



CITY OF AUBURN

Full Plates, Full Lives: Food Systems in a Growing Auburn

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University of Washington ○ College of Built Environments

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FULL PLATES, FULL LIVES: FOOD SYSTEMS IN A GROWING AUBURN

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ABOUT LIVABLE CITY YEAR

The UW Livable City Year program (LCY) is an initiative that enables local governments to tap into the talents and energy of the University of Washington to address local sustainability and livability goals. LCY links UW courses and students with a Washington city or regional government for an entire academic year, partnering to work on projects identified by the community. LCY helps cities reach their goals for livability in an affordable way while providing opportunities for students to learn through real-life problem solving. LCY has partnered with the City of Auburn for the 2016-2017 academic year, the inaugural year of the program.

The UW's Livable City Year program is led by faculty directors Branden Born with the Department of Urban Design and Planning, and Jennifer Otten with the School of Public Health, in collaboration with UW Sustainability, Urban@UW and the Association of Washington Cities, and with foundational support from the College of Built Environments and Undergraduate Academic Affairs. For more information contact the program at uwlcy@uw.edu.



LIVABLE CITY YEAR: ONE YEAR. ONE CITY. DOZENS OF
UW FACULTY AND HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS, WORKING
TOGETHER TO CATALYZE LIVABILITY.

LCY.UW.EDU

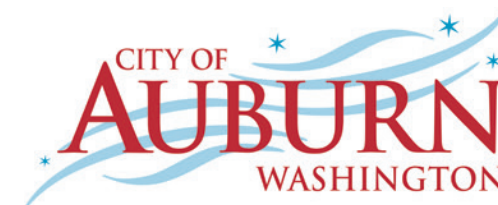
ABOUT THE CITY OF AUBURN

The City of Auburn is well-positioned to take advantage of many of the opportunities in the Puget Sound region. Centrally located between Seattle and Tacoma, Auburn is home to more than 77,000 residents. It is the land of two rivers (White & Green), spread across two counties (King & Pierce), and home to the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe.

Auburn was founded in 1891 and has retained an historic downtown while also welcoming new, modern development. Known for its family-friendly, small-town feel, Auburn was initially an agricultural community, the city saw growth due to its location on railroad lines and, more recently, became a manufacturing and distribution center. Auburn is situated near the major north-south and east-west regional transportation routes, with two railroads and close proximity to the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma.

Auburn has more than two dozen elementary, middle and high schools, and is also home to Green River College, which is known for its strong international education programs. The city is one hour away from Mt. Rainier, and has many outdoor recreational opportunities.

The mission of the City of Auburn is to preserve and enhance the quality of life for all citizens of Auburn, providing public safety, human services, infrastructure, recreation and cultural services, public information services, planning, and economic development.



WWW.AUBURNWA.GOV

01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, Mayor Backus formed the Blue Ribbon Committee with the goal of transforming Auburn into the healthiest city in Washington by 2020. This was in response to a King County assessment, conducted earlier that year, that revealed that Auburn had low rankings for many health determinants including obesity and diabetes. In alignment with the city's goals and through the University of Washington and Livable City Year program, a team of graduate and undergraduate students developed a food policy plan that sought to improve community health outcomes through better nutrition.

The student team identified community resources and common barriers to healthy food by interviewing key community members. Conversations with community leaders such as Debbie Christian of the Auburn Food Bank, and Jason Berry of YMCA, revealed that there is limited healthy food availability and affordability

THE COMMUNITY HAS MANY PROGRAMS PROMOTING
HEALTHY FOOD AND FOOD SECURITY, HOWEVER,
THE PERVASIVENESS OF POOR NUTRITIONAL HABITS
PREFERRING CONVENIENT, UNHEALTHY FOODS IS
LIMITING BROAD ADOPTION OF HEALTHY EATING
OPPORTUNITIES AND HABITS

outside of Downtown Auburn. Many healthy food options are centrally located downtown and are inaccessible to more vulnerable community members who face mobility issues. The community has many programs promoting healthy food and food security, however, the pervasiveness of poor nutritional habits preferring convenient, unhealthy foods is limiting broad adoption of healthy eating opportunities and habits.

After identifying resources and barriers to healthy food, we created a list of recommendations and a validation plan to help Auburn inclusively transition towards better nutritional habits. Recommendations focused on increasing healthy food accessibility and affordability and improving healthy food skills to promote the consumption of healthy foods by Auburn residents.

Key recommendations include:

- Expanding Auburn's paratransit and community ride services to grocery stores
- Creating a city-wide marketing strategy promoting healthy food consumption
- Supporting Auburn's local farming community to serve as a healthy food source for Auburn

This food policy plan can help create a culture in Auburn in which health is a priority for policy and decision-makers and healthy food choices become the standard for community members.

02 INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the City of Auburn completed a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for its Comprehensive Plan. The HIA was intended to inform the Comprehensive Plan about the impact on the health of Auburn residents. The assessment identified that Auburn has “relatively poor community health outcomes.” Auburn has the highest rates of diabetes, obesity, and inactivity compared to other cities in King County. Auburn also has one of the lowest life expectancies of any city in King County (HIA, 2014).

