

Mayor's Office of Food Access

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Boston Food Access Council Meeting

1481 Tremont Street, 2nd Floor Conference Room

Boston, MA 02120

December 13th, 2018 | 6:00p - 8:00p

MEETING GOALS

- Provide input to strategic plan for OFA and BFAC
- Provide updates on BFAC Working Group activities
- Receive constituent input

AGENDA

Welcome and Introductions

Members in Attendance: Laura Benavidez, BPS; Sutton Kiplinger, The Food Project; Barbara Knecht, Urban Farming Institute; Jonathan Tetrault, Greater Boston Food Bank; Vidya Tikku, Trustees; Jenny Silverman – Dorchester Community Co-op; Bing Broderick, Haley House; Allison Bovell-Ammon, Children's Health Watch; Chris Bosso, Northeastern University; Doug Rauch, The Daily Table; Mary Bovenzi, Boston Public Health Commission; Tara Agarwal Pedulla, Boston Children's Hospital; Emily Broad Leib, Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic; Liz Miller, City of Boston Mayor's Office of Food Access.

Other special guests: Gabbie- Krupp Family Fdn, Catalina Lopez-Ospina, City of Boston Mayor's Office of Food Access; Liz Hatzenbuehler, City of Boston Mayor's Office of Food Access, Judy Neufeld, strategic planning consultant

Brief Updates from BFAC Working Groups

- Working Group 1 goal: *Improve food access in underserved communities through economic development and community wealth building initiatives.*
 - This group continues to explore the concept of a healthy corner store(s) and is pursuing a feasibility study, using an NIH framework, to understand what would "fit" in Boston
 - Feedback
 - Anticipate unintended consequences
 - Previous corner store efforts in Boston were unsuccessful because they were not supportive of store owners bottom line
 - Additional data collection needed on how this project could impact communities of color, what other cities have done, and a survey to determine if corner stores really lack health items
- Working Group 2: *Improve food access in under resourced communities by making more vacant land accessible and usable for cultivation by local residents interested to pursue community gardening and commercial urban agriculture.*

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- This group is working to identify next steps to clarify process and navigate cost barriers faced for those wanting to participate in urban gardening and farming and how to ease that burden
- The activity of Working Group 3 is on hold currently, but we will revisit nutrition assistance to identify appropriate next steps

Additional comments:

- BFAC advocacy work should be inclusive of all programs/policies/advocacy related to food access in the city
- Advocacy work of the OFA is constrained by being under City government, but OFA can bring information to the Mayor and can be part of those conversations
- Perhaps advocacy work could fall into the admin space of the BFAC and not in a specific working group, or a governing committee could handle this/set guidelines for how the council could handle this
- Consider separating local and state/federal level work

Discussion of OFA/BFAC Strategic Plan with Share Our Strength consultant, Judy Neufeld

- Jan 28th will be a convening for the strategic plan reveal
- Judy has been working with HHS on collective impact process and is in the midst of stakeholder interviews with the BFAC. She plans to create a draft plan for the January meeting and will the finalize plan by the end of the month (Jan 2019).
- Below are the questions Judy has asked and feedback received thus far:

Q1: What is the most pressing issue related to food access?

A: Poverty, income inequality and affordability; accessibility; racial disparities

Q2: What are gaps in work and what are we [BFAC] not doing that we should be?

A: siloed at city and non-profit level; competition for resources; and unwillingness to pick a strategy and move forward given the diverse backgrounds of the BFAC.

Interviewees have shared that they believe that the work of the BFAC is innovative, particularly the healthy corner store initiative and work happening in the healthcare arena.

Using the SWOT Model, threats/challenges identified include:

- funding
- climate change
- threats from the current Administration and threats to funding
- implementation of article 89
- public charge
- Imagine Boston 2030 as an opportunity to align with goals

Q3: What should OFA do, what are they good at?

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A: holding the message; good convener; and making sure food is on the agenda of every meeting group

Questions and comments from BFAC members and community audience:

Q: Judy, is anything you were surprised about learning or expecting to learn?

Judy: you hear that folks are siloed and this was surprising to hear in interviews because Boston is more innovative, so why are we so siloed in our work still?

Q: The city is changing a lot, was gentrification brought up?

Judy: Not yet, housing did, but not the specific issue of gentrification

Other Questions and comments from BFAC members and audience:

Q: *Do we know what people are eating in Boston to assess how healthy their food?*

A: We do have data on barriers to food. Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) puts out a surveillance report (BFRSS) of Boston residents using data collected from very specific questions that ask Boston residents about fruit and vegetable intake or healthy food intake, water, sugar sweetened beverages, and other health behaviors. BPHC breaks this information down by race/ethnicity and neighborhood. Also, this data regarding access and food insecurity is also used to inform BPHC's work.

- Food access challenges more prevalent in communities of color in Boston and in neighborhoods of Mattapan and Roxbury.
- There is the challenge of programming continuity -- some programs only last for 1 year or are seasonal which can impact people's ability to access food on a continual basis.
- Important to recognize the value and support system of other critical programs, the emergency food system isn't capability of absorbing the shock of changes at the federal level

Comments:

We spend a lot of time talking about nutrition and what are people eating, but this can be unintentionally stigmatizing and may hurt lower income and underserved people. We can really be successful around addressing deprivation due to diet culture or poverty.

