

A Recommendation To Establish a Standing Cambridge Food & Fitness Policy Council

A Report to the Cambridge City Manager

October 26, 2011

Submitted by:

Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council

Cambridge Public Health Department

CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT



Cambridge Health Alliance

Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council Members

Chris Basler, Project Planner
Economic Development Division
Community Development Department

Stuart Dash, Director
Community Planning Division
Community Development Department

Elaine DeRosa, Executive Director
Cambridge Economic Opportunity
Committee (CEOC)

Hannah Freedberg
[designee for Jeff Cole, Executive Director]
Federation of Massachusetts
Farmers Markets

Rebecca Gallo, Director
Evaluation & Development
East End House

Astrid Harmer, Dietitian,
[designee for Woanyih Lin, Director
Cambridge/Somerville WIC Program]
Cambridge Health Alliance

David Leslie, Executive Director
Food For Free

Dawn Olcott, School Nutritionist
School Health Program
Cambridge Public Health Department

Jack Mingle, Director of Food Service
Cambridge Public Schools

Jackie Neel, Deputy Director
Department of Human Service Programs

Paul Ryder, Division Head for Recreation
Recreation Division
Department of Human Service Programs

Emma Watkins, Director
Citywide Senior Center
Department of Human Service Programs

Josefine Wendel, School Nutrition Coordinator
School Health Program
Cambridge Public Health Department

Jennifer Wright, Director
Cambridge Conservation Commission

With special thanks to our guests at the Focus on Fitness meetings:

Rosalie Anders, Associate Planner
Environmental and Transportation Planning
Community Development Department

Kate Dewey, Director
Cycle Kids

Sarah Fresco, Walk/Ride Day Coordinator
Green Streets

Robert Goodwin, Program Manager
Recreation Division
Department of Human Service Programs

Janie Katz-Christy, Director
Green Streets

Stacey King, Director
Community Health and Wellness Programs
Cambridge Public Health Department

Dr. Robert J. McGowan, Coordinator
Health, Physical Education and Athletics
Cambridge Public Schools

Albert Pless, Manager
Men's Health League
Cambridge Public Health Department

Preface

In September 2008, the Cambridge City Council adopted the following policy order:

That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to recommend to the City Council a method to develop a Food Policy Advisory Council.

In response to a request by the City Manager, staff at the Cambridge Public Health Department convened a Food Policy Task Force (Task Force) in fall 2009 to explore the potential benefits and feasibility of establishing a citywide food policy council.

The Task Force produced a report in July 2010 recommending the establishment a Food and Fitness Policy Council for a one-year period. On behalf of the City Manager, the Cambridge Public Health Department convened an ad hoc Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council, which was charged with:

- Developing recommendations for a strategic and coordinated approach to improving access to healthy foods and physical activity opportunities for Cambridge residents, particularly low-income residents.
- Recommending whether the City of Cambridge should establish a permanent (standing) Food and Fitness Policy Council.

The public health department facilitated six meetings of the council between October 2010 and May 2011. The council's findings and recommendations are described in this report.

I. Introduction

Obesity is epidemic in the United States. Approximately 68% of U.S. adults¹ and 32% of U.S. children (age 2–19)² are overweight or obese. In Cambridge, about 43% of adults³ and 34% of children (age 5–14)⁴ are overweight or obese.

The dramatic rise in obesity over the past quarter century has created a substantial health and economic burden for the nation. Adults who are obese or overweight are at increased risk for a host of medical conditions including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and stroke.⁵ Similarly, children who are overweight and obese children are at greater risk for developing diabetes, heart disease, and other serious conditions as they get older.⁶ And many kids feel the impact much sooner.

For many years, obesity was regarded as a private health matter whose resolution wrested largely on the individual. Today, public health experts are increasingly aware that environmental factors beyond the control of the individual—such as difficulty accessing healthy foods or safe places to play and exercise—play a significant role in the obesity epidemic.⁷

Many communities and states are exploring ways to create environments that support healthy eating and active living.^{8,9} A novel approach for effecting environmental change is the formation of food and fitness policy councils. To date, the Cambridge Public Health Department is aware of only four food and fitness policy councils in the United States—three are in Massachusetts (Holyoke, Lynn, and Worcester) and one is in California (Monterey).