A balanced diet is essential to good health and wellbeing. Food is the source of the body's energy, protein, essential fats, vitamins, and minerals necessary to live, grow, and function. Unhealthy diets play a major role in illnesses and diseases, including coronary heart disease, hypertension, obesity, and diabetes. A balanced and healthy diet comprised of a variety of healthy foods can treat or prevent these diseases (National Health and Medical Council of the Australian Government 2017).

There are many ways to define healthy food. To be effective, a policy must consider healthy food in a way that meets the diverse needs, definitions, and interests of all community members. When creating the food policy plan, we defined healthy food as food comprised of fresh and nutritious ingredients. Such ingredients have high nutritional value and low caloric density, and this generally means emphasizing a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables as core to a healthy diet. Unhealthy food refers to foods and beverages that have low nutritional value and high caloric density, which generally includes most ‘fast foods’ and other convenience products.



Credit: Colourbox.com

Diets that are high in calories and low in nutritional value contribute to increased health care costs for community members. Often, foods and drinks that are unhealthy are the most readily available and are frequently the most affordable. Healthier foods that are better for long-term health are often harder to find or are costlier because prices are not based on nutritional content. By making health the core criterion for food policies, the City of Auburn could foster a healthier and more prosperous community.

Through the Livable City Year program of the University of Washington, a team of graduate and undergraduate students, representing the urban planning and environmental engineering disciplines, created a food policy plan over the course of 12 weeks as part of a course curriculum.

This food policy plan is in alignment with the city's health goals for its community. A 2015 King County Healthy Needs Assessment showed that the Auburn community had lower rankings on many health measures than other areas of King County. In response, Mayor Backus formed the Blue Ribbon Committee, with the goal of transforming the City of Auburn into the healthiest city in Washington by 2020. The food policy plan specifically addresses the Blue Ribbon Committee's focus on obesity in adults and children. Rates of obesity incidence, affected by genetics, environment, and personal behavior, can be curbed by the consumption of healthier foods. The consumption of healthy foods can also make a key contribution to the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases within the community.

The food policy plan identified challenges and strategies to creating a healthier Auburn by cultivating knowledge of healthy food options. The student team spoke to community members, leaders, and city officials to better understand and assess the food system and culture within Auburn. The team then identified specific strategies to improve the health of the community by increasing healthy food access and availability as well as improving healthy food behavior and skills.

FIGURE 1

Vegetables provide essential nutrients for fewer calories. The consumption of vegetables can help prevent certain diseases and illnesses.

03 METHODS

We assessed the City of Auburn’s food policy, food distribution system, and community culture towards food to develop an effective food policy plan. We sought to find the specific strengths and weaknesses of the Auburn community to create an actionable food policy plan.

Food Policy Assessment

We undertook a series of interviews and analyses to assess the current state of food policy in Auburn. We interviewed members of the City of Auburn’s Steering Committee and community leaders, analyzed current elements of the city’s comprehensive plan, and looked at the available healthy food initiatives and programs within the city.

Food Distribution Assessment

We first examined the different districts within the city to assess food distribution. We used the information and findings gathered from a previous Livable City Year



Credit: Colourbox.com

project that mapped the city’s districts. For each district, food providers were identified through Google’s public database of businesses. Further study into the list of food providers separated outlets for healthy food, considered to be large grocery stores, from small-town grocery stores, corner stores, or convenience stores in low-income communities that may offer limited amounts of healthy foods at higher prices. We then mapped the large grocery stores within each district’s limits. A table was then created showing travel distance and times for residents within each district to the nearest healthy food provider. Travel distances and times were considered from the center of each district and were found using Google Map’s travel function.

We used the 2014 HIA maps of “health focus areas” to understand spatial distribution of vulnerable residents (HIA 2014). “Health focus areas” are areas within Auburn where the residents are more vulnerable or at risk of poorer health as determined by the prevalence of multiple risk factors. These risk factors include demographic proportions of youth, seniors, minorities, and individuals with limited English proficiency. Other risk factors include rate of zero-car households. We also visited the City of Auburn to look at the street network and pedestrian routes to assess areas of decreased mobility for vulnerable populations who do not have access to a car, such as seniors and youth.

We then analyzed the relationship between vulnerable populations and food distribution, identifying which districts of Auburn lacked both healthy food options and contained a vulnerable local population. Understanding this relationship

FIGURE 2

Green leafy vegetables are especially effective at combating diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and cancer.

allowed us to identify which areas of Auburn were in more need of healthy food options or programs.

Community Assessment

The HIA identified multiple stakeholders within the food system, who collectively have made a significant positive impact on the health of the community. They also identified partnerships within the city that have worked in abating some of the health issues facing the Auburn community. Our reconnaissance allowed us to explore these relationships and identify key factors that may impact the food system. Building on the guidance of the HIA, follow-up conversations were scheduled with the Auburn Food Bank, YMCA, Teen and Senior Community Centers, Auburn School District, and Nexus Youth Center. This provided us with insight regarding food security issues facing much of the community. The knowledge gained from our visit to Auburn helped us achieve a better understanding of what problems face the community, and what changes we can implement that may have a positive impact on the health of Auburn’s residents.

