

Somerville Food Plan Overview

In 2018, the city of Somerville's Shape Up Somerville office and the Somerville Food Security Coalition, along with many partner organizations, published the Somerville Community Food System Assessment (FSA).

The FSA provides the evidence base needed to understand what the food landscape is today and how people interact with it, particularly as it relates to our food assets, food security, and food economy. This report was the culmination of almost two years of brainstorming, collaboration, research, and hard work from all of the FSA working group members and partners.

Activities for the assessment included: 1) mapping a variety of food assets in the city and beyond; 2) assessing the affordability and accessibility of fresh food at stores across the city; 3) conducting six focus groups to hear how people get food; 4) analyzing databases to better understand our food economy; and 5) gathering information about other food system activities.

General findings that arose from this work include that: food access is closely linked with transit access and equity; most of the food jobs in Somerville are in the food service sector and are lower paying than other jobs in Somerville; there are many actors in Somerville's food landscape and therefore many opportunities to grow and strengthen the local food system; and while Somerville is well-networked in the food rescue arena, there are ways we can improve.

The FSA workgroup developed key learnings and next steps which were then prioritized and turned into the 11 goals, 22 recommendations, and 98 action steps making up the Somerville Food Action Plan. **The Food Action Plan lays out how we hope to operationalize those curated next steps and create coordinated meaningful change in Somerville's food system.**

The plan is formatted as a grid which categorizes the actions by area of work and also the goals they will feed up to if we accomplish the actions. Actions for each topic area are organized from highest to lowest priority, as designated by the Food Assessment workgroup. Actions that received at least ten votes during the Community Food Assessment launch are marked with an asterisk.

Shape Up Somerville and the Somerville Food Security Coalition will incorporate relevant actions into their own workplans and partner with departments within the City as well as with community organizations to implement other actions across the city to reach as many residents as possible. We will also publish quarterly progress reports to remain transparent and accountable as we work towards achieving the goals of the plan.

The FSA and Food Plan aim to serve all Somerville constituents. We will not be able to achieve these goals if the recommendations are not designed with input and participation from all types of food system participants. We welcome your feedback! Please share this report far and wide, and email us at sus@somervillema.gov to share your thoughts or more actively participate in strengthening Somerville's food system.

Shape Up Somerville & Somerville Food Security Coalition, May 2019

Somerville Food Action Plan: Goals, Recommendations, and Actions

Updated May 16th, 2019

Transit	1	Goal: All transit options in Somerville and the region support equitable access to healthy food.
	1.1	Recommendation: Prioritize improving bus service so that buses running within and through Somerville are more frequent and reliable as well as comfortable and safe.
		Actions:
	1.1.1	Investigate, and if indicated, eliminate MBTA restrictions on bags.
	1.1.2	Request training for MBTA drivers for accommodating people with groceries.
	1.1.3	Connect bus users to the Better Bus Project.
	1.1.4	Help advocate for extending the 85 bus line up to Broadway.
	1.2	Recommendation: Improve equitable access to car-share and grocery delivery services.
		Actions:
	1.2.1*	Partner with a grocery store to pilot a regional affordable grocery delivery service.
	1.2.2	Better connect shuttle services and ride share programs to opportunities to get food en route.
	1.3	Recommendation: Ensure that pedestrians of all abilities can access food as needed and desired.
		Actions:
	1.3.1	Offer a subsidized grocery caddy to assist those walking to food access points.
1.3.2	Work with neighborhood markets that are already selling healthier food items on implementing affordable pricing and promotion.	
1.3.3	Work to make routes to grocery stores safe and accessible for all abilities.	