Local food and fitness policy councils—which build on the model of food policy councils—create an arena for studying a municipality’s food and fitness systems and making recommendations that increase access to healthy foods and fitness opportunities. Members identify, propose, and collaborate on innovative solutions to make these systems socially just and environmentally sustainable—and potentially spur local economic development.

A food and fitness policy council also creates an opportunity for diverse stakeholders in the city’s food and fitness systems—who may work in government agencies or in different organizations or sectors—to work together to achieve common goals for the community.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey Data, 2007-2008.

² “Prevalence of High Body Mass Index in US Children and Adolescents 2007-2008,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, January 20, 2010.

³ Cambridge 2008 Five Cities in Massachusetts Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

⁴ Cambridge Public Schools, 2009.

⁵ “Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 24, 2009.

⁶ “Basics About Childhood Obesity (web page),” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed on October 25, 2011. Available at: www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/basics.html.

⁷ “Recommended Community Strategies,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, July 24, 2009.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ “Childhood Obesity (web page),” Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, accessed on October 24, 2011. Available at: www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity.

Information Gathering and Committee Deliberation

The ad hoc Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council (FFPC) was convened in October 2010 for a one-year period. During its six meetings, the council was charged with (1) developing recommendations for a strategic and coordinated approach to improving access to healthy foods and physical activity opportunities, and (2) evaluating whether the city would benefit from a standing Food and Fitness Policy Council.

The council's 14 members were appointed by the City Manager and included representatives from city departments, Cambridge Health Alliance, food pantries, the agricultural community, and community-based organizations. School nutrition staff from the Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD) organized and facilitated the 2010–2011 meetings.

During these meetings, the council developed an overarching goal and objectives for a standing FFPC and reviewed the work of other food and fitness policy councils in Massachusetts. The group also discussed the city's food system* and fitness system** with regard to (1) access to healthy foods and fitness opportunities and (2) increasing awareness and understanding of healthy eating and physical activity opportunities and resources for Cambridge residents and workers.

To gain a better understanding of physical activity opportunities in Cambridge, the council invited representatives from the Men's Health League (CPHD), CycleKids, GreenStreets, and city departments to speak about their respective programs and identify "gaps" in the city's fitness system.

Finally, the group developed a list of actionable items for the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council (see page 8) and agreed unanimously to recommend that the FFPC become a standing city committee.

* A **"food system"** is a series of interlocking processes that combine food production, processing, purchasing, transportation, distribution, consumption and waste recovery that together create the complex process by which a population is fed.

** Recognizing that a standard definition of a "fitness system" does not exist, the Cambridge FFPC defined the city's **"fitness system"** to include physical activity, physical education, and the environment in which these activities take place.

II. Recommendation

To develop and implement a strategic and coordinated approach for improving access to healthy foods and physical activity for all residents, members of the 2010-2011 Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council recommend that the City of Cambridge establish a standing Food and Fitness Policy Council (FFPC). This recommendation is endorsed by the Cambridge Public Health Department.

Members of the 2010-2011 FFPC recognize that it is important not to duplicate actions of other groups in Cambridge. While Cambridge has many programs and services that promote healthy eating and physical activity, there is no single coordinating department, committee, or task force across the city whose mission it is to focus specifically on expanding access to healthy foods and fitness opportunities for all residents.

A central activity of the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council would be to develop a framework for examining strategies for making healthy foods and fitness opportunities accessible to more people, and in the process, improve coordination and collaboration among city programs, schools, businesses, and organizations. Integral to this effort would be a strategic map that would create a shared vision on food and fitness for all city departments and help achieve progress toward common goals— such as reducing chronic disease, hunger, and greenhouse gas emissions.