We spoke to the following community leaders:

- Jeff Tate, City of Auburn Steering Committee
- Jason Berry, Director, YMCA
- Carol Barker, Director of Child Nutrition Services, Auburn School District
- Debbie Christian, Executive Director, Auburn Food Bank
- Bree Harris, Outreach Specialist, Teen Rec Center
- Carla Hopkins, Regional Manager, King County Library System

Methods for Recommendations

To create effective and actionable recommendations for the City of Auburn we analyzed the specific barriers to healthy foods that residents face and identified resources and strengths specific to the city. We then sought to mitigate or overcome these barriers for residents by using the city’s available resources.

04 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Current Food System

The HIA assessment identified some strengths and weaknesses within the community that have a significant impact on the health of its residents. Grocery store destinations and community garden efforts remain focused in the downtown area, far from many marginalized communities that need programs like community gardens the most. Unhealthy food options are readily available and influence the decisions of teens and adults alike. Financial hardships continue to influence food decisions made by community members. Consumption patterns of the community have created a culture that accepts unhealthy foods as a viable meal choice. These factors present significant challenges in creating a healthy environment in Auburn.

Low-income communities are more negatively affected by the lack of grocery outlets. Financial restraints can become more apparent, especially when families

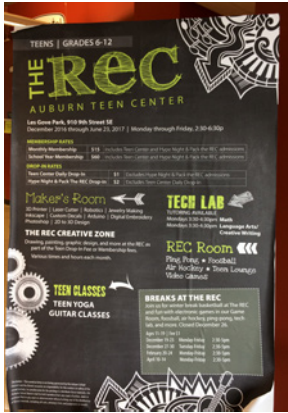
PROVIDING MEALS FOR OVER 600 FAMILIES ON A WEEKLY BASIS, THE FOOD BANK KEEPS ITS PULSE ON FOOD SECURITY ISSUES FACING MANY INDIVIDUALS IN THE COMMUNITY

must budget trips to maximize the use of their vehicle. Smaller trips to a grocery store are likely a limited option if one needs to travel more than a mile. The additional cost of fresh produce may also influence many meal decisions. For a family of four it may be more expensive to buy fresh produce and cook a meal, rather than purchasing a prepared meal. Prepared meals are not only convenient for families, but are now used as a budgeting tool. With economic strains still affecting many families in Auburn, solutions that maximally stretch the value of a dollar become easier choices to make. It has become an increasingly significant challenge for low income families to purchase fresh produce that will enable them to have a healthier diet.

In addition, the City of Auburn's food system reflects Auburn's diverse population. Auburn houses multiple grocery stores that specialize in ethnic ingredients for various cultures such as the Saar's Super Saver, stocked in Mexican and Asian specialty foods and ingredients. These grocery stores are also centrally located in North Auburn or downtown. An International Farmer's Market runs from June to October, also in Downtown Auburn. Though the city has markets that may provide for different cultures, the diversity in population may present challenges in promoting healthy food for the whole community. There may be different cultural views of what is healthy, as well as different levels of food skills, specifically familiarity with or willingness to try new foods.

Community Organizations and Resources

Multiple members of the community identified the Auburn Food Bank as a fundamental part of the Auburn food system. Providing meals for more than 600 families on a weekly basis, the food bank keeps its pulse on food security issues facing many individuals in the community. Debbie Christian, Director of the Auburn Food Bank, shared some of her experience in Auburn. Having directed the food bank for more than 10 years, she has seen community needs change over time. It is not just about handing food out, "sometimes you have to teach people how to eat" (Debbie Christian 2017). She explained that many patrons do not know many of the produce items common to mainstream European-American culture. At times, she introduces these items by providing recipe cards or suggestions. She also has cooking demonstrations and classes to help educate the community. Sometimes, she demonstrates the item by snacking on it in front of the patrons, just to show patrons that these items are edible. Debbie is one of many who are working on educating the community on healthy food items. An increase in food skills, specifically the capacity to identify an array of produce items, helps increase accessibility to many residents. Root vegetables common to European-American households, such as parsnips or turnips, are readily available locally but may be unknown to people with other cultural backgrounds. Auburn can transform into a healthier community in part by increasing the produce recognition of its residents, and by increasing the city's awareness of the cultural foods and preferences that shape residents' diets.



Credit: Jessica Canet

FIGURE 3

The Teen Rec Center is an after-school resource for teens that serves a daily snack and occasionally cooking demonstrations.

The addition of the Teen Center at the Les Gove campus is a positive step in providing more healthy options to teens within the community. A partnership with the school district provides a healthy snack option to each child. Activities like smoothie preps and cooking lessons help teens identify healthy food options by increasing the confidence, skill, and ability to recognize a diverse array of food items at an early age. Programs such as these, help nurture healthy eating habits. Even the design of the building encourages healthy lifestyles by allowing access to the Les Gove park, which provides plenty of green space for outdoor recreational activities.

