Food Service Program for children and teens. Expand and improve this program to serve as many food insecure youth as possible.
- Ensure that park programs are accessible to people of all income levels.
- Establish older adult nutrition programs to provide food to seniors who may be facing food insecurity.



# RESILIENCY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING GOALS



## RESILIENCY

“having the capacity to respond, adapt, and thrive under changing conditions.”<sup>7</sup>

A resilient food system can adapt to local and global challenges from climate change, urbanization, political and economic challenges, and population growth.<sup>8</sup> Resiliency planning can address both short-term emergency preparedness and other evolving community conditions that can create an increase in food insecurity.

Strong connections between food banks, local government, and community organizations are necessary to ensure that those experiencing hunger have access to food. Equity is an important part of resiliency as community members who are more vulnerable to disasters or changing conditions (such as children, older adults, and people who are homebound) live in areas where there may be more physical and economic barriers to accessing healthy food—barriers that could be even more formidable in the face of

extreme weather events, economic and political changes, and other challenges.

Some local plans weave resiliency and sustainability into each section of the plan, while others have a dedicated resiliency chapter. The Metropolitan Council recommends including a resiliency chapter in local plans, although there are no minimum requirements specified.<sup>9</sup>



# RESILIENCY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING GOALS

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# POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

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Conduct a community food assessment to determine possible vulnerabilities in the community food system.

Strengthen relationships with community organizations to support the most vulnerable residents in the community.

Support food assistance programs.

- 📍 Conduct a baseline food accessibility assessment to determine where food can be acquired and how accessible that food is to all members of the community.
- 📍 Conduct a community survey that addresses the community's experiences with food access, including transportation, availability, and affordability.

📍 Determine whether food pantries/shelves and food banks are currently meeting the hunger relief needs of the community.

📍 Support food pantries/shelves, food banks, mobile food delivery, and school meal services within the community.

- 📍 Complete a Resilience or Emergency Preparedness Plan that includes food access and hunger relief as an element.
- 📍 Identify specific community neighborhoods or populations that may be at increased risk of hunger in the event of a disruption in food supply.

📍 Develop active partnerships among hunger relief organizations, state and local government, retail food vendors and non-profit agencies to increase the number and quality of healthy options available in emergency food settings.<sup>10</sup>

📍 Ensure residents know how to access SNAP, WIC, Free/ Reduced School Lunches, and other food assistance programs.



# RESILIENCY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING GOALS

# POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS



Address the linkages between climate change and food access.

- Ensure food sources are diverse and redundant, meaning there is more than one food source and more than one way for food to get from farm to table.
- Promote a strong, diverse local food economy to protect against food losses that may occur in other parts of the country or world.

- Promote the availability and consumption of local food, which reduces the transportation distance and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Support community gardening programs that allow residents to grow food in their own neighborhoods.

Coordinate local hunger relief planning efforts with regional and state disaster preparedness agencies/organizations.

- Identify and collaborate with local and regional governmental and nonprofit disaster relief agencies to ensure the needs of under-resourced communities are included in emergency planning efforts.
- Ensure emergency planning efforts prioritize neighborhoods at increased risk of hunger if the food supply is disrupted.

- Designate critical food assistance distribution sites with ready-to-eat food within the community for easy access in an emergency.
- Explore alternative transportation for accessing food in an emergency.





# TRANSPORTATION PLANNING GOALS

A sustainable transportation system is energy efficient, offers diverse options, provides mobility and connectivity for all residents, and promotes local economic development. A socially sustainable transportation system “gives equitable access to all citizens; ensures human safety; provides affordable services; strengthens community connections; and preserves and enhances local cultures.”<sup>11</sup> Individuals with a limited income or experiencing mobility issues may have limited access to personal transportation or not be able to access the public transportation system. Providing accessible and affordable ways for all community members to access healthy food is vital to a thriving community.



## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING GOALS

## POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS



### Ensure that transit services support food purchases.

- 📍 Remove restrictions on the number of bags transit users can carry.
- 📍 Provide space for storing full grocery bags on transit.
- 📍 Increase the frequency of transit services during off-peak and weekend hours when farmers' markets are open.

- 📍 Provide special transit services connecting users to food retail outlets during off-peak hours and weekends.
- 📍 Incentivize affordable, healthy food vendors and hunger assistance programs to locate along existing transit routes.

### Improve pedestrian and bike connections between residential neighborhoods and local food sources.

- 📍 Provide resources explaining how pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure connects to transit and healthy food outlets.

- 📍 Assess need for new pedestrian and bike routes to ensure all neighborhoods have access to food retail outlets, especially for low-income, senior, student, and multi-family residential areas.



## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING GOALS

Improve transportation access to healthy food outlets.

Ensure grocery stores and farmers' markets are located in places easily reached by transit, bicycle, or walking.

## POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

- Assess the range of food vendors located near existing transit routes to determine what foods are offered, the affordability of healthy food options, and the purchasing habits of customers at these locations.
- Coordinate bus schedules with open hours of food vendors.
- Assess and map connectivity of pedestrian paths, bike paths, and transit routes to sources of healthy food, hunger relief services, and multi-family, low-income, student, and senior housing developments.



- Allow and establish affordable food-delivery services that bring food from local stores and farmers' markets to seniors, individuals with mobility issues, students, and people without transportation.
- Allow and support mobile food shelf deliveries to seniors, individuals with mobility issues, students, and people without transportation.
- Develop a Safe Routes to Food initiative to identify needs and gaps in the transportation system impacting food access.



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<sup>7</sup> METRO. COUNCIL, *Resilience* (2018), [metro council.org/Handbook/Plan-Elements/Resilience.aspx](http://metro council.org/Handbook/Plan-Elements/Resilience.aspx)

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