



Boston Food Access Council Meeting

6-8 p.m. Thursday, March 8, 2017

BPDA Board Room, Boston City Hall

Room 900, 9th Floor, 1 City Hall Sq, Boston MA 02201

Meeting Minutes

Attendees

Members in attendance: Barbara Knecht (Urban Farming Institute), Tara Agarwal Pedulla (Children's Hospital), Sutton Kiplinger (The Food Project), Mary Bovenzi (Boston Public Health Commission), Vidya Tikku (The Trustees), Laura Benavidez (Boston Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services), Leah Triscari (ABCD), Bing Broderick (The Haley House), Allison Bovell-Ammon (Children's HealthWatch), Bill Dean (Tufts Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy), Elizabeth Miller (City of Boston Mayor's Office of Food Access)

Delegates in attendance: Katie Sandson (Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic), Jenny Silverman (Dorchester Community Food Co-Op), Maura Ackerman (Project Bread)

Members absent: Vickey Siggers (Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition), Liana Krupp (Krupp Family Foundation), Carol Tienken (Greater Boston Food Bank), Emily Broad Leib (Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic), Chris Bosso (Northeastern School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs), Alison Brown (Dorchester Community Food Co-Op), Noreen Kelly (Project Bread), Doug Rauch (Daily Table)

Other special guests: Tara Hammes (City of Boston Commission on Affairs of the Elderly), Felipe Ruiz (Boston Public Health Commission), Jillian McKoy (former OFA/BFAC intern), Kristina Stefanini (former OFA intern), Catalina López-Ospina (City of Boston Mayor's Office of Food Access), Chief Marty Martinez (City of Boston Health and Human Service Cabinet), Marta Rivera (City of Boston Health and Human Services Cabinet)

(SEE SLIDES)

Address from and Discussion with Chief Marty Martinez

Chief Martinez introduced himself, asked BFAC members to introduce themselves, and addressed members with his vision for the City of Boston Health and Human Services cabinet (HHS) and the Boston Food Access Council (BFAC).

Role of HHS: to ensure that people have what they need not just to survive, but to thrive

- Asset-based strategies to help people reach their potential
- HHS is doing this but needs to articulate better and move forward with that work



- Three buckets of HHS that the Mayor's Office of Food Access (OFA) is meeting in some ways, and needs to work on in others:
 - Look at outcomes instead of outputs
 - Don't just create numbers, rather ask "to what end are we doing this work?"
 - What is the impact beyond just programs?
 - Equity
 - There are gaps in almost every department, caused by lack of resources, lack of opportunity, lack of strategy
 - How do we fill these gaps and create equity?
 - How do we ensure that all have equitable access to resources?
 - In some cases the City might support your work rather than deliver that work.
 - Elevate the work
 - Elevate the work inside and outside of City Hall
 - Make sure the Mayor knows how important this work is (he has expressed interest in this work!)
 - Mayor Walsh should be using his voice for our work
 - Chief Martinez is ready to tell everyone who will listen how important the work is, but he needs and wants to be educated by the BFAC on this

Role of the BFAC

- Relationship
 - The City needs to be in a relationship with the BFAC, learn from them, identify gaps, get advice on using resources
 - Reciprocal relationship, help us set an agenda.
 - What does food insecurity mean in Boston?
 - How do we approach it?
 - We can't solve this by ourselves. Need to be strategic.
- Chief Martinez's involvement with the BFAC equates to direct involvement with the Mayor
 - Vldya Tikku: Has the Mayor asked Chief Martinez to do any work in particular related to food access?
 - Chief Martinez: His charge has been to help OFA do more and think bigger and bolder.

Belief that the work of HHS is the most important work in City Hall

- Grew up in a single parent household. Social supports, churches, schools, etc. created opportunities that his mother wasn't able to provide
- This safety net is key to helping people

Progress Updates from BFAC Working Groups

Working Group 1

- See slides



- **Chief Martinez:** Regarding the Food Access Economic Development Fund, can you provide an example of something this would fund that can't already be found?
 - **Elizabeth Miller:** The idea is that this fund would supplement other existing resources. The MA Food Trust is an example. It provides capital support but not operational.
 - **Sutton Kiplinger:** Support like this is valuable as food businesses have very low margins.
 - **Allison Bovell-Ammon:** Important to support minority- and women-owned businesses, support them to do more than just scrape by and to support their community.
 - **Sutton Kiplinger:** Work around economic development and business development only works if people in the community have money. Economic development needs to go hand-in-hand with work to increase purchasing power.