Jason Berry is Director of the YMCA and serves on the Human Services Advisory Board for the City of Auburn and expressed their focus on creating a healthy environment. A pilot program in partnership with the YMCA and the Auburn School District works on reducing the number of community members affected by diabetes. The program operates in two schools within the Auburn School District and works on increasing food knowledge. The pilot program has placed community garden patches on school grounds, increasing food skills of school children. Curricula allow students to interact with the environment and encourages them to grow their own food. Community gardens work as anchors in learning environments, teaching students about the food sources and nutritional values. Food recognition increases and students can identify new food products they may not have known before. Some have even shared that they had not known that vegetables grow on plants.

Community Culture

Bree Harris, Outreach Specialist at the Teen Rec Center, explained that the program encourages healthy food options for teens but faces many challenges. “It’s hard sometimes when the students can run to a fast food restaurant on their way here and spend a few bucks to get an unhealthy meal that’s inexpensive, and fills them up” (Bree Harris, 2017). She specifically stated that many students from low-income families see fast food options as the best option for a meal. Fast food is accessible, quick, and cheap, providing an effortless way to get food that is both tasty and filling.

Carol Barker, Director of Child Nutrition Services for the Auburn School District, is responsible for 1200-1800 student meals per day across the district. Her food program has a direct link with a sizable portion of the community, and can have a significant impact on the food culture within the community. Availability of products, budget cuts and the restricted buying authority of schools have limited the amount of food choices they can provide to their student body. In turn, students are not learning healthy eating habits and are likely to develop a skewed relationship with food. They only become familiar with a smaller variety of food choices that are accessible within an allotted budget. Foods are often selected not for their caloric or nutritional value, but because they are inexpensive and easily available.



Credit: Jessica Canet

Many residents find it convenient to visit neighboring cities like Kent, Federal Way and Algonia-Pacific for grocery shopping. Food choices for many residents are made because of convenience, like the teens who visit fast food chains before going to the Teen Rec Center. Rather than making a trip to a local grocer and buying healthier food options, prepared food retailers become a convenient choice.

FIGURE 4

Les Gove Park is located between the Community Center, Teen Rec Center, Senior Center, and Public Library. It offers a space where members can access services and learn about healthier food options.

Geographic Barriers to Healthy Food

The seven geographic districts within the city can be categorized into two types: the Auburn valley floor (North Auburn, South Auburn, and downtown) and the hill districts (West Hill, Lea Hill, Lakeland, and Southeast Auburn).

West Hill was recently annexed and is characterized by large single family dwelling units. It is isolated by SR 167 and the BNSF and Union Pacific rail corridors, with a few road crossings to the North Auburn neighborhood. The West Hill neighborhood does not have any grocery stores or fresh produce providers within its boundaries. Interviews with community members have revealed that many West Hill residents travel via personal automobile to Federal Way for grocery shopping. West Hill residents do not seem to experience as many barriers to healthy food options, although they have been categorized as a health focus area by the Health Impact Assessment because of their higher than average proportion of youth, minority, and individuals with limited English proficiency.

North Auburn, which contains downtown, is a mix of industry and both single and multi-family residences. Two large grocery stores are located west of Valley Cities, a housing project, while a handful of large grocery stores are located downtown.



Credit: Tomasz Zajda Virrage Images, Inc.

FIGURE 5 Valley Cities and the Auburn Food Bank are both in North Auburn. Out of all the districts, North Auburn has the highest rates of poverty and zero car households. It also has higher than average minority, youth, and low-English proficiency speakers. The HIA indicates these residents are among those that experience the most barriers to accessing goods and services in Auburn and are at extremely high risk for poor health. Lea Hill is a residential area that predominately consists of single family dwelling units, as well as a few apartment complexes. The Green River College campus is also within Lea Hill. This district has a single, small grocery store within its boundaries. Residents in Lea Hill North and near Green River College are noted in the HIA as at high risk for poor health. Communication with community members has indicated that Green River College students who do not have cars and live in Lea Hill South have trouble accessing services and goods. Overall, Lea Hill residents experience some access barriers, and Green River College students experience them to the greatest extent.

Farmers Markets allow local food suppliers and growers to reach community members. Foods provided are often various in-season fruits and vegetables. The Auburn International Farmers Market runs from June to September in the Sound Transit Plaza.

The Plateau district is adjacent to the Muckleshoot Reservation. A dominant business in the Plateau is the Muckleshoot Casino, with a range of single family residences and a few apartment complexes in the vicinity. The Plateau has just two sources of fresh produce: the Day N Night Grocery, which is a small shop, and the Muckleshoot Market & Deli, another small shop intended for quick visits. The Plateau has higher than average proportions of seniors, minorities, those in poverty, and those without a car. As suggested by the HIA, these residents are at high risk for poor health. It is also important to note that the nearest grocery store to the Plateau is in downtown.

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South Auburn is a mix of commercial and residential land use. Its residences include single family homes, apartment complexes, and a mobile home park. Within South Auburn is a single grocery store, Albertsons; however, grocery stores such as Grocery Outlet and Fred Meyer are just north of the district. Residents of South Auburn have been identified by the HIA as experiencing more access barriers and as having extremely high risk for poor health. These residents include higher proportions of minority populations, low-English proficiency residents, seniors, and youth under 18 compared to other districts of Auburn. While South Auburn has some healthy food sources, it has a poorly connected grid with incomplete sidewalk connections. Residents of South Auburn may also experience more mobility barriers and therefore be unable to reach nearby grocery stores easily.

