

Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council: Developing a City-community co-owned council

The Homegrown Minneapolis Local Food Entity Working Group researched, convened a multi-faceted public process, and worked with a design team to envision **phase three** of Homegrown Minneapolis. The central question for the group was how a leadership entity such as a Minneapolis Food Council could be structured to foster a thriving connection to and standing in the community and be sustained long-term. This document, then, is offered as a foundational summary that will serve to help steer **phase three** of the Homegrown Minneapolis Initiative.

The summary below briefly describes the approach and thinking involved in creating the Minneapolis Food Council as a commons-based structure. Based on the information and insights gathered, the Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council was created as a hybrid structure: one that is neither fully owned nor independent of the city, and one that is neither held exclusively by nor without the co-equal investment of the community. Rather, the hybrid structure might best be understood as a footbridge connecting the city and the community into their rightful relationship - one of mutual trust, benefit, and shared vision.

History

The Homegrown Minneapolis initiative, begun in December of 2008, engaged hundreds of stakeholders from multiple perspectives – community gardeners, farmers, farmers market managers, restaurateurs, food and farming nonprofits, entrepreneurs, academics, City staff, regulators, policy makers and enthusiastic local food consumers – in developing innovative policies and strategies to improve the growing, processing, distribution, consumption and composting of healthy, sustainable, locally grown foods in Minneapolis.

This **first phase** of the initiative resulted in development of more than 50 recommendations that were presented to the City Council in June of 2009. To oversee the implementation of these recommendations, the City Council established a Homegrown Minneapolis Implementation Task Force made up of city staff, community members and experts, and authorized this taskforce to meet until July of 2011. These efforts in the Homegrown story are considered to be **phase two** of the initiative.

What the Minneapolis Local Food Entity working group was charged with:

Phase one of Homegrown Minneapolis developed the following recommendation:

*Recommendation #3: “**Explore the need for, and structure of, a longer-term entity that will provide ongoing guidance to the City on local foods issues and is representative of Minneapolis' diversity. If appropriate, establish such an entity.**”*

To address this recommendation, the Implementation Task Force established the Local **Food Entity Working Group** that met on an average of every 6 weeks for over a period of 18 months to evolve their findings and recommendations. This working group was led by Julie Ristau, Co-director of On the Commons and Co-chair of Homegrown Minneapolis, June Mathiowetz, Coordinator of Homegrown Minneapolis and Cam Gordon, City Council Member and Co-chair of the Homegrown Minneapolis Implementation Taskforce.

The Working Group held two public meetings with more than 130 people present, interviewed over 30 individuals in the fall of 2010, researched many other regions in the country for lessons learned and invited several other City-community partnerships to share best practices of how they worked collaboratively. The Working Group reported their findings regularly to the Homegrown Minneapolis Implementation Taskforce and their recommendations were presented in the spring of 2011. Materials documenting these efforts can be found on the Homegrown Minneapolis website. In June of 2011, the Working Group concluded its efforts.

The Working Group began by researching existing Food Policy Councils across the US. A recent significant national report (see Food First report on the Homegrown website for further information) pointed out that:

- Food Policy Councils had a tendency to become bureaucratic, quasi-governmental entities that dwindle in excitement and momentum.
- That a reliance on representative-based only membership created diminishing efforts for cross-collaboration, authentic diversity and stewardship of the whole system.
- An exclusive focus on policy failed to engage the hearts and minds of community members who had historically grown and created food and local economies.
- There was a trend in many regions that exhibited a diminishment of resources when Councils relied only on foundation grants for their survival, which the Working Group interpreted as a lack of ownership in the Council itself.

In addition, the Working Group's analysis gleaned lessons learned from how **phase one** of Homegrown Minneapolis structure helped to catalyze the interests and skills from **both** the community and city staff to set the context for public engagement and subsequent direction.

Frameworks Considered

Based on the above research, community declaration and learnings of the first two years of Homegrown Minneapolis (HGM), a basic assumption was crafted:

Establishment of a food council should be intended to deeply root and weave together the food work in the community, foster a sense of belonging and connection, build upon a history of more than twenty years of efforts to cultivate a local food system here, and recognize the culture and skills of practitioners and agrarian practices. The community seeks to co-create, celebrate and share this ongoing body of work as partners.

The next step was to ground this assumption in a working framework that could respond to what the Working Group heard from the community, what could be surmised to be working already in the first two phases of Homegrown, and also what the national research told them.

The Working Group's research led them to the frameworks of the commons (a commons-based approach), resilience theory, sustainability principles and permaculture ethics as

compatible and intersecting bodies of work that could be applied practically to address the challenges of creating a strong, grounding foundation for the third phase of Homegrown Minneapolis and the emerging Minneapolis Food Council.

