

# FOOD AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY POLICY SCAN RESULTS 2018

## Introduction and Purpose

One in three Anne Arundel County residents is obese or overweight, leading the Anne Arundel County Department of Health (AACDOH) to make obesity prevention a strategic priority. Beginning in January 2018, representatives from the AACDOH and the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF) undertook a food policy scan<sup>1</sup> by interviewing over 20 representatives from Anne Arundel County agencies and non-profits. The goal of the scan was to identify and articulate the strengths and

opportunities of food-related policies by interviewing government agencies. The scan examines multiple aspects of the Anne Arundel County food system including zoning, land use, public health, food access and social equity. Based on the strengths and opportunities identified in this project, county agencies can implement evidenced-based strategies to improve public health and reduce obesity and other chronic illnesses for all county residents.

## Anne Arundel County Strengths

Systems, Market and Vision—Anne Arundel County excels in creating markets for local farmers. Mobile markets and food trucks are able to sell in Anne Arundel County and other nearby counties through a reciprocity agreement that enables intra-county selling. Some of the farmers markets accept federal nutrition benefits and provide a matching dollar incentive to low-income residents. The Anne Arundel County Food Bank also partners with local farmers to provide produce and meats to low-income families. Additionally, the Anne Arundel County Economic Development Corporation (AAEDC) has a restaurant stewardship program that markets restaurants offering locally produced foods.

AAEDC also offers business support and incentives to local farmers. The county allows, promotes and offers educational opportunities toward backyard composting as a means of diverting food waste from landfills.

Zoning and Land Use—Anne Arundel County excels in allowing home gardening and agricultural use of residential land. County codes permit gardens or farms and farm support structures, like barns or stands on urban and suburban residential property. Residents are permitted to have bees, chickens, other farm animals, and they are able to operate farm stands on their property. Food producers are also permitted some level of food processing on farm sites.

1. The tool was developed by University of Virginia professors Tanya Denckla Cobb and Tim Beatley.

The Anne Arundel County Recreation and Parks Agriculture and Woodland Preservation program offers farmland tax incentives and AAEDC offers creative leasing and financing models for start-ups. The county also permits community gardening on public land as long as it is managed by the county.

Public Health, Physical Activity and Food Access—Anne Arundel County excels in expressing concerns and establishing goals toward improving public health and reducing obesity and other chronic illnesses. Anne Arundel County government supports employee wellness by offering incentives and providing free or low-cost physical fitness programs. The public school system incorporates healthy meals and allows students who purchase lunch to select unlimited fruit and vegetables. The Department of Health encourages community members to organize

farmers markets and recreational activities. Some existing bus services have routes by major grocery outlets and are available at various times of the day. The county also has a Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan for non-rural areas, and the Move Anne Arundel Transportation Master Plan emphasizes improvements to safe, convenient walking and biking routes.

Fostering Social Equity—Anne Arundel County takes efforts to ensure that low-income families and families facing short term emergencies have access to food. The county has multiple systems to connect people with needs with places of means. The county has completed a Community Health Needs Assessment, the Poverty Amidst Plenty report and a performed a food environment study, which produced a detailed food resource map.

## *Anne Arundel County Opportunities*

Systems, Market and Vision—The county lacks a coordinating body for policy. This limits both the emphasis of food-related policies throughout the county and the coordination of the myriad efforts throughout the county aimed at addressing food, health and agricultural issues. The Healthy Anne Arundel Coalition Obesity Prevention Subcommittee focuses on programs rather than the policies that enable programs. Additionally, there is no policy or language that describes food as a “citizen’s right,” nor a stated goal to reduce the environmental footprint, nor a goal to support the local food economy. Programs exist to help farms transition to low-spray or organic farming methods, but farmers are not encouraged, or incentivized to farm in any particular fashion. Local food producers would benefit from a policy that preferences purchases from local food producers or gives tax incentives to businesses that purchase foods from local food producers.

Zoning and Land Use—Anne Arundel County has the opportunity to sponsor or work with a land trust that would allow community or non-profit gardens to grow produce for consumption and sale. Funding streams could also be created for urban food development projects, such as Community Development Block Grants. Vegetation planted on public lands could be food-bearing plants (e.g., fruit and nut trees) that would allow pedestrians to forage and eat food as it grows. The county has the opportunity through its General Development Plan to update streets and neighborhoods with safe walking and biking routes, so that people can live, work, go to school and food shop without daily automobile usage. Town centers and redevelopment areas are opportune places to start.

Public Health, Physical Activity and Food Access—The most substantial opportunity is in the realm of transportation.

Only in the Odenton Town Center and the Parole Town Center in Annapolis physical activity incorporated into the built environment. Anne Arundel County would benefit from the implementation of safe biking and walking plans in all areas, connecting neighborhoods to grocery stores and other outlets. More trail connectors in residential, school, employment and shopping areas will promote more active transportation and access to healthy food sources. The 2013 pedestrian bicycle plan excludes rural areas by including only those areas with county water and sewer infrastructure and has routinely lacked the funding for implementation. The most substantial recreational facilities are within affluent areas and most convenient to residents with the greatest means. The county would benefit from tax incentives or programs that

support the construction of physical fitness facilities in or adjacent to low-income areas of the county. Similarly, the county has an opportunity to provide ride sharing or low-cost taxi services to connect people from low-income areas to and from grocery outlets.

Fostering Social Equity—Tax and regulatory measures that disincentivize the purchase of high sugar beverages and other unhealthy foods, and aid in the creation of grocery outlets to serve low-income residents would be helpful. Also, pre-development assistance to developers considering such grocery outlets would be useful. Policies to support a living-wage to farm workers and facilities to ensure that farm training takes place in a comfortable environment in the language of the trainees would also improve equity.

## Conclusion

In many ways Anne Arundel County is advanced in farming and food related policies. The county allows for growing food, raising animals and erecting structures to aid in farm sales on private urban, rural and suburban property. The public school system incorporates healthy meals for all students including free and reduced-price eligible families. The county offers numerous programs and activities to alleviate hunger and improve food access to low-income residents and residents who live in areas lacking healthy food options. The county would benefit from a network of safe and convenient biking and walking routes to reduce automobile dependence and

encourage more walking and biking. The northern most portion of the county has some of the worst health outcomes and the greatest number of hurdles towards healthiness. Many of the agencies within Anne Arundel County offer a plethora of programs, educational efforts and activities aimed at assuaging the conditions that permeate that area. These efforts are meaningful and laudable, applying creative ways to lessen the burden imposed ultimately by high levels of concentrated poverty.

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