Southeast Auburn has single family homes with large lots, creating a very low density population. It is bounded by the White River to the north and has a large open gravel mine to the northwest — both of which act as transportation barriers. There are no grocery stores within the district nor are there bus lines that provide good service to the area. Though food distribution and public transportation in this area are sparse, it is not considered a health focus area and populations are not considered to be in greater risk for poor health because it does not have higher than average rates of youth, minority, seniors, or low-English proficiency speakers.

Lakeland Hills is characterized by residential land use. It is somewhat densely packed with single family homes and some apartment complexes. It has a single grocery store on its southern edge, Haggen Food & Pharmacy. While food distribution is sparse, similar to Southeast Auburn, residents of Lakeland Hills are not considered to be at greater risk for poor health nor do they experience greater than average access barriers because they do not have higher than average rates of youth, minority, seniors, nor low-proficiency English speakers.

Socioeconomic Barriers to Healthy Food

Time Constraints

Conversations with community members have revealed that many residents of Auburn, like most Americans, commute to and from work, leaving them with little time or energy to cook their own meals. With this commuter lifestyle, faster food options often comprised of unhealthy foods, are more accessible and convenient. Food availability, which is when there is an adequate number of accessible and convenient food sources offering healthy food options, is insufficient for this lifestyle. Throughout Auburn, unhealthy foods are more available in places where people work, live, learn, and play, making them a more convenient option for commuters.

Financial Constraints

Food affordability is defined as the ability to buy most or all the healthy food desired. This is an issue for Auburn's low-income community members as well as

those without access to a vehicle. Often, healthier foods cost significantly more than unhealthy options. Small-town grocery stores, corner stores, or convenience stores in low-income communities may offer limited amounts of healthy foods at higher prices. Lower income individuals may not have enough money to afford healthy food. Residents who are reliant on public transportation may also have additional time and accessibility costs they might not be able to afford.

Lower income individuals may also not have the infrastructure needed to support the consumption of healthy foods. Community members with smaller housing or no housing may lack the space needed to store fresh produce. Their refrigerators may be too small, or they may not have access to one — this is especially likely for families that live in mobile homes or similar situations. Debbie Christian stated that some Food Bank users reject bulk foods because they do not have enough storage space. Community members may also lack a proper kitchen to cook their own meals. The Food Bank does not provide foods that need to be cooked to unhoused community members, aware that they do not have the means to cook and prepare these foods.

Cultural Constraints

Many Americans face challenges in developing and using healthy food skills. Food skills refer to the ability to try, select, and prepare healthy foods. Occasionally, culture and ethnicity can affect food skills. For example, if an ingredient is uncommon in a certain culture, then people of that culture are often reluctant to try that food. Or, a healthy food that is common to a culture may not be readily available. A conversation with Debbie Christian, the Auburn Food Bank Director, revealed that

FIGURE 6
Adequate food skills gives community members the tools to choose healthier food options.



Credit: Syda Productions

food bank users often reject foods that they are unfamiliar with. In summary, there are different cultural familiarities with various foods that can limit people's abilities to use products, even if they are provided at little or no cost.

Insufficient food skills can also result in limitations on healthy food options, especially in an area where healthy food options are sparse compared to unhealthy food options. Local grocery stores may have limited variety in healthy food options and residents may be unwilling to try that food or not know how to prepare that food. In a diverse city, such as Auburn, there may be residents who are culturally unfamiliar with healthy foods that are locally available and lack the food skills to properly include them in their diets. Without proper knowledge systems in place, even healthy food provided at a low cost will not have the desired effect.

Goals of the Food Policy Plan

The Food Policy Plan works to reduce barriers and promote healthier patterns. While better provision of healthy food to communities is essential, a successful intervention is predicated on more than just material supply at accessible costs. Finding ways to improve knowledge of cooking techniques and possibilities for healthy food items, particularly those that are not culturally familiar, is essential to overall sustained success. An ideal plan would likely include not just cooking and identification knowledge, but inclusive education and vegetable production that allows a variety of cultures to partake in the entire process of food production. Ensuring that communities have access to food and knowledge is a key foundation to building social cohesion and diversity around food and nutrition over the long term.

Reduce Healthy Food Barriers:

- To increase food accessibility for community members, especially more vulnerable community members such as seniors or youth.
- To increase food availability by increasing the geographic distribution of healthy food options while empowering local businesses and entrepreneurs.
- To increase food affordability by increasing healthy food sources and supporting community gardens.

Promote Healthy Food Consumption:

- To improve healthy food behavior by redefining “health” and “healthy food” for the community through proper marketing.
- To improve food skills of community members through education programs that teach residents the proper skills they need to choose, prepare, and cook healthy meals.

Plan Validation

Recommendations of the food policy plan must be evaluated after implementation by measuring the level of implementation of specific program elements and direct health outcomes. Direct health outcomes would be used as the most immediate determinants of community health. Since there are numerous factors that influence health outcomes, the measurement of program accomplishments would be a useful complementary method for evaluating the plan. These program accomplishments are the key elements, detailed in the Appendix, as indicators of success in promoting healthy food sources options, healthy food affordability, and healthy food consumption. Understanding how determinants of healthy food influence the community members’ abilities to make healthy choices would then suggest how to develop adaptive strategies for city actions that might improve access to healthy food sources and other elements of the food policy plan.

