



The New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee

Discussion of the New Orleans Master Plan – Working Draft
April 15, 2009 / 10:00 am – 12:00 noon

Background. The New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee (FPAC) has developed 10 policy recommendations to improve access to fresh healthy food. One of the FPAC recommendations is that the City of New Orleans should make access to fresh food retail a priority for neighborhood development. Another is to make zoning and permitting processes for grocery stores, farmers' markets, and urban agriculture more straightforward – and indeed supportive of these important features of healthy neighborhoods.

The New Orleans City Planning Commission is working with a consultant team to prepare a Master Plan to guide the city's development, and to update the zoning ordinance. Representatives of the planning firms Goody Clancy and Camiros discussed the first Working Draft of the Master Plan (released on March 20, 2009) with FPAC members and community partners.

Discussion Summary (April 15, 2009). The following feedback was offered on the draft Master Plan, particularly as it relates to healthy food access. (These ideas have not been endorsed or prioritized by the full FPAC; they are summarized here as a record and resource.)

Present:

Suzanne Hague (Goody Clancy)
Arista Strungys (Camiros)
Marilyn Yank (New Orleans Food and Farm Network)
Emery VanHook (marketumbrella.org/Crescent City Farmer's Market)
Vanessa Ulmer (Prevention Research Center at Tulane University)
Jenga Mwendo (Lower Ninth Ward Urban Farmer's Network)
Eric Baumgartner (Louisiana Public Health Institute)
Lavon Wright (City of New Orleans, ORDA)
Mithun Kamath (Office of Councilmember Arnie Fielkow)
Lisa Hoffman (PRC)
Ida Bledsoe (New Orleans Food and Farm Network)
Domnica Fotino (PRC)
Nicholas Larchet (Graduate Student, EHESS Paris)
Michael Smith (New Orleans Food Coop)
Jeffrey Schwartz (Broad Community Connections)
Tracey Patterson (PRC)
Gary Williams (ECD/HOPE)

Discussion points and recommendations:

Chapter 9 (9.9-9.10)

Draft Goal (9.5): Provide access to healthy food for all residents and promote healthy food choices.

- **Draft Policy: “Establish fresh produce retail outlets within walking distance of all residents and encourage healthy eating habits.”** (p. 9.24)
 - Separate this point into two separate points in order to keep a strong emphasis on the availability of fresh produce retail outlets.
 - Incorporate notion of improving outlets, not just establishing them.
 - Add statement that specifies skills education: “Increase educational opportunities to develop skills in fresh food growing and cooking.” May also incorporate education on health benefits here.
- **Draft Policy: “Identify areas underserved by fresh food access”** (p. 9.24)
 - Need to better define underserved areas, which may include criteria for average household income.
 - Need to add a clear statement that supports dedicating public sector (economic development) resources to bring fresh food outlets into underserved areas; it is not sufficient to merely identify these areas.
 - Could incorporate marketing viable sites to supermarket operators.
 - Consider targeting financial incentives to low-income areas that are underserved by fresh food outlets.
- **Draft Policy: “Establish a walkability standard for access to fresh produce outlets for all residents, e.g. 80 percent of households within ½ mile of outlets.”** (p.9.24)
 - Currently the text provides an example standard only. If the Master Plan will not establish this ‘walkability standard,’ define who is responsible for doing so.
- **Draft Policy: “Remove zoning and regulatory barriers to farmers’ markets.”** (p.9.24)
 - It was clarified why this point is necessary. The current zoning text is basically silent on farmers’ markets and the stringent standards for “green markets” are more appropriate to permanent (7 days a week) markets; so there is a need to create standards that work for farmers’ markets.
- **Draft Policy: “Encourage community gardening programs and urban agriculture.”** (9.24)
 - Plan should encourage all levels of growing, from the backyard gardener to the market entrepreneur
 - Language is currently vague. Should distinguish community gardens from urban farms. “Urban agriculture” can be used to describe the full spectrum of growing.

Additional topics:

- Suggestion to define grocery stores, given that some corner (convenience) stores call themselves ‘supermarkets,’ which may be misleading in terms of what they carry. Arista noted that zoning cannot regulate what a store chooses to name itself, however she can look into categories of definitions. It is important to craft categories carefully for appropriate enforcement.
- The planning team is also working on “corner store districts,” which would give residents more control over approving a particular use, parking, etc. for a historically commercial site that is located at the corner of a block in a neighborhood.

- Fast-food outlets: There was interest in limiting the location/concentration of fast-food outlets and other stores that sell primarily unhealthy items. The planning team indicated that it is not possible to base zoning on what kind of food is served. Fast food outlets can, however, be limited based on features (drive-thru), keeping sidewalks intact (curb cuts), and on the basis of neighborhood integrity and business and development objectives. Other cities have prohibited new fast-food outlets from locating within a certain distance of schools, or instituted density limits.
- A question was posed on the extent to which the City could support a community's preferences for what development is permitted. A community review process might be required for approval of a fast-food restaurant, for example – especially to avoid having 4 fast-food restaurants locate on all 4 corners at a particular intersection.
- Transportation: Question as to whether bus-lines to grocery stores can be prioritized. The planning team felt this would be difficult in large-scale uses, as it is hard to specify what store will remain open where.
- Taxes: Question as to whether taxes could be repealed on fresh produce. Planning team indicated that it may be more feasible to use tax credits as an incentive.

