Comprehensive Plan Policies

Background
Planning for food is increasingly a topic of interest both locally and around the country. Supporting local food is important for the local rural economy, for community food security and for reducing the distance food travels from farm to table. Local governments can play a significant role in supporting local agriculture, promoting public health, improving access to healthy and affordable food, reducing environmental impacts, and diverting food waste from landfills.

Supporting the local food system with comprehensive planning can have economic, quality of life, and environmental benefits.

- Creating and sustaining farm income
- Living-wage food production, processing, and sales jobs
- Improving the economic viability of local agriculture
- More efficiently using vacant or underutilized parcels through urban agriculture
- Increasing access to healthy food choices in all neighborhoods

Regional and countywide planning also provides direction to local jurisdictions in addressing the food system. VISION 2040 is the central Puget Sound region’s long-range growth management, transportation, and economic development framework. It addresses the importance of conserving agricultural land, supporting the local food economy, and building healthy communities. Each central Puget Sound county has countywide planning policies that discuss the food system in some capacity. Depending on the county, these policies look at production, food access, local food procurement, and agriculture.

The examples below focus on supporting food access and the local food economy. In other parts of the country, some jurisdictions have also chosen to address disincentives to unhealthy food in their communities. If jurisdictions choose to incorporate policies regarding “healthy” and “unhealthy” foods, they should consider defining these terms.

Resources are available to help local jurisdictions evaluate food access in their communities and potentially establish quantifiable measures to track changes. Several jurisdictions have found the Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI) to be a useful indicator of the availability of healthy and unhealthy retail. The RFEI is calculated by dividing the total number fast-food restaurants and convenience stores by the total number of supermarkets and produce vendors. More information and state-by-state maps of the Retail Food Environment Index are available online.

For suggested implementation actions, see sections on Urban Agriculture, Farmers Markets, and Local Food Procurement.

Recommendation: *Incorporate supportive policies in the comprehensive plan.*

Land Use Element
Goal: Promote food security, local food production, and public health by encouraging locally-based food production, distribution, and choice through urban agriculture, community gardens, farmers markets, and food access initiatives. Establish partnerships and share resources to promote food access and production.

Policies:

- Agriculture and community gardening
  - Work with residents to evaluate and remove barriers to food production.
  - Minimize conflict between agricultural and non-agricultural uses through maintaining a Right-to-Farm Ordinance.
  - Expand community gardening through city land, including parks and surplus property.
  - Support the development and adoption of joint-use agreements on publicly owned sites or institutional facilities to allow gardens, distribution and sales.
  - Promote inter-agency and intergovernmental cooperation and resource-sharing to expand community gardening opportunities.
Healthy food access
- Explore incentives or regulatory changes to encourage location of food purveyors in underserved areas.
- Prioritize low-income areas as potential locations for community gardens, farmers markets, and food access programs.

Economic Development Element
**Goal:** Support the local food economy. Seek ways to expand capacity to grow, process, distribute, and access local foods. Establish partnerships and share resources to support the local food economy.

**Policies:**
- Local food economy
  - Support retail sales and local food economy by encouraging locally based food production, distribution, and choice through the support of community gardens, farmers or public markets, and other small-scale, collaborative initiatives.
  - Explore economic development opportunities related to local agriculture. Assess and plan for community-supported agriculture programs, and local food processing/wholesaling/distribution facilities to connect local agriculture to markets such as retailers, restaurants, schools, hospitals, and other institutions.
  - Encourage business, programs and uses that support local food production.

- Farmers markets
  - Support farmers markets as means to encourage community-building, support local agriculture and economic development.
  - Identify potential farmers’ market sites on public property, community facilities, and, where feasible, on streets using temporary street closures. Encourage new farmers markets in neighborhoods with low food access.

- Procurement
  - Explore procurement policies that favor local and regional food sourcing of healthy food in city or county services.

Local Examples: Healthy Des Moines Element

The adopted Healthy Des Moines Plan Element shows how food policies have been integrated in an element focused on health and well-being.

**12-03 POLICIES**

**12-03-01 Healthy Eating**

(1) Support policy, systems, and environmental changes that result in increased access to healthy foods for the most at-risk populations in the City, with an emphasis on school-age children.

(2) Provide healthy food and beverages in City programs and facilities to promote healthy eating habits.

(3) Support the Des Moines Food Bank, Farmers Market and other organizations that help provide food assistance to low-income residents so that all families, seniors, schools, and community-based organizations are able to access, purchase, and increase intake of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods.

**12-04 STRATEGIES**

**12-04-01 Healthy Eating**

(1) Adopt a Healthy Food Resolution and create a long-term action plan to ensure commitment to healthy food access beyond CPPW funding.

(2) Evaluate, adopt and implement nutritional standards and healthy food procurement policies in City owned and operated facilities and across departments.

**12-04-02 Active Living**

(1) Develop and implement a communication plan and Healthy Des Moines website with information and links about healthy eating, active living and related events.
Local Examples: King County Comprehensive Plan

The King County Comprehensive Plan provides examples of supportive food policies that have been integrated throughout plan elements.

Rural Legacy and Natural Resource Lands

R-517 King County should explore ways of creating and supporting community gardens, farmers’ markets, produce stands and other similar community based food growing projects to provide and improve access to healthy food for all rural residents.

R-665 The county should develop incentives that support local food production and processing to increase food security and provide a healthy local food supply, and reduce energy use.

R-674 King County should work with farmers and ranchers to better understand the constraints to increased food production in the county and develop programs that reduce barriers and create incentives to growing food crops and raising food-producing livestock.

R-675 King County should prioritize its programs to help build and support a sustainable, reliable, equitable, and resilient local food system.

R-676 King County should consider adopting procurement policies that would encourage purchases of locally grown fresh foods.

R-677 King County should promote local food production and processing to reduce the distance that food must travel from farm to table.

R-678 King County should collaborate with other organizations to further the development of programs that increase the ability of shoppers to use food assistance benefits and the ability of farmers to accept electronic and other forms of payment at farmers’ markets and farm stands.

Environment

E-455 King County shall work with regional stakeholders to ensure a viable and safe organics recycling infrastructure that allows for yard, food, wood, biosolids, manure and other organic wastes to be turned into resources benefiting climate change, soil health, water quality, and maximizing landfill diversion.

Economic Development

ED-602f King County will explore opportunities to support agricultural tourism and value-added program(s) related to the production of food, flowers, and wine in the county. These partnership venues should be educational and include information on the diversity of products available in the county and the importance of buying local.

ED-603 King County should partner with other Puget Sound counties and businesses to analyze the need and possible sites for regional agricultural (including beef and poultry) and forest product processing facilities that may require regional demand to make them economically feasible. The county should also explore options and incentives to encourage entrepreneurs to invest in mobile forest and food production processing facilities that can serve the region.

ED-604 King County will continue to partner with organizations that support programs and strategies that strengthen the interdependence and linkage between the rural and urban economies, such as the Regional Food Policy Council and Puget Sound Fresh.
Other Resources


Integrating Food Policy in Comprehensive Planning: Resources for the City of Seattle – Puget Sound Regional Council (2012)


Planning for Food Access and Community-Based Food Systems: A National Scan and Evaluation of Local Comprehensive and Sustainability Plans – American Planning Association (2012)