	1.4	Recommendation: Clear the way for people to bike to food retailers and pantries
		Actions:
	1.4.1	Add bike racks at food retailers and pantries to promote active transit to food assets.
	1.4.2	Continue to prioritize bike safety through enhancement and maintenance of bike infrastructure.
Cultural Relevance and Inclusion	2	Goal: People and organizations designing policies and programs to improve healthy food access and intake are diverse and represent a range of incomes, ages, ethnicities, cultures, and communities.
	2.1	Recommendation: Use an equity lens when considering future food policies and aim for inclusive stakeholder engagement.
		Actions:
	2.1.1*	Engage in community dialogues about structural racism in the food system.
	2.1.2*	Work with existing and new community champions to engage the community on proposed food action plan designs and implementation.
	2.1.3	Work with community-based organizations and City departments to engage a more diverse group of people in participating in planning, design, and implementation of policies and programs related to food system work.
	2.1.4	Find multi-year grant funding to support the cultural relevance and inclusion goal and involve several community-based organizations in the budget.
	3	Goal: School-aged children have access to all the wholesome food needed to support their growth and development.

3.1	Recommendation: Increase utilization of FNS offered meals at PK-8 schools and Somerville High School.
	Actions:
3.1.1*	Continue to embed Farm to School programming into school curriculum, and find funding for further Farm to School opportunities.
3.1.2	Explore feasibility of hosting share tables at schools in Somerville.
3.1.3	Evaluate students' need for mid-morning snack, particularly at schools where Fresh F&V program does not exist.
3.2	Recommendation: Enhance out-of-school-time nourishment opportunities during the school year, specifically during vacations, weekends, snow days, and after school.
	Actions:
3.2.1	Research feasibility for of having Somerville Public Schools implement Supper Programs.
3.2.2	Strengthen partnership with Prospect Hill Academy Charter School to create more wrap-around services for out of school time food access.
3.2.3	Connect more children to after-school programming and work with these programs to provide healthy meals.
3.2.4	Look for ways to sustainably fund food access solutions for students on weekends, snow days, and vacations.
3.2.5	Work with Somerville High School Culinary program and other Center for Career and Technical Education (CTE) offices at Somerville High School to identify ways they can participate in this recommendation.
3.3	Recommendation: Feed more youth during the summer.
	Actions:

	3.3.1	Increase utilization of open summer lunch sites through promotion and outreach.
	3.3.2	Explore feasibility of extending summer meals and/or turning some lunch sites into supper sites.
Resource Awareness and Utilization	4	Goal: All constituents know about the available resources in the community to support their ability to get sufficient, healthy food.
	4.1	Recommendation: Audit existing media and methods used in the community to promote services and events and inform practitioners about the best medium for relaying information.
		Actions:
	4.1.1*	Develop an inventory of community bulletin boards in locations such as food stores, libraries, post-offices, laundromats, schools, and community and youth centers and include them in guides that promote food resources.
	4.1.2*	Create a community-wide communication platform to connect consumers to a variety of food resources.
	4.1.3	Translate key information into more languages such as Mandarin and Arabic.
	4.1.4	Host an online free public space where people can access all locally produced food system related reports.
	4.1.5	Hear from a broad range of constituents on how they learn about events and resources in the city.
	4.2	Recommendation: Enhance “word of mouth” as a key method of receiving information.
		Actions:
4.2.1*	Identify new and existing people in the community who can champion messages about wellness and community resources regarding food access, health, and overall wellness, and pay them for their time.	

4.3	Recommendation: Reduce the 61% SNAP Gap and improve attrition rates for WIC, despite federal level challenges.
	Actions:
4.3.1	Investigate and report on reasons for the SNAP Gap. (SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, was formerly known as Food Stamps).
4.3.2	Work with Somerville Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) office to promote their messaging on eligibility, benefits and safety of participation in the program.
4.3.3	Support advocacy efforts for passage of SNAP Gap legislation

5	Goal: All food retailers in Somerville will sell food that meets the affordability, accessibility, preference, and health needs of everyone in Somerville. Shoppers' demand and utilization of small food retailers will support improvements to existing models.
5.1	Recommendation: Model a healthy neighborhood market initiative after successful examples in other communities, and partner with the City's Economic Development staff to pilot a low-risk initiative for market owners and operators.
	Actions:
5.1.1*	Incentivize and provide stores with technical assistance to help them accept WIC and SNAP, and advocate for continued funding for such programming.
5.1.2	Support zoning amendments that allow neighborhood markets to exist in neighborhoods across Somerville.
5.1.3	Encourage more retailers to offer a senior discount.
5.1.4	Expand Union Square Main Streets / Arts Council-style food tours in Winter Hill and East Somerville neighborhoods.
5.1.5	Introduce price signage at point of selection in neighborhood markets.