A standing Food and Fitness Policy Council would provide a framework for current activities in Cambridge aimed at improving the city's food and fitness environment. The FFPC would build on and work in concert with food and fitness-related activities of elected city officials, city departments, organizations, and work groups such as the Healthy Children Task Force.

The following sections describe the overarching goal and objectives for a standing Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council; recommended actions for the next three years; and a proposed structure for the council.

Council Goal and Objectives

Goal

The overarching goal of the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council is to promote health through improving access for all residents to healthy and culturally appropriate foods and to physical activity.

Objectives

For all residents:

1. Improve access to healthy, culturally appropriate, fresh foods, including locally grown food, with a focus on residents who have less access and limited financial resources.
2. Facilitate access to food and fitness through coordination and networking among city and school departments, organizations, and businesses.
3. Improve access to food and fitness by facilitating education through city and school programs, organizations, business and the public.

Council Structure

A standing Food and Fitness Policy Council would operate under the umbrella of the Cambridge Public Health Department.

Meeting Schedule

The Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council will meet five times a year.

Staffing

The FFPC will be staffed by members of the Cambridge Public Health Department who will continue to guide the work of the council. CPHD staff will be responsible for organizing and facilitating meetings, with assistance from other council members. CPHD is currently exploring the idea of sharing leadership of the FFPC with another city department.

In October 2011, CPHD was notified that it is a co-recipient of a five-year federal Community Transformation Grant, created by the Affordable Care Act. The grant will support a part-time coordinator for the FFPC who will work under the direction of CPHD nutrition staff.

Funding

The Cambridge Public Health Department will be responsible for staffing the Food and Fitness Policy Council. Council members' time would be valued as an in-kind contribution, including attendance at five meetings annually.

The Community Transformation Grant will provide staffing and coordination support for the FFPC. To support council objectives, additional funding streams will be actively pursued.

Membership

Membership will be comprised of representatives from the City of Cambridge, institutions, and organizations involved with food or fitness.

It is expected that members will be familiar with their respective department or organizations' food and fitness-related policies and programs, and have the authority and/or expertise to make practical assessments regarding strategic planning, policy, and implementation of new initiatives. Other stakeholder—such as representatives from city departments, health care, food pantries, universities, community-based organizations, and food service establishment—will be invited to share their expertise on specific issues with the council.

Representatives from the following groups will be invited to participate on the standing Food and Fitness Policy Council.

City Departments, Offices, and Commissions

- Department of Human Service Programs (various divisions)
- Community Development (various divisions)
- Cambridge Public Schools (various divisions)
- City Manager's Office
- Conservation Commission

Cambridge Health Alliance

- Cambridge Public Health Department (various divisions)
- WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Program

Community Organizations

- Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee
- Food For Free
- Mass Farmers' Markets
- Other organizations involved with food and fitness

Universities

At the discretion of the council, additional groups or individuals may be invited to join the FFPC in the future.

Decision-Making

Members of the 2010-2011 FFPC conducted decision-making by consensus. The effectiveness of this approach will be reexamined by the council in 2012, in view of the council's expanded membership and the likelihood of holding several open meetings.

Evaluation

Progress toward meeting the goal and objectives of the FFPC will be assessed annually. After three years, the council will assess the overall progress and efficacy of the group, including recommendations for moving forward.

Recommended Actions for the Cambridge FFPC

The 2010-2011 Food and Fitness Policy Council developed the following list of recommended actions, many of which align with national strategies for reducing obesity and chronic disease.

Council members believe these actions are critical for improving the city's food and fitness environments. The council is particularly concerned with improving access to healthy foods and fitness opportunities for vulnerable populations, such as low-income families, elderly adults, non-English speakers, and residents with disabilities.

