



FOOD ACCESS THROUGH LAND USE PLANNING AND POLICIES

LAND USE PLANNING AND POLICIES TO IMPROVE FOOD ACCESS MAY INCLUDE ATTRACTING HEALTHY FOOD RETAIL (E.G., SMALL BUSINESSES, MOBILE VENDING), LIMITING THE DENSITY OF LESS HEALTHY FOOD RETAIL, AND PERMITTING URBAN AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY GARDENS.

MAKE THE CASE:

Why Is This A Health Equity Issue?

The issues below highlight the need for land use planning strategies that advance health equity:

- **Historical Land Use Policies and Practices Have Shaped Community Resources:** Historically, land use strategies, such as zoning regulations, were used to separate residential areas from industrial areas. However, some of these strategies were used to segregate groups of people based on race, ethnicity, or income status.¹⁴⁵⁻¹⁴⁷ Such land use decisions and other issues have left many low-income and communities of color with limited access to essential services, facilities, and infrastructure,^{145,148-151} including food resources.
- **Barriers to Healthy Food Options May Exist in Underserved Communities:** The density of fast food outlets has been found to be higher, and the availability of supermarkets is lower, in low-income communities and communities of color.^{108,110,120} Additionally, low-income communities and communities of color may have higher food prices for healthy food than high-income and white communities.^{105,108,110,111} The quality of healthy food may also be lower in these underserved communities.^{108,110,111} Land use planning and policies can be used to improve the food options in a community.

Note: As many land use and zoning strategies fall in the purview of other sectors, public health agencies should work with appropriate partners when considering such strategies.



Design and Implement with Health Equity in Mind

To maximize health impact and advance health equity, consider these factors and others when designing, implementing, and evaluating land use planning strategies to improve access to healthy food:

KEY FACTORS	BARRIERS OR UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES	OPPORTUNITIES TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT
<p>COMMUNITY AWARENESS & INVOLVEMENT</p> <p>Engage residents who lack access to healthy food in planning and policy development</p>	<p>Historically, low-income populations and communities of color have been excluded from, or not actively recruited into, land use planning and policy development.¹⁴⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with organizations that have credibility and ties to residents to foster meaningful engagement. • Provide training to build residents' leadership skills and increase their understanding of the planning process. • Establish systematic processes to ensure that resident concerns are gathered and reflected in land use plans when they are updated.
<p>DISPLACEMENT</p> <p>Make improvements to food retail in underserved communities with current residents in mind</p>	<p>Economic development including new food retail may result in increases in property values and rent. If such changes occur, existing residents may be displaced if they are unable to afford living there.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure comprehensive plans outline how improvements in food access will affect other priorities such as housing and jobs (e.g., incentivize local hiring for new food retailers). • Align transportation decisions (e.g., transit hub locations, bus routes), with food access needs, particularly for those who may depend on transit (e.g., people with disabilities, the elderly).
<p>DISPROPORTIONATE NEGATIVE EFFECTS</p> <p>Be aware that the same methods used to attract healthy options may also be used to bring in less healthy options</p>	<p>Efforts to attract healthy food retail may inadvertently allow or incentivize less healthy options. For example, retailers in underserved communities may be accustomed to selling low-cost and less healthy food options, and may use any incentives to continue selling these items, instead of healthier options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider linking specific requirements for healthy food to any incentives to attract or enhance food retail, particularly in underserved communities. • Provide support to food retail outlets operating in food deserts that meet some established healthy food requirements (e.g., additional vending permits, training, Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) equipment).

Build the Team: Partnership for Success

Successful efforts to implement land use planning strategies to increase access to healthy food depend on bringing a diverse set of partners to the table early, consistently, and authentically. These partners may include the following:

- Community development, revitalization, and redevelopment agencies and organizations
- Community members (of diverse abilities, ages, cultures, gender, income levels, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation)
- Developers
- Food system coalitions and organizations
- Leaders and community champions from multiple sectors
- Local economic development agency
- Local farmers and regional food distributors
- Public health agencies
- Organizations serving populations experiencing health inequities
- Public Works Department
- Retailers and vendors
- Social service agencies
- Zoning and Planning organizations



Massachusetts Ave Project (MAP) Growing Green Youth listen as city officials introduce Buffalo's Green Code (form-based rezoning effort) during participation in a public meeting in Buffalo, NY. (2011). Photo courtesy of MAP.

