

Food Equity Initiative Policy Platform

Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network

October 2021

In recent years, the City of Charlottesville has doubled down on its efforts to forge avenues for race and class equity in the areas of housing, education, economic development, climate change, policing, transportation, health, and food. In the area of food and health, the City Council passed the Food Equity Initiative for the first time in 2018 beginning a course of systemic efforts to reshape community health, wealth, and belonging through our food system. As the coalition driving the Food Equity Initiative, Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network of 30+ organizations has been working in collaboration with community members, City departments, and Charlottesville City Schools to further identify the policy and funding steps necessary to bring our collective vision of a healthy and just food system to fruition.

The following **Food Equity Initiative Policy Platform** includes input from over 300 individuals and recommends the following overarching strategic values, funding priorities, and concrete goals for City Departments to deepen their capacity for food equity.



Food Equity & Justice

Advancing Systemic Change and Collective Movements



The Power To Grow

Advancing Affordable Housing & Urban Agriculture



The Right to Good Food

Advancing Transportation & Neighborhood Food Access



Inspire Youth Choice

Advancing Healthy School Foods



Build Community Wealth

Advancing Neighborhood Food Access and Markets



Restore Earth & Climate Justice

Advancing Environmental and Climate Justice

Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network will be working with City Departments and Charlottesville School System towards implementation of these priorities. [Sign on to show your support](#) for these recommendations and for the Food Equity Initiative’s goals for cultivating a healthy and just food system for ALL Charlottesville residents.



Food Equity & Justice

Advancing Systemic Change and Collective Movements

Food equity and justice practices are foundational throughout this policy platform and reinforce food as a human right. Each recommended action emerged out of prioritizing community members voices and choices and aims to impact long-term systemic change. While some cities establish food policy councils to carry out Food Equity Initiative type work, Charlottesville has a unique and dynamic partnership with Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network. Together we leveraged the power of public and private partnerships to rapidly respond to crisis in the face of the pandemic. Supporting collective movements that uplift community voice and leadership through partnership and collaboration with grassroots organizations, youth leaders and resident advocates has been a foundation of systemic change for our city.

In order to build equity in the Charlottesville food system so that all community members have access to fresh, affordable, culturally relevant food—food equity and justice must be considered as a core strategy for community health and safety. Partnerships with grassroots organizations, youth leaders, and resident advocates are critical.

Food Equity Initiative Recommendations

- Continue support for Food Equity Initiative coordination through Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network and maintain the focus on an integrated approach through urban agriculture, healthy school foods, affordable housing, transportation and food pathways, and accessible food markets. **[City Council]**
- Dedicate a percentage of the city meal tax to create a Food Equity Fund that will strategically support infrastructural projects such as community owned grocery stores, transportation enhancements, etc. The Charlottesville food economy can help create a FoodE | Food Equity city. **[City Council]**

Food Equity & Justice: Budgetary Recommendations

- Continued City Council funding for the **Food Equity Initiative- \$155,000/year** for 3 years
- Pass Meal Tax Initiative in FY23 to set aside a % annually for **Food Equity Fund** to fuel proposed and future activities - 2%/year set aside



The Power to Grow

Advancing Affordable Housing and Urban Agriculture

The power to grow food for the health and nutritional wellbeing of one's family is a power not equally distributed across the city. Black and brown, low-wealth neighborhoods carry the increased burden of choosing between good housing and land to grow sparking mind, body, and social health. Currently, three key urban farms ushered forth by residents themselves as an effort to create fresh and free produce for their families and neighbors have been destroyed to make room for much needed affordable housing.

At its height, these farms totaling an acre in the city's urban center, produced 17,000 pounds of produce for 350 families in the Friendship Court, South First Street, 6th Street, Crescent Halls, Midway Manor, Riverside and Westhaven neighborhoods. In addition to produce distributed at weekly markets, these growing communities bolstered some of the most environmentally sustainable practices managing storm water runoff, building soil health, fostering natural pollinator habitats, and growing orchards while cleaning the air and capturing carbon.

In pursuit of restoring the power to grow for every community, the Food Justice Network believes an equitable investment in urban agriculture is needed to counter impacts of necessary housing redevelopment on decreased food access and environmental health. When families have the power to grow, land is liberation.