Adaptive Management Strategies

Adaptive management strategies are ways in which program implementation can be adjusted in response to incoming data about program performance. We encouraged the city to review plan validation data and consider flexible decision making to modify program activities as outcomes from management actions and other events become better understood through the community health metrics. Programs work best if they are considered opportunities to learn and adapt throughout the process of implementation. The metrics serve as the monitoring system for the plan. If some of the metrics fall short of expectation, which indicates the corresponding policies failing to achieve their goals, this should allow policy makers to continuously adjust their approaches to responsively work towards success. Based on this understanding, decision makers should analyze the current situation of the plan and explore alternative ways to meet the management objectives. Understanding outcomes of alternatives based on the current state of knowledge allows for opportunities to implement one or more of these alternatives, monitor the impacts of management actions, and then adjust management actions.

Community Participation and Validation

The assessment and recommendation of the food policy plan is based on limited community input, including reviewing data, and talking to a range of stakeholders such as the people at the Teen Center, Community Center, and the Food Bank. There is risk that recommendations represented only the perspective of a limited population of the community. Implementing a community participation validation component of the Auburn Food Policy Plan is an important part of the recommended planning process. The food policy plan will be more successful if it reflects the full scope of community values and desires by involving a diverse spectrum of local stakeholders.

Identifying stakeholders in the community is an initial step to community participation validation. Stakeholders are those entities and persons who have a stake in the outcome and implementation of the Auburn Food Plan. It is important that stakeholders from all spectrums of communities are involved and work

towards common strategies for the success of the food policy plan. To begin this process, a list of suggested stakeholders should be identified and asked to form a stakeholder committee and attend monthly meetings to discuss and review the proposed policies. Beyond this, we recommended that several public meetings be held in city neighborhoods, where citizens are invited to a facilitated discussion on the proposals to gather additional ideas and secure feedback and validation of the proposed actions. It is important that public meetings be held in city neighborhoods so that meetings are more accessible for community members who face mobility issues.

Core Recommendations

We have categorized each of our recommendations by their expected timeframe for implementation: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. These estimates reflect our own assessment and will need to be reviewed by city personnel.

THE FOOD POLICY PLAN WILL BE MORE SUCCESSFUL IF IT REFLECTS THE FULL SCOPE OF COMMUNITY VALUES AND DESIRES BY INVOLVING A DIVERSE SPECTRUM OF LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Reduce Healthy Food Barriers

Increase Food Accessibility

[MT*] The Community Services Division should encourage a partnership between local CSAs, grocery stores, the Auburn Food Bank, and others to pilot a produce and basic grocery delivery system for residents with mobility and access issues.

(* = Causes impacts to certain community)

[LT*] Support, promote, and improve Auburn’s paratransit and community ride services so families can reliably travel to and from local grocery stores and other activity centers.

Increase Food Availability and Affordability

[ST] The City Council should adopt a city-wide definition for “healthy” and/or “nutritious” food to be used when assessing incentives for new business and restaurants. These words may mean different things to different stakeholders, and the City Council should provide clarity so that residents and businesses can adjust accordingly. A good definition may identify several complex factors (e.g. nutrition content, level of processing, local sourcing, and others) rather than drawing an arbitrary line between “healthy” and “unhealthy.” Adopting an existing definition from the state or federal government may be the least contentious approach.

[ST] Support Auburn’s local farming community as a source of healthy food in Auburn, and encourage increased connections between Auburn’s farms, restaurants, grocery stores, and consumers.

[ST] Permit food growers to engage in direct sales to Auburn residents, including allowing farmers to build and operate sales kiosks on farm property. Auburn has already enacted good standards for agricultural enterprises within Auburn’s residential conservancy zones that allow for farm stands, stores, coffee stands, and other accessory uses (ACC 18.31.210). However, many commercial-scale farms are just outside city limits. The Economic Development Team, in conjunction with the Department of Community Planning and Public Works, should explore how to encourage these nearby farmers to focus their direct sales efforts on Auburn residents. For instance, this partnership can facilitate partnerships between county farms and city agricultural enterprises to have county farm products resold in the agricultural enterprises’ farm stands. The city may also work with cottage food processors in Auburn to help them identify local farm sources to expand their business. Cottage food processors are operators who prepare food in private residences and sell to the public.

[ST] Support and expand the availability and attractiveness of community gardens city-wide, as a way for residents to grow their own food while learning new skills and spending time outside.

[MT] The city should expand existing programs that mitigate business startup costs to encourage new businesses and restaurants emphasizing nutritious food to locate throughout Auburn. The Economic Development Team should explore creating a “Food Enterprise Zone.” Similar to the Innovation Partnership Zone focused on industrial development, the Food Enterprise Zone would be one potential approach to collaborate with farmers, restaurants, and other food

providers to expand food options within a specific geographic area, perhaps the entire city. In the long term, the Zone may help develop Auburn into a hub for farming and food products businesses that could not only boost the health of the city but also cultivate a unique identity and attraction for Auburn to help sustainably and equitably enhance its development.