Grounding Principles: An interlocking set of grounding principles to set the framework

Drawing on these frameworks will facilitate the intentions of HGM to co-create a health promoting, environmentally sustainable, local, resilient, inclusive, equitable, fair and transparent local food system.

The Working Group predicated HGM phase three efforts on these various frameworks to reflect whole system views. The expectation was that in doing so it would illuminate how the success of the Minneapolis food system work is inextricably linked to regional momentum around building and sustaining local food systems. At the same time HGM would be able to raise the visibility of its achievements and demonstrate the success of the collaboration that has been established in the past months between the city and the community around creating a vibrant local food system.

Commons-Based Framework

A commons-based framework highlights the importance of publicly shared resources and assumes a practice of co-creation, multiple owners and equity, collaboration, relationships with each other and our food, celebration, cultural distinctiveness, sufficiency, and local empowerment as central elements. All of these aspects were sited in our public process as critical expectations.

The commons is also – importantly – about how we share, the practice of people coming together to create and manage resources with equity and sustainability as central management principles. In a commons, people have power in decisions about resources and their communities not only as voters, “inputters” and consumers, but also as stewards and creators.

Sustainability Principles

A sustainability framework also provides useful ways to guide thinking about how to shape food systems for the coming decades. The Brundtland Commission in 1987 adopted a now widely used definition of sustainability: “*Meeting the needs do the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*” The later work of Dr. Karl-Henrik Robert helped answer the question “How?” with “By not systematically degrading the ecosystem by chemical and physical means and by not systematically degrading the social system by abusing political power and economic power and responsibility.” This body of work serves to guide individuals and societies in their decision-making by rooting the definition of sustainability in science. See appendix for the sustainability principles.

Permaculture Principles

Community members voiced the need for a food system that is resilient, multi-faceted, redundant, right-scaled, and diverse. They were also seeking a paradigm shift from a conception of ourselves as consumers (taking passively and receiving) to a conception of ourselves as producers or co-creators of our food system. (See appendix)

Resilience Principles

Resilience thinking can help design social-ecological principles based on Commons Principles. The Resilience Alliance has defined resilience as a system's capacity to absorb disturbances without fundamentally changing its state. They propose attributes of a resilient system (See appendix)

Proposed Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council structure

Based on the information and insights gathered and grounded on the consolidated frameworks suggested, the Working Group concluded that a proposed Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council is best positioned to do effective work if it relies upon a hybrid structure: one that is neither fully owned nor independent of the city, and one that is neither held exclusively by nor without the co-equal investment of the community. Rather, the hybrid structure might best be understood as a footbridge connecting the city and the community into their rightful relationship - one of mutual trust, benefit, and shared vision.

Rather than creating a structure that could end up, as the national research suggested, bogged down, disconnected, and irrelevant over time (see Food First Report on Food Policy Councils), the form envisioned will demand evolution based on continuous learning and responsiveness. Participants believe a healthy system requires flexibility and fluidity at its core to allow for self-correction, and adaptation to shifting conditions.

Comments received directly from the community held sessions and interviews highlighted those elements of such a healthy system and partnership should include:

- Authority evolved from wisdom rather than hierarchy
- Leadership predicated upon inclusiveness rather than separation
- Process as celebration rather than process pro forma
- Information used for sharing power rather than for hoarding it
- Questions welcomed as a transformative opportunity rather than as a threat
- Strategies that restore and enhance capital rather than remove and diminish it
- A role for everyone where people can actually work together
- Feedback loops incorporate everyone
- Capacity
- Connections to multi-dimensional aspects of communities: cultural, social, political
- Mutually beneficial
- Many points of "intervention participation"
- Care for earth and care for people as a bottom line value
- Rough social equity
- Governance that is built on belonging and agency

The Working Group noted that the conversations revealed a deep belief that we are in movement times, that there is momentum and breadth, and that a newly formed Food Council could play a pivotal role in supporting and strengthening this movement locally and regionally. People noted that how we structure and launch this next phase is critical to long-term economic, social and cultural changes in the food system in Minneapolis that we hope to achieve.

Purpose and Composition of a Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council

The Working Group took the body of feedback received from all its meetings and worked with the Homegrown Minneapolis Implementation Taskforce to refine the purpose of a Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council. It was determined that the purpose of the new body will be to:

- Develop innovative policies and strategies to improve the growing, processing, promotion, distribution, consumption and composting of healthy, sustainable, locally grown foods in Minneapolis;
- Advise the Mayor, City Council, and Park Board on food system related opportunities and challenges;
- Provide technical expertise and recommendations in the development of the City's Local Food sustainability targets;
- Advance the food system in directions that are health promoting, environmentally sustainable, local, resilient, inclusive, equitable, fair and transparent and, where necessary, convene additional expertise to innovate around challenges;
- Assist in development, implementation, and evaluation of Homegrown Minneapolis recommendations;
- Support, participate and provide leadership in development of regional food system work; and
- Assist with opportunities to celebrate food and its role in strengthening the connections of Minneapolis' many communities and cultures.