Using Planning and Zoning to Create Access to Healthy and Affordable Foods

Buffalo, NY

An unstable economy has left the once-thriving city of Buffalo with a declining population, unemployment,¹⁵² high rates of poverty, and chronic disease.¹⁵³ It has also left a large number of vacant lots. While some may view vacant lots as blight, residents saw an opportunity to turn them into community gardens. However, the current comprehensive plan and zoning code was difficult for residents to navigate.

A team led by Dr. Samina Raja, Associate Professor at the University of Buffalo, works with the Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP), a community-based organization, to tackle one of Buffalo's biggest challenges - food insecurity. In 2008, the University team mapped grocery stores and found there were fewer grocery stores in communities of color than predominately white communities. MAP took on this challenge by bringing a mobile market to neighborhoods without a grocery store to increase residents' access to healthy and affordable foods; but an existing zoning ordinance restricted where the vehicle could park.

Through a partnership with the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, several organizations including the University of Buffalo, MAP, and others formed

Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities (with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)—at a time when Buffalo was focusing its efforts on policy improvement strategies. Buffalo was undergoing an update of its land use plan and zoning code, and the partnership saw an opportunity to highlight the links between zoning and food access. Youth from MAP's programs and other groups in Buffalo were invited to help educate community stakeholders on the benefits of improving access to healthy food sources. They also discussed the impact of zoning codes on growing healthy and culturally appropriate food in the community.

As a result of these educational efforts, the mayor announced his support of strategies that promote access to healthy foods at the first Buffalo Food Policy Summit. The city of Buffalo will likely implement a zoning code that supports an equitable food environment by including strategies such as making market gardens a permissible land use. In addition, the Food Policy Council of Buffalo and Erie County was created by the Erie County Board of Health, and will provide support and act as a resource on food systems and its impact on the health of the community.



How a Model for Social Change Led to Grocery Stores and a Fast Food Moratorium

Los Angeles, CA

South Los Angeles residents suffer from disproportionate rates of chronic disease¹⁵⁴ and low life expectancy.¹⁵⁵ In 1992, the nonprofit organization Community Health Councils (CHC) formed to address the health care safety net crisis in Los Angeles. Seven years later, health disparities loomed large in South LA, and CHC explored the root causes of these inequities. Using a model for social change grounded in community engagement and coalition building, CHC focused on inequities surrounding food and the built environment. The group took the time to build key relationships, an important step for addressing unintended consequences as they arose.

Community members, churches, and community-based organizations, in collaboration with CHC, led an intensive assessment that documented disparities in food access with support from CDC's *Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health* program. Over 100 residents participated, many traveling to West LA (an area with some of the best health outcomes in the county) to note differences in the types of food available. Compared with West LA, South LA lacked sufficient grocery stores that carried healthful foods and faced an overabundance of fast food restaurants. The inequity in access to healthy foods became apparent, and community forums spurred dialogue about environmental impacts on health.

Residents envisioned what a healthy South LA would look like and determined that healthy food options were critical. With this groundwork and support from the community, CHC explored strategies to address the density of fast food restaurants and attract grocery stores. The City Council approved a Grocery Store and Sit-Down Restaurant Incentive package that created economic incentives for attracting healthy food retailers to South LA. Building upon relationships with the local planning department, CHC also worked to support the implementation of other strategies to create a healthier food environment. In 2008, the Los Angeles City Council established an interim control policy that placed a moratorium on permits for new stand-alone fast food restaurants in the targeted neighborhoods for a maximum



Examples of food options predominant in South Los Angeles, CA. Photo courtesy of Community Health Councils.

two-year period. The moratorium later became a permanent policy in the form of a general plan amendment preventing the development of new stand-alone fast food restaurants within a half-mile of an existing establishment.

By focusing on the needs identified by community members, CHC made meaningful strides toward improving the food environment. Community members were involved in every step of the process. Lark Galloway Gilliam, Executive Director of CHC stated the key to a successful initiative: “Don’t leave the community behind. Let the community lead.”