Food Equity Initiative Recommendations

- Hire an Urban Agriculture Director to review, clarify, and simplify the process of garden space rentals for community organizations, and low-wealth community members to grow food on city land, as well as coordinate efforts with private landowners who may donate land for community food security purposes. **[Parks & Recreation]**
- Commit funding to acquire and protect green space for community food security and environmental sustainability efforts focused on Black and brown low-wealth neighborhoods. Priority areas to dedicate for urban agriculture include Azalea Park and Washington Park. **[Neighborhood Development Services and Parks & Recreation]**
- Sustain investment in affordable housing development and commit to cultivating more affordable living by implementing policies and practices that include green space and urban agriculture space as integral to public, subsidized, and affordable housing community development. **[City Council]**
- Analyze the distribution of green space for recreation, urban agriculture, and climate mitigation across economic and racial boundaries in our city and create a plan to break down inequities that exist. **[Neighborhood Development Services and Parks & Recreation]**

The Power to Grow: Budgetary Recommendations

- Invest in integrating an urban agriculture map overlay to the comprehensive plan to track access and land use.
- Staffing for Urban Agriculture Director within **Parks and Recreation—\$115,000 /year**
- Support increase funding for land protection **Parks and Recreation—\$250,000/year**
- Support funding affordable housing development (0%-60% AMI)



The Right to Good Food

Advancing Transportation and Food Pathways

While Charlottesville is regarded as a foodie town nestled in the abundance of sustainable cultivated farms, the right to good food is not equally realized across our city. Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 6 residents faced challenges acquiring enough good and nutritious food for their families. Across the Blue Ridge Health District, health outcomes continue to draw stark lines by race. In our City, inequitable access to food can be traced back to neighborhoods, demonstrating that not every community was developed fairly in terms of transportation, grocery store access or *affordable* community markets, and economic opportunity. In addition, individuals reentering society face barriers with decreased access to programs like SNAP and WIC, as well as housing assistance, further exacerbating inequities we see today across race and class.

In pursuit of the right to good food for every community member, the Food Justice Network believes measures should be taken to expand eligibility to programs, cultivate ownership of affordable markets, and develop stronger transportation avenues to food resources.

Food Equity Initiative Recommendations

- Commit funding to affordable housing redevelopment projects that support development of community owned market places centered around food, health, and childhood development. **[City Council, City Manager's Office]**
- Develop funding avenues to provide free or subsidized travel rates to bus pass holders that qualify for SNAP or WIC and increase outreach to free travel passes for youth. **[Charlottesville Area Transit, Department of Social Services]**
- Work with local and state partners to advocate for available federal policy waivers to expand SNAP program eligibility. **[Department of Social Services]**



- Analyze and report SNAP application and eligibility determination outcomes by race. **[Department of Social Services]**
- Work with community partners to develop and implement strategies to effectively market Department of Social Services benefit programs including SNAP (and encouraging its use in certain places), camp scholarships, and other activities through direct, consistent interactions with low-wealth communities in order to promote self-sufficiency. **[Department of Social Services]**
- Adapt/change transportation routes to be quick and efficient and include specific routes to affordable markets, schools, gardens, parks, grocery stores, and areas that have been identified. **[Charlottesville Area Transit]**
- Maintain robust communication with community members and coordination across nonprofit providers regarding access to emergency food sources such as the newly launched Cultivate Text Messaging Service. **[Department of Social Services]**

The Right to Good Food: Budgetary Recommendations

- *No current budget ask while assessment is underway, but council should anticipate future ask in the following areas to support the recommendations above.*
 - Charlottesville Area Transit (bus route changes and equitable fares)
 - Public Works (capital infrastructure development)
 - Neighborhood Development Services (bike and pedestrian pathways)
 - Financial incentives for internal urban ring groceries, cooperative markets, and farmers markets



Inspire Youth Choice

Advancing Healthy School Food

In Charlottesville, more than half of city school youth are eligible for free and reduced-price meals and 1 in 6 city school students experience childhood food insecurity. Low-wealth students and students of color experience food insecurity at higher rates compared to their white peers. While school meal programs serve a central role in combating childhood hunger while supporting positive health and academic outcomes, students have indicated barriers to accessing school meals such as time to make it through the lunch line, unappealing food options, and smaller portions than needed. These issues are compounded by structural challenges within the school system to prepare and make available fresh, from scratch, culturally relevant foods such as limited kitchen infrastructure, inconsistent staff availability and high turnover, low wages for nutrition staff, and the diversity of the Charlottesville City School (CCS) student population and cultural food needs.