Working Group 2

- Presentation from Barbara Knecht
 - See slides.
 - Coming at this work from the perspective of community gardens and urban agriculture.
 - More farms, more food.
 - How can we get more land into cultivation for community gardens and urban farms?
 - Internal and external barriers
 - Priority to streamline process for interested parties sits largely in control of City government
 - Funding issues
 - High cost to develop ¼ acre for cultivation
 - Passing of Article 89 clarified what can be built where and helped to open up more land for cultivation
 - Many other steps involved in this process which are all subject to all the permitting that any other development project is subject to
 - There is demand for community gardens and urban farms, but barriers include:
 - Management for community gardens
 - Urban farms need increased capacity
 - Money is needed for development
 - Permitting process needs to be streamlined
 - Not many professionals out there to help with this process, as everyone is in this learning curve together
 - Working group proposes to push forth an increase in land under cultivation by X amount with X years
 - Need internal/City help (Boston Water and Sewer, Inspectional Services, Department of Neighborhood Development)
 - Need to identify appropriate parcels of land for this use
 - Need to identify costs faced by those interested to develop land for cultivation
 - Need to identify sources of funding for this work



- Looking into Community Preservation Act funding
- MA Department of Agricultural Resources has been helpful in the past.
- **Felipe Ruiz:** It is important to connect with organizations to ensure that everyone who has a stake in this is involved. Bringing residents in is also important.
- **Tara Agarwal-Pedulla:** What is the difference between a community garden and an urban farm as it related to zoning and the challenges you discussed?
 - **Barbara Knecht:** The zoning isn't an issue here. The distinction is that a community garden is meant for personal use while an urban farm is meant for the sale of what is produced. The Urban Farming Institute is supporting commercial urban farms, but there are several non-profit urban farms in Boston.
- **Vidya Tikku:** We need help from the City to find parcels that are the right size, flat, have good soil, and not too many trees.
- **Jenny Silverman:** Regarding the goal of urban farms, it is important to think about who the produce will be sold to, high priced for restaurants or lower priced to make it accessible for community members and corner stores, etc.
 - **Barbara Knecht:** Every farm is different. Making a living off of urban farming is difficult. Some farmers bring their prices down by cross-subsidizing, selling some at restaurants which provides good marketing to help grow the movement and also allows farmers to offer lower prices for direct sales to consumers
- **Jenny Silverman:** Can the economic development fund that we are talking about help?
 - **Barbara Knecht:** The Urban Farming Institute wants to help farmers get on land without debt. Lots of start-ups and banks aren't lending this money. The philanthropic community is getting on board but the money isn't rolling in.
- **Sutton Kiplinger:** The land that is available is in historically underserved neighborhoods, and then the food leaves that neighborhood. This council should be taking up these hard questions. Costs of food are high largely because of the use of pesticides, herbicides, and mechanization, which won't fly (or shouldn't fly) on urban farms. Farmers should be able to charge what they need to. We should be rational about subsidies and clear about where they go and why.
- **Barbara Knecht:** Other costs that farmers face include the cost of labor to address City rules around snow removal, for example. The Urban Farming Institute is putting farms into a community land trust and the land trust helps to think about long-term maintenance.
- **Allison Bovell-Ammon:** Regarding getting land and the low-vacancy rate, have you connected with the Boston Planning and Development Agency?
 - **Barbara Knecht:** The Department of Neighborhood Development is the primary partner. They have several parcels with varying suitability. We also have to consider:
 - The value of housing vs. the value of open space
 - Farms clustered together is better for the farms. Is it good for the neighborhood?



- At the Urban Farming Institute, we only develop farms with neighbor support. Often neighbors bring sites to us. People want open space too for the benefits it brings, that more housing would not bring.
- Most farms are 10000 sq ft, or ¼ acre
- **Vidya Tikku:** Cultivation is grassroots. This council is where we have opportunity to work with the City. Housing is also needed. The good news is that the Department of Neighborhood Development is involved with urban agriculture and help with City funding for improvements.
- **Barbara Knecht:** Housing and urban growing aren't in cultivation yet, but it might happen.
- **Chief Martinez:** It is important to think about private developers. Community Development Corporations have explored that effectively. Developers can prioritize open space at the will of community pressure. This should be part of the approach, as the private side also has to come to City Hall for approval. Take a multi-pronged approach.
 - **Barbara Knecht:** The Urban Farming Institute has had productive conversations with a developer regarding the developer creating a farm on part of the land they are developing. Developers are starting to see this as an asset.
- **Bill Dean:** Please spell out acronyms so that everyone knows who we are talking about. Tufts has a sustainable farming project as well as some great sustainable agriculture faculty who can potentially help with this work. Any thoughts around rooftop farming?
 - **Barbara Knecht:** There are all kinds of farms in the City. Rooftop, freight, bees, food forests. The Urban Farming Institutes's commitment is to ground level farming because of the visibility it offers. People can see and touch it which is an important component when thinking about access. Those other forms of farming are not forgotten, but ground level is our focus.
 - **Vidya Tikku:** Rooftops can be more than farms. Boston has tried this concept in several places. The Boston Medical Center rooftop garden started by The Food Project had lots of challenges. Better as a youth education space. Green City Growers is doing well creating rooftop gardens. Infrastructure and efficiency are big hurdles.
 - **Bill Dean:** What about community gardens for apartment buildings?