[LT*] Explore partnerships with the Auburn School District, Auburn Public Library, Green River College, Junior Achievement Program, and others to create practical culinary and management training programs for high school and college students, culminating in opening and maintaining a new local restaurant or healthy food business concept.

Promote Healthy Food Consumption

Improve Healthy Food Culture

[ST*] Partner with King County Public Health to develop a city-wide marketing strategy to promote nutritious dietary options and habits.

[ST/MT*] Use existing resources such as the Teen Rec Center to recruit teens who are interested in gaining culinary experience. Groups of teens could help cook and cater for community events and for seniors. The program may focus on volunteerism and provide in-kind compensation such as passes to the Teen Center, or it could emphasize practical experience and provide paid work opportunities.

Improve Food Skills

[ST] Use Neighborhood Matching Fund grants to provide starter garden kits for home or community garden use, including seasonally-appropriate seeds, containers for indoor use, basic gardening tools, and instructions and advice for planting and caring for a small garden. These can be made available at local community gardens, or home and garden stores for pickup in a manner similar to the existing Graffiti Abatement Program.

[MT/LT*] Partner with local community organizations to implement new and existing initiatives focused on food systems projects and funding. Partnerships could include Leadership Institute of South Puget Sound, Auburn Adventist Academy, and the Blue Ribbon Committee.

FIGURE 7

Community gardens create spaces where residents can interact with each other and with their food, planting, growing, and ultimately eating their yield.



Credit: Colourbox.com

05 CONCLUSIONS

The Auburn community could benefit from a food policy plan. The Auburn community has poor health outcomes, including high rates of obesity and diabetes, which are treatable with a healthy and balanced diet. The food distribution system in Auburn has grocery stores and community gardens centrally located in downtown, creating an unequal distribution of healthy food options. Typical of an industrialized food system, unhealthy food options are more readily available, accessible, convenient, and cheap. Unhealthy food culture is also prevalent in Auburn where community members are more vulnerable and experience decreased mobility and access to resources. Some residents are also commuters and have less time to prepare healthy foods, making them more prone to choosing more convenient food options. In addition to this, some residents face cultural barriers to healthy food as they may be unfamiliar with healthy food options. The food policy plan can help create a culture in Auburn in which health is a priority for policy and decision-makers and healthy food choices become the standard for community members.

THE FOOD POLICY PLAN CAN HELP CREATE A CULTURE IN AUBURN IN WHICH HEALTH IS A PRIORITY FOR POLICY AND DECISION-MAKERS AND HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES BECOME THE STANDARD FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The food policy plan recommends specific strategies and programs that would increase the accessibility and affordability of healthy food options and increase the consumption of healthy foods by Auburn residents. The food policy plan also aims to improve the food skills of community members, giving them the tools to choose a healthier lifestyle by teaching them how to select, prepare, and cook healthy foods, while remaining cognizant of Auburn's diversity. Supporting local food growers and cultural diversity in food familiarity can help create a food system that is uniquely Auburn. Material provision of healthy food options is important to better nutrition and human health, and addressing these issues at the city level requires dynamic thinking. Disparities of access, knowledge, and habits require comprehensive thinking to intervene in ethical ways that equitably raise the health of a city through nutrition.

A APPENDIX

Food Distribution in Auburn

This table was created using Google’s transit mapping function. Analysis was done from neighborhood center to the destination at 5:30 pm, when there would be more traffic, or at about the time that residents would most often commute home.

Neighborhood	Distance to Grocery Store	Travel Time with Car	Travel Time on Bus	Grocery Store
West Hill	3.8 miles	20 min	65 min	Trader Joe's <i>Federal Way</i>
	3.5 miles	20 min	60 min	Fred Meyer <i>Downtown Auburn</i>
North Auburn	1.2 miles	5 min	10 min	Saar's Super Saver <i>North Auburn</i>
	2.0 miles	10 min	15 min	Fred Meyer <i>Downtown Auburn</i>
Lea Hill	3.5 miles	10 min	25 min	Trader Joe's <i>Kent</i>
	3.8 miles	20 min	50 min	Fred Meyer <i>Downtown Auburn</i>
Lea Hill - Green River College	3.8 miles	15 min	15 min	Trader Joe's <i>Kent</i>
	3.2 miles	15 min	25 min	Fred Meyer <i>Downtown Auburn</i>
Plateau	3.8 miles	20 min	30 min	Fred Meyer <i>Downtown Auburn</i>
	3.3 miles	10 min	45 min	Albertsons <i>South Auburn</i>
South Auburn	2.5 miles	15 min	20 min	Fred Meyer <i>Downtown Auburn</i>
	1.5 miles	10 min	20 min	Albertsons <i>South Auburn</i>
Southeast Auburn	3.6 miles	15 min	N/A	Albertsons <i>South Auburn</i>
	6.0 miles	25 min	N/A	Fred Meyer <i>Downtown Auburn</i>
Lakeland Hills	0.6 miles	15 min	10 min	Haggen Food & Pharmacy <i>Lakeland Hills</i>
	5.6 miles	15 min	90 min	Fred Meyer <i>Sumner</i>
	5.5 miles	25 min	40 min	Fred Meyer <i>Downtown Auburn</i>

B APPENDIX

Plan Validation

The measurement and data should be collected by both the federal government and Public Health Seattle and King County, as noted in the HIA. The base data is based on King County City Health Profile Auburn.

