

## Marin Food Policy Council

Meeting Notes

August 20, 2013

[HHS campus](#)

### Next Marin Food Policy Council meeting scheduled for:

Tuesday, September 17th, from 3:00-5:00 p.m. @ [HHS campus](#)

### Action Items:

Chair Janet Brown welcomed all attendees with the following opening remarks:

“Welcome to Marin Food Policy Council, the place where dreams come true. As we continue to work together to provide a framework for action for the County on issues affecting food access and health for all residents, we are asked to add this Council’s voice to policy efforts that support breastfeeding. This “first food” issue affects the youngest and most vulnerable members of our Marin community and in addressing it, we are beginning at the beginning of what constitutes community food security.

The Council is approaching a final version of its zoning template policy language specific to Community Gardens. The completed “advocacy packet” is a truly visionary piece of work when presented within a context of improving public health. It seeks to widen access to land, resources, learning experiences, and information, related to the practice of gardening, and to encourage all Marin residents who understand the benefits of growing their own food, and all those would like to try it.

The Community Gardens policy document constitutes a major health initiative with multiple long term positive benefits for the entire Marin community. It leads in the direction of a healthier, happier way of life for our neighbors and ourselves. It changes the look and feel of neighborhoods for the better, as well as our ideas of open space, public land, and our collective future. Our work is to identify ways we can support, and bring attention and resources to, those public health goals.

Within the context of public health, we operate with the understanding that the health of our neighbors, co-workers, and fellow residents is a powerful factor in maintaining our own individual health. We recognize our interdependence when it comes to staying well. Recent news that Marin County was found to be the healthiest county in the United States based on a certain set of criteria such as exercise, weight, lifespan, and diet, does not conceal or distract us from recognizing that there are real and substantial health disparities within our community. We know these disparities exist. Their persistence is evidence of our failure to fully understand the public health model, and to accept its central premise that health is, in great measure, a collectively created attribute.

Dr. Richard Levins, Professor of Population Science at Harvard University, explains the complexity and challenge of trying to influence public health. His assertion is that health is a function of wholeness, arising out of the entire pattern of actions and decisions that we make, or that are made for us, over the course of a lifetime—decisions that govern our daily lives. Those decisions take place in a natural and social environment that provides or prohibits choice.

What is critical to our understanding is that each of us is dependent on those around us to ensure that we stay healthy. That’s why simply having health insurance does not ensure health. If one has the best health insurance obtainable, one is still exposed to hundreds, if not thousands, of encounters with others on a daily basis. We are vulnerable to whatever condition is being created or maintained in that general population.

The person with the golden health insurance is still subject to contact with relatives, friends and co-workers under stress, and to others who often do not have adequate resources to care for themselves, or access to routine medical care. Our community members who work in our favorite restaurants and hotels, teach in our classrooms, share our office space, serve in our hospitals, touch the silverware we use, make the beds we sleep in, and hand us our change, are directly connected to us, and we to them. It's a primary reason to want everyone to have the best possible diet and preventive care, and to be able to see a doctor when they feel unwell. The inescapable conclusion is that wanting that for everyone is in your own best interest. It's selfish and it's smart, as well as being the right thing to do.

As individuals, we do not generally achieve a health profile substantially above that of the natural and social environment in which we live. Therefore, nothing makes greater sense than to work hard to improve conditions out of which health arises for the entire community.

Being recognized as one of the healthiest communities in America, amidst awareness of severe disparities in general health and lifespan throughout this County, ought to give us pause. Perhaps it can empower us to actually work toward the designation we have prematurely received—to deserve it—to make it true. We can become an example of a community that is pro-active toward improving health and quality of life for all residents. As a community, Marin County can use this recognition to further advance the concept of community food security and the implications that has for public health policy.

When faced with the gargantuan problems of health and environment, it often seems that the problems are daunting and overwhelming, (climate change and pandemics) while the solutions seem maddeningly small, (improving the lunch served at school and connecting it to lessons in the garden). Yet, over and over again, we have seen that what is most effective in terms of energy and change, are human scale solutions, connected to place, that solve more than one problem without creating new ones.

The only way we have seen to change a food system, for example, is one bite at a time. When we make a conscious choice to seek out and eat food produced in line with the values we say we support we have the power to redesign food systems. Eat your values.

## **Complete remaining presentation discussion and policy recommendation – Susan Martinelli and Gueidi Beltran:**

- Draft community support for breastfeeding policy and action statement.
- Enlist MCFP member agencies and programs to develop breastfeeding support strategies of their own.
- Draft letter of support for WIC Business-Community Alliance.

Council Representatives Susan Martinelli and Gueidi Beltran will draft language for a breastfeeding policy and action statement as well as a letter of support for WIC Business-Community Alliance, and send to the Steering Committee before September's Food Policy Council meeting.