Chapter 8

- **Draft Goal (8.4): Encourage programs that promote environmental education and environmentally valuable permanent and interim uses of vacant land.**
 - **Draft Policy: "Secure community garden programs."** (p.8.17)
 - **Draft Policy: "Explore community orchards as an interim use for vacant land."** (p.8.17)
 - It is important to use wording that implies some degree of commitment and permanence. Orchards and gardens are something that develops over the course of several years. Example given to use 5 year lease for public land, and if maintained continue for another 5 years (e.g. Vancouver)
 - There was a question as to whether community benefit agreements (CBA) were being incorporated into the Plan, e.g. to encourage such land uses.
 - Is there any way to address empty lots, along the lines of "lot next door" program, to allow neighbors to use/purchase abandoned properties for urban agriculture? Possibly community-based organization (land trust) to legally steward land?
 - Main challenges for community gardens are infrastructure and upkeep. It's a good idea to develop standards for upkeep and that the garden should align with the culture of the neighborhood. Who sets and **enforces** standards is important.
 - For Urban Farms, it's important to define how to create zoning use, control of operations, setting guidelines for operation and conditions of functioning.

Per NOFFN handout, support for development of Community Gardens and Urban Farms should also address:

- Encouraging all new housing units to contain designated shared space for residents to garden.
- City support for soil remediation on contaminated land
- Support for instruction in sustainable and/or organic growing practices and healthy soil development.

- **Park System policies**

- Could include existing community gardens in the current clause re: no net loss of public parkland (Goal #5). Could also secure existing Community garden sites in partnership with Parkway Partners.
- Could designate community gardens as a use of open space and/or parkland.
- If Community gardens came under the jurisdiction of the park system there would be infrastructure (i.e. water, fencing) as well as maintenance and standard setting, whose lack is often the cause for failure of community gardens.

Chapter 15

- **Draft Goal (15.9): Increase access to community gardens.**

- **Draft Goal (15.10): Increase opportunities for urban agriculture.**

- It was noted that The Lower 9th Ward Urban Farming Coalition should be listed among organizations involved (currently it is not listed).
- Actions to increase opportunities for urban agriculture include: offering assistance in developing abandoned areas (clearing debris, bringing water); decreasing the fee for water meter.

- **Draft Policy: “Allow limited food growing on private property.”** (p. 15.33)

- Recommendation to strike the word ‘limited’ given its inherent limitations. Agreement that the main idea is to allow for appropriate types of urban agriculture – which are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.
- Question of whether limited sales of food grown on site might be permitted. Could allow for a ‘farm stand’ at a community garden as temporary use. Challenge is obtaining a license for growing season with number of times people sell per season, defining temporary use and standards for use.

Per NOFFN handout, policies that would increase opportunities for entrepreneurial urban farms include:

- Eliminate City Codes that are barriers to produce stands/farmers markets in neighborhoods
- Reduce real estate tax and utility fees for privately owned land, operated as for profit urban farms
- Install City water meters and back flow valves on deemed agricultural sites at reduced fee
- Establish a granting mechanism for initial start-up costs
- Support existing agencies and area non-profits and community advocacy groups undertaking community sustainable agriculture projects as their mission
- Support for area composting facilities that hold high standards for developing quality soil for fresh food production.

Chapter 6

- **Draft Goal (6.2): Revitalize existing neighborhood commercial districts and create new mixed-use urban village districts at neighborhood edges.**
- **Draft Policy 2.viii. “Launch a program to recruit grocery stores to underserved neighborhoods”** (p.6.48)
 - Again, define underserved neighborhoods, and consider giving preference to low-income neighborhoods in awarding financial incentives.
 - Establish a responsible agency. Recognition that attracting grocery stores is a quality of life issue that requires active policies and a lead agency. NORA should be involved (land assembly), but is probably not right for stewarding this program.
 - Data on grocery stores will need to be updated in the Master Plan text.
- **i. “Fast-track the creation of a one-stop shop and comprehensive resource guide to opening and operating a business in New Orleans.”** (p.6.44)
 - Emphasize resources and incentives for small business development.
- **ii. “Allow commercial uses within neighborhoods at intersections, corners, and locations where they have traditionally existed—as conditional uses.”**
 - Need to include expectations (use, hours); corner stores would become their own zoning district. Mixed-use makes it tough to balance various neighborhood needs.
- **ix. “Establish a neighborhood commercial development division within the new economic development public-private partnership.”** (p.6.49)
 - Support farmers markets, main street initiatives.