Working Group 3

- See slides
- **Maura Ackerman:** Project Bread is looking to expand our capacity regarding advocacy. We just launched a public policy advocacy newsletter, similar to the one published by the Food Research and Action Center, but specific to Project Bread's network. Please sign up if you are interested. It has opportunities around food and also social determinants of health, wealth building, housing, and how all of these issues connect.
 - **Allison Bovell-Ammon:** Will it contain action opportunities?
 - **Maura Ackerman:** Yes. Guidelines for how to advocate.
 - **Laura Benavidez:** Does it include metrics?



- **Maura Ackerman:** Want to measure impact and report on it, have transparency. We will have metrics but we don't know what that will look like yet.
- **Chief Martinez:** Some of you already do this advocacy work. Why does this rise to the level of strengthening and expanding resources and how is that going to be born out of a government-led council?
 - **Elizabeth Miller:** Hoping to improve ability of stakeholders to engage in effective advocacy to protect these programs. But we do have to be careful about how we approach this given that we as the City are limited in what we can do around advocacy.
 - **Maura Ackerman:** What is the policy power of a group grounded in government? Can an advocacy strategy grow out of this group without constraints?
 - **Allison Bovell-Ammon:** Education and advocacy within the city building is important. There are cities that have resolutions regarding protecting SNAP. Is the Mayor willing to speak out on this?
 - **Catalina López-Ospina:** Chief Martinez will also help with education. I can go to him when the council needs the Mayor to advocate for us. We have a direct path to the Mayor through him.
 - **Chief Martinez:** This is definitely a just a question, not a debate. As Chief of Health and Human Services, I am at the table, for example, to talk about what kinds of developments should happen in a given neighborhood and to think about what those communities need. There is an awareness-building piece to that. There are already mechanisms in place for this work, so should the Boston Food Access Council focus on this?
 - **Bing Broderick:** Can we learn from the advocacy work done by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement?
 - **Elizabeth Miller:** They are our peers and there is definitely a lot to learn from them.
 - **Allison Bovell-Ammon:** There is potential for negative things coming out of the federal government. First we need to try to stop them, then how can we inform City initiatives that will fill these gaps. There are "public charge" changes to occur this summer. How can the City respond to that and mitigate that as much as possible?

Discussion of Workings Groups Moving Forward

Elizabeth Miller: What is working and what isn't working with the working groups?

- **Jenny Silverman:** Is the intersection between the groups at the Boston Food Access Council meetings or elsewhere? Need to make sure they are moving forward together.
 - **Elizabeth Miller:** Council meetings are opportunity for working group to share back ideas with each other.
- **Maura Ackerman:** There is a lot under the umbrella of Working Group 3. It is unwieldy. A fourth working group might be useful, to parcel things out.



- **Mary Bovenzi:** Thinking more about timeframes for this work can help us narrow it down.
- **Tara Agarwal Pedulla:** Resources for accessing data to inform our goals and to know what we're working toward would be helpful. Additional project management support would also be helpful.
- **Sutton Kiplinger:** What is the end state we imagine if this goes well? The Imagine Boston 2030 report contains so little about food. The council could contribute to that, which would also require us to align around values that shape how strategies get designed. Is Boston a place where all people can get food? Thus far we've done a pseudo-SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. We need to pair that with a vision.

Comments and Questions from Other Attendees

- **Tara Hammes:** As we think about food access and who Bostonians are, please remember older adults in the community, as they are often forgotten. Help keep older adults aging in place. Keeping food access up for them keeps their health up as well.
 - **Maura Ackerman:** Regarding walkability, a good rule of thumb is to think about residents who are 8 and 80 in order to achieve equity. We can bring this perspective to our food work.
- **Attendee:** The Philadelphia Food Policy Council has gone through a lot of the same questions, especially around what cities can do. They brought their mayor to many of their meetings, which helped him connect the dots regarding why SNAP is important to the entire city, not just to low-income residents.
- **Jillian McKay:** I am a student at Boston University. College students are also often overlooked. Analysis of the effects on mental health of food insecurity on students has demonstrated that community gardening is therapeutic and can do much more than just provide access to food.
 - **Vidya Tikku:** Boston University and the Boston University School of Public Health have offered a lot of help to the Trustees with respect to soil needs.

NEXT MEETING:

6-8 p.m. Thursday June 14, 2018

Location Tobin Community Center

1481 Tremont St, Roxbury Crossing, MA 02120

Future Meetings

6-8 p.m. Thursday September 13, 2018, Location TBA

6-8 p.m. Thursday December 13, 2018, Location TBA

6-8 p.m. Thursday, March 14th, 2019, Location TBA