Further, they proposed that the Food Council have the following composition:

- The body will be made up of no more than 19 members selected through the open appointments process and structured to include participation of community members, City staff and elected representatives. Of these 19 members, 14 will be sought from the community, striving for diverse and balanced representation and being mindful to seek out community expertise and perspective from those often underrepresented.
- The remaining 5 members will include one representative from each of the following City Departments: the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support, Community Planning and Economic Development, City Coordinator–Sustainability, a Mayor's representative, and a Council member or Council member representative.

Note: The City Council later added two positions to the Food Council, one additional community member and one representative of the Regulatory Services Department, bringing the body's total size to 21 representatives.

Leadership and Operating Instructions

A key component to success for this co-owned structure is, of course, shared leadership. The final recommendation emerging from the Homegrown Implementation Task Force was that the body will be led by two co-chairs - one appointed by the Mayor and one appointed by the Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council. Additionally, there will be an Executive Committee that includes the two co-chairs, up to three Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council members and the Homegrown Minneapolis Coordinator.

These two related structures will be created to function together to ground Homegrown Minneapolis in City Hall and in the community. These two functioning bodies will serve to bridge community accountability with City accountability. The Homegrown Minneapolis Coordinator will serve as staff to the body.

Homegrown Values as defined by the community

It was clear from the research completed on Food Policy Councils across the country that structure and frameworks alone do not guarantee an effective governing body and work. Values identified by the larger community are seen as a key building block. To this end, the Working Group offered a collaborative platform for community members to assign and refine a set of working values and optimal food system characteristics that would help to guide the work. This list was compiled by community members throughout both phase one and phase two, and refined in public meetings. (See appendix)

How does the newly formed Food Council work?

Co-ownership of the body and effective community engagement has its challenges and will be refined in the “doing of the work”. To this end, the following is a list of ideas also generated from the community and city staff that may help bridge the gap and inform the “doing”:

- Institutionalize feedback & evaluation (annual process & ongoing mechanisms)
- Engage people not normally at the table meetings in ways that they could lead
- Encompass an educational and fun component at many of the meetings
- Go to where people are; rotate the location in a different community each time
- Publish the meeting agenda ahead of time
- Focus meetings on real problem-solving and elicit community co-creativity
- Identify local food entrepreneurs and bring best practices to light
- Utilize mediums like website, social media, video, radio, music, small group discussions that involve local community leaders

There has been much discussion about how the meetings themselves could be structured to be worthwhile, and not just “business meetings.” One idea is that the first hour would be a business meeting and the second hour more publicly oriented, inviting discussion and potlucks. There could also be opportunities to tour a small farm or business or feature a local foods vendor from the community. Volunteers would provide daycare and there would be a robust cultural component present. Meetings would attempt to implement creative channels for community creativity, leadership and problem solving that takes into account different cultures & different generations.

Functions

In addition to the above state purposes, the Food Council will need a period to review and reflect on past activities, focus on strategy development and idea incubation and build consensus among the new members of the Food Council about proceeding forward. The new group will need an effective meeting format, good communications and administrative support. The body will need to continue to create ways to engage the community and promote close community connections. Community members also cited the following as some of the functions that the new body could serve:

- Work with government agencies to remove regulatory barriers

- Help to increasing access to land for urban agriculture
- Foster and support innovation by encouraging small pilot projects that work through community hubs to share results
- Promote a “National Night Out” sensibility such as an annual harvest event with local foods cook-off, partner with community and professional cooks, or support activities such as an Urban Ag. Sovereignty Day.
- Create promotional materials to spread the message and reach out to new constituencies
- Reward and recognize creativity and best practices, especially farmers
- Continue to reach out to diverse communities using a variety of communication methods
- Identify funding and collaboration opportunities with existing organizations and business interests.

Working with community efforts

The newly formed Minneapolis Food Council will partner with and disseminate information on local foods movement and strive to be in connection with the newly emerging efforts such as the Local Food Resource Hubs Network and the Urban Ag Network. The Minneapolis Food Council could invite a formal process that helps to identify its relationship with these entities in a concrete way.

Assumptions to date suggest that the functions the Hub and Urban Ag networks may have in our region could include:

- Organizing workshops & trainings to re-skill the community
- Demonstrating sustainable practices on-site and in their work
- Reaching beyond the city to facilitate urban-suburban and urban-rural linkages for a regional food system
- Providing access or information on resources - seeds, fertility (compost, manure, compost tea, biochar), consultations, community kitchens; may vary by community; may be housed at different locations
- Becoming educational and resource centers for local foods
- Maintaining a repository database of local foods producers, processors, distributors in the larger community and connecting them
- Seeking out people working in the margins that have not been visible, but contribute greatly to our overall food shed
- Organizing promoting and hosting local foods community events in collaboration each other and the Minneapolis Food Council

To this end, the Food Council can look forward to a fruitful collaborative relationship with these emerging entities.