In order to ensure food equity across the city and provide all students the fuel needed to be successful learners, healthy school food options and infrastructure, informed by youth leadership, must be understood in the context of equity building and elevated with continued momentum. School nutrition programs are not a business but a service to build equity and health among Charlottesville youth.

Food Equity Initiative Recommendations

- **City of Charlottesville** should prioritize fully funding Charlottesville City Schools and school reconfiguration proposals including a specific focus on additional short-term (3-5 year) investment in revamping the school meals program in concert with federal and state grants currently active. We anticipate this investment will be met with increased revenue in the CCS Nutrition department. **[City Council]**
- **Charlottesville City Schools** should support the Nutrition Department to hire an internal Farm to School Coordinator to increase capacity for implementation of food equity practices that will lead to healthier school meal options, robust student and partner engagement, and increased participation in meal programs*. **[CCS]**



- **Charlottesville City Schools** must continue to revamp school lunch line infrastructure and kitchen cooking equipment to create more appetizing serving lines and support the implementation of increased from scratch cooking as well as proper storage of locally sourced produce and meat*. **[CCS]**
- **Charlottesville City Schools** should collaborate with partners to develop innovative strategies to meet the food needs of students outside of the CCS breakfast and lunch programs including the potential to provide a la carte and snack options, larger portions, afterschool meals, meals during school breaks, and other food security needs with the goal of decreasing in-school hunger, and reducing stress for families with limited financial resources*. **[CCS]**
- **Charlottesville City Schools** should establish and practice a new local standard for healthy school meals that goes beyond the current USDA regulations, which CCS is meeting, and significantly increase fresh, from scratch locally sourced, and healthier meal options and by reducing overly processed and high in sugar foods for breakfast, lunch, and snack programs in the next five years* ([Good Food Purchasing Program](#) is an example). **[CCS]**
- **Charlottesville City Schools** should analyze and redesign the Nutrition Department staffing protocol to ensure that all CCS nutrition staff receive fair wages that increase staff consistency and training that provide staff with culinary skills to provide increased fresh, from scratch meals*. **[CCS]**

**These goals are also included in the 2019 MAPP2Health Plan and 2020 Food Equity Initiative Report and embedded in the five-year Healthy School Foods plan currently partially funded by the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation Shaping Futures grant (5 year) and the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth grant (3 year).*

Inspire Youth Choice: Budgetary Recommendations

- **Fully fund Charlottesville City Schools reconfiguration plans.**
- **Fully fund Charlottesville City Schools annual budget and invest in the CCS Nutrition Department, specifically,** with supplemental funding to support food equity practices. Currently, nonprofit partners are investing \$560,000/year in the Healthy School Foods project. Consider a percentage of matching funds.



Build Community Wealth

Advancing Neighborhood Food Access and Markets

The economic divide in Charlottesville falls starkly along racial lines with Black and brown low-wealth families making about a half (\$28,309) of the median household income (\$54,029). Nationally, in 2019 Charlottesville rated in the lowest 10% of United States cities in our ability for income and social mobility. The multiple challenges and stark inequalities make it challenging for families to increase their wealth. Investing in community wealth building opportunities provides multiple benefits across the city.

In order to ignite and fund community wealth, it is critical to provide opportunities for people of color in low-wealth neighborhoods to access economic opportunities that have been limited by systemic racism. This includes expanding local food system businesses owned by people of color and providing youth and residents opportunities to thrive in food system-related position. Robust collaboration with City departments is necessary for implementation.

Food Equity Initiative Recommendations

- Continue to use funding opportunities and resources, such as the Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development grants (through VDACS) and the Virginia Community Capital's Fresh Food Loan fund to assist local business expansion and create opportunity for increased food access. **[Office of Economic Development (OED), City Manager's Office]**
- Utilize existing programs, resources and incentives (Business Equity Fund, ACE Program, Minority Business Program) that support and enable local community food stores, particularly in low-wealth communities. **[OED]**



- Continue to actively support development of business plans and funding for affordable brick and mortar, as well as mobile markets that can serve public housing residents and other low-wealth neighbors. **[OED]**
- Utilize existing and new incentives (Workforce Development, CAYIP, CCS Intern Program, Cultivate Community Advocates & Food Justice Interns) to build a stairway for food system related employment. Work with Food Justice Network partners and local businesses to build a stairway for Charlottesville youth and residents to move from nonprofit programs to potential positions in landscaping, greenhouse, agriculture, culinary, etc. **[OED]**