1. Develop a citywide strategic approach for healthy eating and physical activity

The issues of healthy eating and physical activity touch the work of most city department to varying degrees. Developing a citywide strategic plan that addresses food and fitness would create a shared vision for all departments and be an opportunity to make progress toward common goals—such as reducing chronic disease, hunger, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Recommended Activities:

- a) The FFPC will develop a citywide strategic approach for food and fitness that would create a shared vision for all departments. This would be an opportunity to make progress toward common goals, and increase the efficacy and visibility of current programs and services. The strategic map would include measurable goals and objectives that would be regularly monitored for progress and used as a collective evidence base to support future work.
- b) City departments and city organizations will work together to implement state and federal policies related to healthy eating and physical activity. For example, the federal Affordable Care Act's workplace breastfeeding provision can be supported locally through citywide efforts to promote this policy, including outreach to business associations and human resource departments.

2. Create a consistent food environment for children throughout the day

Children attending the Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) have access to healthy, fresh food during the school day. To ensure that healthy foods are also available to them before and after school, the FFPC recommends developing food guidelines and increasing food purchasing options for preschool and out-of-school-time programs, city-sponsored children's athletic events, and youth centers. These actions would impact foods served at meals, snack-time, family events, cooking classes, athletic events, and other activities.

Recommended Activities:

- a) The city's Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) and the Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD) will collaborate on developing food guidelines for preschool and out-of-school-time programs and youth centers that align with the CPS Wellness Policy and the ongoing expansion of healthy choices in public school meals.
- b) DHSP, in partnership with Friends of Cambridge Athletics and other groups, will create a food policy for city-sponsored children's athletic events that would

introduce healthier snacks and eliminate the sale of soda and candy at concession stands. The policy would build on the current Russell Field concession stand policy, and incorporate elements of the CPS Wellness Policy and align with the forthcoming out-of-school-time guidelines.

- c) DHSP and CPHD will work to expand options for purchasing healthy foods for preschool and out-of-school-time programs, city-sponsored children's athletic events, and youth centers, and to educate program staff about current options for purchasing healthy foods (including locally grown produce whenever possible).

3. Develop coordinated communication and marketing strategies for promoting healthy eating and fitness opportunities

The role of communication, marketing, and social media is gaining increasing recognition for its impact on health behaviors. In a diverse city like Cambridge, centralized targeted marketing and outreach that “bundles” information about healthy eating and physical activity opportunities would be an efficient and effective way to reach different sectors of the population, including low-income residents, immigrants, new residents, and youth.

Recommended Activities:

- a) City departments will work together to train culturally competent outreach workers from established groups (e.g., Men's Health Team, Literacy Ambassadors, Community Engagement Team outreach workers) to promote appropriate healthy eating and physical activity opportunities to residents who best respond to someone they know, particularly residents whose first language is not English.
- b) City departments will collaborate to expand electronic communication portals to promote healthy living opportunities. Examples include a centralized webpage linked to partner agencies, social media with specialized youth marketing, and a shared electronic events calendar.
- c) City departments, including community development, human services, and public health, will collaborate with business associations and community-based organizations to develop coordinated outreach to residents about local food and fitness resources. Products will include information packets for new residents and an expanded *Cambridge Moves* fitness directory for adults and children. These materials will be widely disseminated through city-operated websites, the Chamber of Commerce, and other channels.

4. Expand access to Cambridge farmers' markets

The City of Cambridge currently supports the city's six farmers' markets in a variety of ways, including facilitating the use of city parking lots, publicizing the markets on the city and health department websites, and processing permit applications. To increase the number of people who have access to healthy foods through farmers' markets, the FFPC recommends that the city pursue the following activities.

Recommended Activities:

- a) The City of Cambridge will endorse the Federation of Massachusetts Farmers Markets' efforts to expand acceptance of SNAP benefits (food stamps) at all six farmers' markets in the city.

- b) Assign a city staff member to serve as a farmers’ market liaison to work with market managers on various activities, including (1) determining feasibility of and expediting the process for establishing or expanding farmers’ markets, and (2) helping expedite the process for establishing SNAP benefits at all Cambridge farmers’ markets.
- c) Multiple city departments will work together to better promote Cambridge farmers’ markets. Suggested activities include using multiple communication channels to raise awareness about the markets, including signage and providing information on which markets accept SNAP (food stamps), WIC, and Elder Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program coupons.