Evaluation

There will be ongoing mechanisms for evaluation & feedback as well bi-directional accountability. The Homegrown Coordinator and Executive Committee of the Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council will be directed to return to the Public Safety, Civil Rights and Health Committee annually beginning in 2012 to report on worked completed and the upcoming year’s work plan. This report will be a joint effort of city staff and the community. The purpose and accomplishments of the Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council are to be reviewed every three years by the Minneapolis City Council starting in

2014. In addition, the Council will strive to also create accountability and evaluative measures to ensure that the spirit of the hybrid structure of a co-owned process and body is being upheld.

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Appendix 1: Principles and Frameworks

In 2009, Elinor Ostrom received the Nobel Prize for Economics for her research proving the importance of the commons around the world. Her work investigated how communities co-operate to share resources and informs debates about resource use, the public-sphere and the role of the citizen. Dr. Ostrom's work uncovered a set of design principles for commons management.

Commons Principles

- We all belong to our community (no exceptions), and each of us has an equal stake and voice in what happens.
- We must recognize and repair past damage and inequities that have been created in our current market-based society
- The things that belong to all of us must be named, claimed, defended, protected and improved. We have a mutual responsibility to take care of these commons and pass them on to the next generation in better shape than we found them.
- We must honor our full humanness. Each of us matters more than in ways other than just that of individuals and consumers. We recover our identities as neighbors, community members, citizens, and the experts who know the most about the places we live.
- We are surrounded by abundance and opportunity that the market does not recognize or value. We must see and claim this abundance for the benefit of all.
- Everyone should be offered chances to participate in defining, restoring, creating, managing, leading, governing and owning those things that are important to the future of the community.
- People most affected by critical decisions must be included in the process of making them.
- History, cultural distinctiveness and people's personal stories are important factors in setting goals and making decisions, as well as simply understanding our community.
- Sufficiency and resilience create sustainability.

Resilience Theory

What Might a Resilient World Look Like?

(From Walker and Salt, Resilience Thinking)

Resilience: A system's capacity to absorb disturbances without fundamentally changing its state.

1. Diversity
2. Ecological Variability
3. Modularity

4. Acknowledging Slow Variables
5. Tight Feedback Loops
6. Social Networks/Social Capital
7. Innovation
8. Overlap in Governance Structures
9. Recognition of Ecosystems/Ecosystem Services

Sustainability Measures

How do we know we're being sustainable?

(From Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, Natural Step Framework)

Sustainable societies work to ensure nature is not subject to systematic increases in.

- ...Concentrations of substances extracted from the earth's crust;
- ...Concentration of substances produced by society;
- ...Degradation of physical means;

And in that society ...

... People are not subjected to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs

Permaculture Ethics & Design Principles

(from permacultureprinciples.com)

Care of the Earth

Care of People

Fair Share

1. Observe & interact
2. Catch & store energy
3. Obtain a yield
4. Apply self-regulation & accept feedback
5. Use & value renewable resources & services
6. Produce no waste
7. Design from patterns to details
8. Integrate rather than segregate
9. Use small & slow solutions
10. Use & value diversity
11. Use edges & value the marginal
12. Creatively use & respond to change

Values constructed by community input:

The below set of values reflects what people identified as important to food system work in 2011 and is along to the Homegrown Minneapolis Food Council for final discussion and formal adoption at one of their first meetings:

HEALTH-PROMOTING

- Recognizes the role of the food system in contributing to collective health and well being
- Works on systematic public health improvements to increase nutrition and reduce levels of obesity and other chronic diseases

SUSTAINABLE

- Works to meet current food needs without compromising the ability of the system to meet the needs of future generations
- Conserves, protects, and regenerates natural resources, landscapes and biodiversity

LOCAL

- Recognizes that food and agriculture are central to our local and regional economy
- Works to support small farms and expand the local food sector business and job creation opportunities
- Promotes the restoration, growth, and equitable distribution of capital

RESILIENT

- Thrives in the face of challenges by developing new and better food system solutions

INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE

- Recognizes the food system belongs to the entire community
- Works to ensure all Minneapolis residents are able to meet their nutritional needs

FAIR

- Supports fair wages and healthy working conditions across the food system (If it doesn't work for farmers, it doesn't work.)
- Provides economic opportunities across the city and at levels that serve a diverse range of food system stakeholders

TRANSPARENT

- Provides opportunities for farmers, workers and consumers to gain the knowledge necessary to understand how food is produced, transformed, distributed, marketed, consumed and disposed
- Empowers farmers, workers and residents to actively participate in decision-making in all sectors of the system