Build Community Wealth: Budgetary Recommendations

- *No current budgetary ask while assessment is underway, current ask for staff support to acquire funding. Future funding for these projects could come through the Food Equity Fund.*



Restore Earth & Climate Justice

Advancing Environmental and Climate Justice

While Charlottesville boasts a variety of parks and green spaces in and around the City that largely benefit University students and wealthy residents, environmental and climate injustices have been linked to the historical practice and remaining impacts of racist zoning policy. Higher temperatures and the heat island effect have been shown to have a disproportionate impact, causing greater strain on residents of color and low-wealth residents, due to limited green space and permeable surfaces. The heat island effect threatens health for individuals with underlying health conditions and can impact ability to access food during the summer months. Meanwhile, low-wealth and public housing residents face the added financial burden of increasing utility bills from energy inefficient housing and rising temperatures, thus exacerbating issues of food insecurity. As housing, transportation, and environmental barriers threaten residents' food security, investment in affordable housing paired with dedicated green space for urban agriculture, affordable markets and equitable transportation routes plays a central role in reconciling our climate crisis in coordination with building food equity.

In order to provide residents of color and those with low-wealth the health benefits of access to green space and discontinue the harmful effects of redlining's heat island effect, strategic planning and accompanying investment must be made in affordable housing paired with dedicated green space for urban agriculture, affordable markets, and equitable transportation routes.

Food Equity Initiative Recommendations

- Dedicate city staff (through the Urban Agriculture Director or an Environment & Climate Equity Manager) to support development of equitable Climate Action plans centering urban agriculture and food security strategies for community resilience. **[Public Works]**
- Public Works Climate Protection Office should incorporate food equity and urban agriculture in the draft Climate Action Plan as a vulnerability of the effects of climate change, so that the City can prioritize food access as a target and develop specific strategies to enhance and sustain our food system. **[Public Works Climate Protection]**
- Parks and Recreation should update public land policy to require a percentage of land be reserved by the city for urban agriculture and affordable food market vending for low-wealth communities. **[Parks & Recreation]**

Restore Earth & Climate and Environmental Justice: Budgetary Recommendations

- *No current budgetary ask. Request for staff support for acquiring funding.*



Food Equity Initiative Policy Platform – Background

Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network

Food Equity Initiative (FEI) Overview

In November 2018, the Food Equity Initiative was passed through City Council building on the cross-sector partnerships necessary to bring forward a healthy and just food system in Charlottesville. With the goal to strengthen and embed food equity practices and programs across City Departments and Charlottesville City Schools, five core inter-related action areas were identified and established based on years of community engagement and insight. These include Accessible Food Markets, Urban Agriculture, Affordable Housing, Transportation, and Healthy School Foods. The Food Justice Network’s coalition of 30+ organizations has been working in collaboration with community members, City departments, and Charlottesville City Schools to further identify the policy and funding steps necessary to bring our collective vision of a healthy and just food system to fruition.

FEI Policy Platform Overview

In November 2020, the Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network presented our annual report to the City Council. This report included collaborative efforts towards building a healthy and just food system in Charlottesville through the intersection of initiatives in Urban Agriculture, Healthy School Foods, Affordable Housing, Transportation and Food Pathways, and Accessible Food Markets. During the presentation, Council asked the Food Justice Network to produce an overview document that summarized policy priorities and funding needs across these areas. The Food Equity Initiative Policy Platform was created to fulfill that request.

Connection between FEI and Policy Platform

The Food Equity Initiative Policy Platform puts forth food equity priorities informed by years of community engagement, including *Local Food Local Places*, Mapp2Health, and the FEI city department profiles. The FEI Platform areas connect to the Food Equity Initiative’s five core advocacy areas described above. While the FEI advocacy areas are organized around city department engagement, the FEI Policy Platform planks are organized around community advocacy and include Food Equity & Justice, The Power to Grow, The Right to Good Food, Inspire Youth Choice, Build Community Wealth, and Restore Earth & Climate Change.

Applications of Policy Platform

The policy platform includes specific policy and action recommendations that are to be implemented within city departments and Charlottesville City Schools in partnership with nonprofit partners, businesses and community members. The recommendations can be applied across various City and regional planning processes that connect to these intersecting issue areas such as the Comprehensive Plan, Strategic Plan, and Climate Action Plan. We will continue to update these recommendations and circumstances evolve.

The Food Equity Policy Platform is proposed by Cultivate Charlottesville Food Justice Network Planning Team

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