Food Retail

	5.1.6	Offer language services or translated materials at local food retailers.
	5.1.7	Work with food retailers to enhance, expand, or create healthy food access opportunities.
	5.2	Recommendation: Consider alternative methods of improving healthy food access.
		Actions:
	5.2.1*	Find funding for a community and teaching kitchen feasibility study.
	5.2.2	Review past community kitchen projects.
	5.2.3	Research existing and successful food retail co-ops.
Food Jobs and Food System workers	6	Goal: People working in the Somerville food economy have the potential to achieve or exceed the average income earnings of other workers in Somerville and are engaged in future food systems planning efforts.
	6.1	Recommendation: Support the growth of food businesses.
		Actions:
	6.1.1	Support Person in Charge (PIC) food safety training programs for food service workers in order to improve communication gaps between the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) and the food establishment, reduce or eliminate language barriers around food safety issues, reduce communication burdens, and reduce re-inspection rates.
	6.1.2	Consider ways to expand existing commercial kitchens to support food business entrepreneurs.
	6.2	Recommendation: Support food system workers' efforts to find good jobs.
		Actions:
6.2.1	Provide workforce training programs and workers' rights workshops.	

- 6.2.2 Increase education and awareness of transportation options for late night/early morning shift workers, including asking businesses to pay for transit for workers required to leave after T shut down.
- 6.2.3 Explore alternate childcare solutions for restaurant workers that would align with shift schedules in this industry.
- 6.2.4 Join advocacy efforts to work towards increasing the minimum wage.
- 6.2.5 Develop and improve relationships with food retailers to improve outreach to food service workers.
- 6.2.6 Encourage improved employer practices related to equitable compensation for all employees.
- 6.2.7 Utilize opportunities to share workers' stories regarding their experiences with food access and security.
- 6.2.8 Join advocacy efforts to pass One Fair Wage

7 Goal: Minimize amount of food that is wasted in Somerville.

7.1 Recommendation: Make methods of connecting recoverable food to alternate consumers easier and more transparent.

Actions:

- 7.1.1* Provide Somerville-area stores with a clear, simple, area-specific infographic for guidelines, resources, and data that can be posted near food donations. Emphasize local/community connections, need, and availability of services.
- 7.1.2 Develop an informational guide for businesses and larger institutions on how to donate or compost food. Highlight community benefit and trash removal cost savings.
- 7.1.3 Check in with stores more frequently; perhaps include an annual event to facilitate relationships and reward grocery stores for good donation practices.

Food Recovery and Waste

7.1.4	Incentivize food recovery and transparency of food recovery data throughout the City of Somerville.
7.1.5	Disseminate information to people in a multitude of store positions, so practices are implemented at all levels and are not dependent on managers alone.
7.1.6	Identify and engage Somerville business that must comply with the Massachusetts Commercial Food Materials Ban.
7.2	Recommendation: Support local emergency food providers in creating a more cohesive network for receiving and distributing recoverable food.
	Actions:
7.2.1	Develop an emergency response plan for Somerville pantries experiencing disruptions to food supply due to climate change impacts (i.e. superstorms, electrical outages), or sudden increase in demand (government shut-down, changes in food assistance programs)
7.2.2	Set up more cold storage sites across the City that emergency and supplemental food providers can use to store fresh food.
7.3	Recommendation: Encourage a culture of source reduction/minimizing wasteful purchases as the best way to reduce wasted food.
	Actions:
7.3.1	Examine school and municipal food (and food related) procurement practices to encourage source reduction as a means of waste reduction.

Gardens

8	Goal: Every person and business in Somerville who wishes to grow their own food can do so.
8.1	Recommendation: Build on and promote existing policies and programs that support urban agriculture.
	Actions:

Urban Ag. and	8.1.1	Promote efforts to support a wider range of urban agriculture practices, from window boxes to rooftop farms and beyond.
	8.1.2	Use an equity approach when considering community gardens waitlist.
	8.1.3	Formalize community gardens access process and improve transparency.
	8.1.4	Consider opportunities and incentives for increasing backyard gardening, such as landlord engagement and discounted raised beds and rain barrels.
	8.1.5	Incorporate discussions about soil safety when addressing urban agriculture opportunities.