Outcome Metrics		
Impact	Magnitude	Base
Obesity Rates		35%
Life Expectancy		78.4 years old
Diabetes Rates		2.6 out of 100,000

C APPENDIX

Measurements of Program Success

HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS

	Impact	Magnitude
What we are evaluating	Positive = Changes that may increase healthy food options	* = Causes impacts to certain community
	Negative = Changes that may decrease healthy food options	High = Causes impacts to many people
	No effect = no effect on healthy food options	Low = Causes impacts to no or very few people
		Medium = Causes impacts to larger number of people than Low
.....		
Healthy food options provided in restaurant		
Healthy food options provided by Food Bank		
Direct sales from growers to residents		
.....		
Storefront groceries		
Farmers market		

Measure Suggestions

1. Healthy Food Options Provided in Restaurant: Based on recommendation 4.1.2, the City Council should use the federal definition for “healthy” and/or “nutritious” food to assess incentives for new business and restaurants. Based on this definition, the metrics can be measured monthly considering not only restaurant options but also grab-and-go options for healthy food.
2. Healthy Food Provided by Food Bank: The Auburn Food Bank should categorize their foods provision based on the definition of healthy food. Therefore, the amount of healthy food is provided by Auburn Food Bank can be measured and compared monthly.
3. Direct Sales from Growers to Residents: Sales from growers to residents should be registered on record. This metric should be measured monthly.
4. Number of Community Gardens, Cottage Farms: Community gardens and cottage farms should be documented in city records. This metric should be measured annually.
5. Number of Storefront Groceries: Should be measured annually.
6. Farmers Market: This metric can be measured based on the healthy food options and the amount of healthy food sales at the Farmers Market. This metric should be measured monthly.
7. Ease of Start-up for Healthy Food Business: This metric can be measured based on business startup cost. A survey for start-up business owners with some qualitative questions about the difficulties and challenges of City regulations and administration would be a good way to assess this.

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESSIBILITY

	Impact	Magnitude
What we are evaluating	Positive = Changes that may increase convenience for people to access healthy food Negative = Changes that may decrease convenience for people to access healthy food No effect = No effect on the convenience for people to access healthy food	* = Causes impacts to certain community High = Causes impacts to many people Low = Causes impacts to no or few people Medium = Causes impacts to larger number of people than Low
.....		
Grocery and Healthy Food Delivery System		
.....		
City Paratransit and Community Ride Services		
.....		
Affordability of Healthy Food		

Measure Suggestions:

1. Grocery and Healthy Food Delivery System: Can be measured based on number of times Auburn Food Bank, Muckleshoot's Elders In Home Support Services and CSAs operate and also the amount of people these delivery programs cover. Should be measured monthly.
2. City Paratransit and Community Ride Services: Can be measured based on car ride reservation systems, available service hours, and how many people are using the services. This metric may also measure and examine the marketing outcomes for the transit service.
3. Affordability of Healthy Food: Could be measured by the cost per one gram edible portion of healthy foods. The same method was used in the 2001–2002 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey by USDA.

HEALTHY FOOD CONSUMPTION

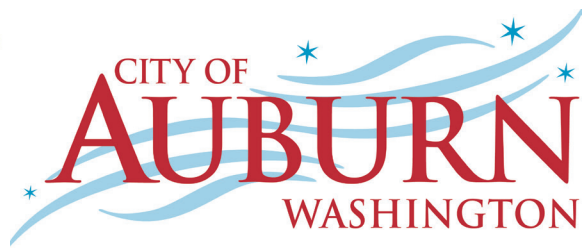
	Impact	Magnitude
What we are evaluating	Positive = Changes that may increase convenience for people to access healthy food Negative = Changes that may decrease convenience for people to access healthy food No effect = No effect on the convenience for people to access healthy food	* = Causes impacts to certain community High = Causes impacts to many people Low = Causes impacts to no or few people Medium = Causes impacts to larger number of people than Low
.....		
Healthy Food Focused Events		
.....		
Healthy Food Education Programs		
.....		
K-12 Nutrition Curriculum		
.....		
Community Kitchen Access		
.....		
Food Pantry Facilities		

Measure Suggestions:

1. Healthy Food Focused Events: Can be measured annually by how many food-focused events and festivals are held and how many people take part in these events.
2. Healthy Food Education Programs: Ideal way is to send out a knowledge question survey form (the questions would be based on for example easy-to-cook recipes included in grocery delivery packages) to see how well the people are absorbing the knowledge.
3. K-12 Nutrition Curriculum: Can be measured by weekly hours of Nutrition class in K-12 school. Exam grades for these classes can be used to measure how well the kids are learning.
4. Community Kitchen Access: Number of community kitchens that are available to the public and how many hours they are available weekly.
5. Food Pantry Facilities: Measure days of operation of food pantry facilities, also personal cold food storage options for individuals at day-shelter facilities.

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