## **Discussion on Community Garden policy recommendation:**

Council Representative David Lewis shared the latest Community Garden policy recommendation document revised by Bob Brown, Tom Lai, and Carlene McCart,

including the three themes of: recommendations for policies and actions supporting home and community gardens, recommendations for garden management and support, and a request for the development of an interactive map of community garden sites. The goal was restated to simplify and shorten the permit process, creating more of a checklist for staff to approve garden requests as long as applicants meet certain criteria, such as performance standards. Council Representative David Lewis agreed to discuss item E. Chemical Use of the listed performance standards to assess options that the Marin Food Policy Council could agree to support. The Council approved the document, pending resolution to the issue stated above, and consensus was reached to take the policy recommendation to the County and city mayors for municipal plans. Later in the meeting Council Representative Denise Trevino proposed the possibility of having an order of cities to approach as well as potential policy implementation plans.

### **Discussion regarding specific community needs:**

#### **Council discussion points regarding specific community needs identified at 7/16/13 meeting:**

- Marin City
  - Healthier breakfast, lunch, and snack options for children attending Bayside and Martin Luther King Jr. schools
  - Affordable, accessible grocery store with healthy options
  - Community garden
  - Farmers market
  - Safety
  - Availability of physical activity spaces
- Canal
  - Affordability of healthy foods
  - Safety in walking in the Canal neighborhood
  - Farmers market
  - Healthier school lunches and snacks
  - Variety and quality of healthy foods
  - Promoting healthier options in retail
  - Availability of physical activity spaces
- West Marin
  - Food Pantry needs
  - Dollar value and distance

Council Representatives discussed specific community needs and agreed to the following desired learning and actions for the next council meeting:

- Council Representative Terrie Green will present a statement of desired food access/food justice in Marin City for the Council to support and share the resolution recently approved.
- Council Representative Richard Waxmam will summarize the issue of access to safe space and Shared Use Agreements.
- Council Representative Alexnadra Danino will research CalFresh administrative policy.

- Council Representative Sheila Kopf will share the results of CalFresh enrollment on the inequality gap found in a recent food bank and Stanford Center of Poverty and Inequality study.
- Council Representative Deborah Schoenbaum will keep the Council posted on the Marin Youth Commission's timeline for potential future collaboration including youth participation at meetings and having the Council share policy ideas with the Commission.
- Council Representative Deborah Schoenbaum and YLI will work with Council Representative Terrie Green and Marin City with the possibility of including Marin City youth on the Marin Youth Commission, which has a few seats still open for representation from communities that should have a voice.

It was agreed that the next couple Council meetings will resume the Food Access/Food Justice focus, and include the desired learning and actions listed above, upcoming CX3 results, Marin County Youth Commission engagement, and potential collaboration with the People's Grocery.

## **Discussion regarding shared themes by communities:**

### **Council discussion points regarding shared themes by communities identified at 7/16/13 meeting:**

- Healthy images and messages (public transportation, convenience store windows, groceries, billboards, posters, ads, pictures, text, "ambiance," etc.)
- Store intervention or training
- Store access
- Safe neighborhood
- Food pantry sourcing
  - Grocery stores
  - Farmers and ranchers
- Aging
- Homeless

Council Representatives discussed shared themes by communities and agreed to the following desired learning and actions for the next council meeting:

- Healthy images and messaging will be explored further.
- San Mateo County and Central Valley chapters of the Youth Leadership Institute storefront makeovers will be explored as potential models for Marin.
- The People's Grocery of West Oakland will be explored as potential models for Marin City.
- The Council discussed the recent award of Marin as the country's healthiest County as well as the option of drafting a statement in response to this award, calling attention to the disparities that still exist and listing the issues that the Marin Food Policy council is working on.
- The Council discussed a policy agenda/action plan template that Council Representative David Lewis sketched on the board.

## Discussion regarding food pantries and sourcing:

### Council discussion points regarding food pantry committee work identified at 7/16/13 meeting:

- Food bank has ramped and is providing food at more sites and serving more individuals since 2008
- Still there remains a higher demand due to the recession
- Desired increase through coordination for sourcing at all levels: independent grocery stores, major grocers, and individual farmers
- The hope is that the Council is the place to develop options and solutions

Council Representatives discussed food pantries and sourcing and agreed to further explore the following issues:

- Awareness of the statistics surrounding food insecurity and the connection of food supply and food access
- Increased outreach and education of existing incentives for food donations
  - AB152 tax credit for crop donation
  - Emerson Food Donation Act protecting food donors from food safety liability
- Potential for working with produce buyers on expiration and “in-store” date practices and perfect produce standards
- Nutrition education to help people learn how to cook and prepare food they’re not familiar with
- Narrow the gap between food access and consumption with education modeled after the People’s Kitchen with the People’s Grocery and La Mesa de las Abuelas in West Marin
- Connecting Marin grazing/ranchland and creameries with the consistent demand for more protein and dairy
  - Potential use of retired dairy cows as meat

The meeting wrapped up just after 5 p.m. Chair Janet Brown made the following closing remarks:

“It is not easy to cross boundaries to adopt a whole-systems approach to health. It means leaving the areas we know well and venturing into fields where we have to depend on the expertise of others. It means learning unfamiliar concepts and mastering new tools to engage complexity. It means asking people to take health into account in making decisions that usually depend on other considerations. It may provoke controversy. It may make people we approach uneasy and even angry. It requires patience, imagination, courage, integrity, and a sense of humor.”

- Dr. Richard Levins, John Rock Professor of Population Science, Harvard School of Medicine

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