Policy	9	Goal: The City of Somerville has local policies that support equitable access to a healthy food system.
	9.1	Recommendation: Identify and pass local policies that increase equitable access to a healthy food system.
		Actions:
	9.1.1*	Encourage municipal planning processes to include food access in neighborhood and transit planning; identify current and upcoming opportunities to begin this intentional inclusion, as well as point people for these efforts.
	9.1.2	Consider opportunities for streamlining funding and administration of Farmers Market match programs.
	9.1.3	Create models for healthy food and beverage policies to be enacted at municipal and organizational levels, and subsequently encourage their adoption
	9.1.4	Continue to align local food system goals with Massachusetts Food System Collaborative.
9.1.5	Identify & implement multi-sector, multisystem approaches for promoting tap water.	

	9.2	Recommendation: Have food permitting process support the City's goals to improve equitable opportunities to participate in a healthy and productive local food system.
		Actions:
	9.2.1	Streamline the permitting process and outline it in a translated tool with clearly designated gatekeepers to promote food business growth.
	9.2.2	Examine and publicize the resources and assets Somerville offers to encourage food business start-ups.
	9.2.3	Support the adoption of the 2013 food code.
	9.2.4	Review the permitting and licensing process for permanent and temporary food permits to eliminate redundancies, inefficiencies, and unnecessary barriers.
	9.2.5	Work with ISD to make it easier to provide samples of cooked foods at events.
	9.2.6	Encourage public distribution of multilingual forms (clarify type) at relevant events like Ignite.
ation	10	Goal: The Somerville Food Action Plan is well known by constituents and goals are incorporated into the work of community partners and City departments.
	10.1	Recommendation: Somerville City Council accepts the Somerville Food Action Plan.
		Actions:
	10.1.1	Turn recommendations in the assessment into a Food Action Plan.
	10.1.2	Share draft Food Action Plan with workgroup members and visit community organizations for input.
	10.1.3	Prioritize all of the Plan's goals, recommendations, and actions and develop a strategy and deadlines for implementing them.
	10.1.4	Determine which relevant committee or organization will manage and track progress for each actions.

Implement	10.1.5	Develop and implement a multilingual communications strategy to engage, seek involvement from, and inform residents and municipal leaders about implementation of the Somerville Food Action Plan.
	10.1.6	Include food system goals in other municipal plans and initiatives such as Somervision 2040, neighborhood planning processes, Climate Forward, and Somerville Learning 2030.
	10.1.7	On a quarterly basis, review progress toward implementing recommendations and update and revise the Somerville Community Food Assessment and Action Plan as needed. Publish progress updates to a public forum in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, at a minimum, and additional languages as possible.
	10.1.8	Stay up to date on other regional communities' food plans and progress, and connect where appropriate.
	10.1.9	Update the Somerville Community Food System Assessment and Action Plan every three to five years.
Future Research	11	Goal: Work with students and organizations to support deeper dives into areas of the food system to inform future interventions, policies and funding.
	11.1*	Study best practices and regional feasibility for incentivizing business and institutions to reduce or divert wasted food.
	11.2*	Better understand daily food access opportunities and gaps for youth and seniors through case studies.
	11.3	Activate all the food asset maps produced for this assessment.
	11.4	Map Somerville's Food & Nutrition Literacy resources. Once mapped, measure utilization of current resources among agencies/individuals.

- 11.5 Create composite index for store availability and affordability and incorporate these indicators into a food access map.
- 11.6 Learn more about "just green enough" concept and see if applicable for "just food enough" per CUNY food policy institute.
- 11.7 Measure Somerville's Food Swamp to Healthy Food Ratio.
- 11.8 Identify gaps. Look retroactively at success/inadequacies of past campaigns. Understand data on food shopping at Temple Street drugstore.
- 11.9 Explore how to make Broadway neighborhood markets more popular.