Q3: What should the BFAC be doing?

Judy: tackle drivers of food insecurity, policy work and advocacy- can the BFAC supplement or complement the work that OFA cannot? Are there too many people at the table? There are people missing at the table, such as community members

Questions and comments from BFAC members and community audience:

Q: *What could you imagine the BFAC would accomplish in the next 5 years?*

- Perhaps identify 5-6 small things to be able to say that the city has done or policies that have changed or been implemented: eg. mobile produce vending and / healthy corner store
- Discuss state and federal issues
- Draft and sign onto things that could better engage people and convene people
- We may need to do some smaller things first to get comfortable with taking on something bigger



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- Address silos: the city helps facilitate partnerships and groups working together as a cohesive group rather than operating in silos
- Dramatically raise awareness and education around food access issues in Boston -- many Bostonians still don't understand the lived experience for a large part of the population and have it [food access] be something people think about, similar to the way we think about recycling. It is a system problem that needs to be addressed
 - as much as government and non-profit's have resources, they pale to the corporate world. This sector is not being fully drawn in, so how do we sweeten the pot to draw them in? eg Fidelity; Institutions to Gillets, etc.
- The council could be more inclusive and diverse - we are missing representation from the communities we serve
 - fundamental equity issues, people closest the issues know how to solve them; mobilize resource to grassroots solutions that have already been designed
- Set tangible, measurable goals
- Every decision in the government has food access on the table; any decision that affects anyone in this town, if food isn't part of that discussion, then we haven't exceeded

Community feedback:

- Preparing ourselves for climate change – affects agricultural and societal stability and is something that we need to think about ahead of time
- Boston Gleaners already have a huge amount of produce we aren't able to get. There is a lot of food already being grown and that is a huge untapped supply to increase 'rescue' efforts. We might not be finding more land, but to better tap into land that is already being productive
- Issues are distribution and storage: value of local farms is that you cut distribution cost significantly, but the cost of distribution is the biggest challenge adding to the cost of food

Q4: Should this council be convened by OFA? Are there structures that would allow us to be more effective?

Questions and comments from BFAC members and community audience:

- We all depend on the support of OFA as a convener, but there is a tension in how OFA thinks about policy and advocacy. It would be better if the BFAC was separate from OFA, but don't have a constructive suggestion for where this group should sit
- Detroit Food Policy Council is specifically separate of government so that it could be fully representative of stakeholders and prescribe policy aims in conversation with the city in a way they wanted to -- this would be a good example to look at
- It would be good to have an understanding of what else the BFAC could look like because many council members don't really know what other realities could exist for this group
- Harvard Food Law and Policy has a handout on how other city councils are structured could be a helpful resource.
 - There are benefits of being part of a city agency, such as coordination and being able to give input through OFA to the whole city government. It would be good to know how we can do that better. The downside is determining if there is work that would go beyond the city/OFA? Should there be a chair that has other things on it and is a rotating seat?

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Should members sign up in an individual capacity rather than as a representative as a member organization?

- This question is a constant struggle, and the current structure is probably not the most innovative way for us to function. How does the city fit in and where do we take it from there?
- On the one hand, the city is independent, and may be seen as another special interest in the community, but on the other hand, it is part at parcel part of the city government. The connection to OFA is strong and it is a pipeline into city government that is structured and you want to keep that. The tension may always be there -- these are concerns of people who were brought along to the city, the connection is not trivial.

Q:How do we find a scenario where the tension is not a barrier?

- One idea is for council members to talk about what our organizations are doing, we can then pass off those advocacy responsibilities and can incorporate some structural things such as what's going on, what are agendas you care about, and then the city can advocate when they can.
- Free standing coalitions have success in different ways, but still have similar issues (conflict of interest, board members, what role does government play). We might think about establishing a group that looks at other options and spend some time looking at the research (eg. governance) to determine the best way for this group to move forward. This is just an ongoing question and part of doing the work is investigating this option.
 - There are so many organizations in Boston working on food access -- some together and some against each other. A benefit to anchoring in the city government is their convener role. Maybe everything doesn't need to go through this mode, but it's really hard to organize with an anchor such as OFA

Q:Other things we can do to be more effective as a council?

- more inclusive meeting spaces
- ways to do things in smaller groups to allow for more discussion to happen; get in groups of 5 to discuss and engage
- need crash space and have conversations about what others are doing; smaller volunteer gathers or times in the meetings to "collide" and learn about partners work
- set agenda with a dynamic part

Community feedback:

- would like for work from various organizations to be shared -- it allows organizations to better align as well

Public Comments & Questions

- *Is there a plan to bring more community members in?*
 - we will explore this
- Boston Food Solutions New England and the 50x60 plan: how does BFAC fit in?
 - Boston public schools for \$400k to participate in Boston Food Solutions

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Announcements & Closing

- More details about convening in January to come
- March 14 is the next BFAC and will be a closed meeting for BFAC members as the time will be used to review findings and outcomes from the January convening and develop a strategy for the BFAC moving forward.
- All working group meetings are paused until after the strategic planning. These will stay on the calendar and are marked as canceled so they serve as a placeholder once we are ready to meet again.
- BOSFood Love up and running to get school food to be something students want to engage in

Next Steps

- Dates for future meetings
 - Stakeholder strategic plan convening, late January