5. Support food and fitness-related businesses in Cambridge

The City of Cambridge will provide technical assistance and other forms of support to existing businesses in Cambridge that help increase residents’ access to healthy foods and/or fitness opportunities. The city will also encourage development of new food and fitness-related businesses (e.g., healthier retail initiatives, gyms, fitness classes).

Recommended Activities:

- a) Promote Cambridge food and fitness resources: *See Recommendation 3(c).*
- b) The Community Development Department will provide technical assistance and other forms of support to new and existing food and fitness-related businesses. Potential activities include assisting new businesses locate affordable commercial space and guiding new restaurants through the “start up” process.
- c) In partnership with the city’s business associations, the Community Development Department will promote food and/or fitness-related businesses in Cambridge through activities and events, such as the Harvard Square Business Association’s Urban Ag Fair, in which residents are encouraged to display and to sell homegrown foods from their gardens; establishing events such as food and fitness fairs; and encouraging annual activities to promote healthy eating.
- d) Explore strategies for better distributing locally grown foods to schools, restaurants, retail markets, and other establishments.

6. Create a healthier neighborhood food and fitness environment

A “neighborhood food and fitness environment” refers to both the availability of healthy foods and fitness opportunities within a defined area (e.g., residential or business district) and how easily residents can access those foods and fitness opportunities. While Cambridge offers many opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity, they may not be readily available to at-risk populations, such as low-income families, people with disabilities, and elderly adults. As public health experts have come to realize, it is hard for people to make healthy choices if nutritious foods and fitness opportunities are not available, too expensive, or require undue effort to obtain or participate in.

Recommended Activities:

- a) Multiple groups will work together to assess the city’s current emergency food assistance system and food environment from a neighborhood perspective. Through the Cambridge Food Pantry Network and meals programs, the city currently provides healthy and free food, including city-subsidized fresh produce,

- to approximately 2,500 Cambridge households* on a monthly basis. While this emergency food assistance system is a vital lifeline for residents at risk for hunger, it does not address the larger issue of ensuring that *all* residents have access to food that is affordable and culturally appropriate in their neighborhoods.
- b) Multiple city departments will work together to develop outdoor “fitness” signage (e.g., a placard in Porter Square stating the distance to Harvard Square) in Cambridge neighborhoods.
 - c) The city’s Open Space Committee will explore the possibility of developing outdoor fitness stations when designing renovations to neighborhood parks.
 - d) Multiple city departments and organizations will engage neighborhood groups and individual residents in organizing neighborhood fitness events, such as family bike days, family dance festivals, and walking clubs.

7. Expand urban agriculture

Cambridge currently provides supports for urban agriculture through its community gardens, container gardening programs, and annual urban agriculture fair. To increase the number of people who are able to participate in and benefit from urban agriculture, the FFPC recommends that city departments continue to collaborate on this issue and explore options for expanding access.

Recommended Activities:

- a) The Conservation Commission will collaborate with the Community Development Department, other city departments, and community-based organizations (e.g., Food For Free) to develop more capacity for urban agriculture within the city.

8. Support and enhance existing successful programs

Cambridge has an array of successful programs that promote healthy eating and physical activity. Some of these programs have been developed as part of a strategic planning process across multiple city departments and organizations (e.g., school food service improvements through the Tasty Choices program), while others have originated as national campaigns (Let's Move), grassroots efforts (e.g., Green Streets Walk/Ride Days), community-based programs, or from the business community.

Recommended Activities:

- a) The City of Cambridge will continue to recognize, support, and/or enhance current successful programs that align with the goals identified in the proposed citywide strategic map.
- b) City departments and community-based organizations will continue to support the goals of Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign to reduce childhood obesity through existing activities and by developing new ones, such as DHSP's “Let's Move” pilot program this summer that combined fun fitness activities in city parks with a free nutritious lunch for participating children.

* This figure does not represent unique households.