

Marin Food Policy Council

Meeting Notes
September 17, 2013
[HHS campus](#)

Next Marin Food Policy Council meeting scheduled for:

Tuesday, October 15th, from 3:00-5:00 p.m. @ [HHS campus](#)

Handouts:

Sample Letter to Mayors of Marin Cities and BOS President advocacy packet, Community Gardens Draft General Plan Language template.

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. Today is about continuing to build a shared vision and a shared language for aligning and connecting our work, increasing our resources and our allies, and accelerating our results. Since we are a policy-making body, it seems worthwhile to share some words of wisdom about policy development from Dr. Richard Levins, John Rock Professor of Population Science at Harvard School of Medicine.

Dr. Levins reminds us that health is a function of wholeness, and that when policy-makers move to a model of whole-system determination we can see that:

1. All theory is wrong that limits concern to just our species and pushes the rest of nature into the background;
2. All theory is flawed which sees our species as an undifferentiated whole and ignores the injustice that we inflict upon each other;
3. All theory is too narrow which looks only at the individual confronting the environment and fails to see that individual as a unique "particle" formed in an eco-social field;
4. All theory is wrong which separates mind from body;
5. All methodology is wrong which pits quantitative against qualitative methods;
6. Finally, all policy derived from theory is hopelessly biased if "policy" is seen as the allocation of resources and the drafting of regulations; if real conflict of interest is denied and the boundary conditions within which policy is formed are simply accepted as "life"; and, if researchers are not at the disposal of all affected parties.”

Dr. Levins is challenging us to confront health, society, and habitat as a whole, in its full complexity. At the end of each meeting I quote Dr. Levins about adopting a whole systems approach to health. This is what I read.

“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. “

However, he goes on to say....

“But we can all recognize that a problem has to be posed big enough to accommodate an answer. If we fail to define the problem big enough, then many important impacts on our problem are going to come

from outside the domain of the problem, and we will inevitably, mistakenly, treat these impacts as "random" or "error." Contrary to common sense, big problems are often more soluble than small ones."

As we turn our attention to intent and impact of the images and messages confronting our community each day, I thought that two of Dr. Levins' whole-systems cautionary notes are particularly pertinent:

1. All theory is too narrow which looks only at the individual confronting the environment and fails to see that individual as a unique "particle" formed in an eco-social field;
2. All theory is wrong which separates mind from body.

When we first began formulating policy for the Berkeley Unified School District about improving meals served at school and linking them to lessons in the garden, some school officials were worried that we might be going too broad with our ideas and policies. We reassured them by saying that all we wanted to do was remove the inconsistencies between what we taught children in school about diet and nutrition, and what we actually served them when the lunch bell rang. Of course, that meant changing virtually everything, but that admission would have caused alarm and resistance.

Therefore, I would just say that, as pertains to images and messages, we are simply interested in removing the inconsistencies between what we say are positive images and messages that contribute to improving public health, and what we and our children actually see and hear as we conduct our lives at school, at work, and in the neighborhoods where we live.

Continued discussion on Community Garden policy recommendation:

Council Chair Janet Brown and Council Representative David Lewis reported back from Bob Brown on the Council's question regarding item E. Chemical Use of the listed performance standards. Bob Brown explained that it is unwise to state that something is forbidden if there is no bureaucratic program in place to regulate and enforce that statement. Council Representative David Lewis suggested the addition of item 13 "*Discourage use of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical substances in community and market gardens*" to the recommendations for policies and actions to support home and community gardens section of the advocacy packet, as well as the addition of the bullet item "*Discourage use of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical substances in community and market gardens*" to the Community Gardens Draft General Plan template. The ensuing discussion included the following points:

- Council Representative Deborah Schoenbaum questioned whether prioritizing Community Garden access for communities with greatest income and health disparities is explicitly stated in the documents. Council Representatives Susan Martinelli and Leah Smith pointed out locations in each document where this priority was stated.
- Council Representative Rebecca Smith questioned the possibility of streamlining the advocacy packet to facilitate easier comprehension, as well as adding language around nutrition education and food preservation to the advocacy packet, perhaps to the list of Recommendations for Garden Management and Support on page 4.
- Council Representative Rebecca Smith also posed the question of including more language calling attention to the inclusion of school gardens in the recommendation.
- The issue of Shared Use was brought up, with the promise to be addressed further by Council Representative Richard Waxman later on in the meeting.
- The Council discussed the merits of sending the same catch-all document that includes all interests to all recipients, versus sending simplified documents targeting particular audiences. Council Chair Janet Brown volunteered to work with Council Representative Miguel Villareal on a targeted document specific to school gardens.

- Council Representative Susan Martinelli confirmed that the proposed statement to discourage chemical use would be in addition to the existing item E. regarding chemical use.

Council Chair Janet Brown restated the goal of the policy recommendation as streamlining the permit process, thereby making it simpler for people to start a community garden. She then asked if there is general consensus to approve the documents, pending the inclusion of language around school gardens, shared use, and nutrition education. The Council agreed, and approved the Community Garden policy recommendation. Council Representative Liza Crosse then updated the Council that the Marin Municipal Water District is currently looking at the residential and commercial rate structure, and explained that including community gardens under the commercial heading might create an opportunity for reducing water rates for community gardens. She shared that there will be hearings in October on the rate structure, and the Council agreed to endorse a letter in support of rate reductions for community gardens, that the Steering Committee will write and circulate electronically for the Council's approval before the hearings take place.

HEAL overview and discussion on mini-grant opportunity:

Council Representative Rebecca Smith gave some background on HEAL, and explained the Council's role as one of the three HEAL implementation teams, referencing the Strategic Framework given to Council Representatives. She shared that there will be another HEAL mini-grant application round coming soon, with the application due by December 31, 2013, and the funds to be used by June 30, 2014. The Council agreed to brainstorm ideas for use of the funds through October and into November, in order to apply on time. Council Representative Leah Smith reported back on the success of AIM's Market Match program (partially funded by the first HEAL mini-grant), determined by surveys they have been conducting at farmers markets showing that the Market Match program is a huge driving force in motivating people to shop at farmers markets, where they then realize that they are spending the same or less than at their usual grocery store. The Council agreed to solicit a similar report from CalFresh on the success of the Assistor training program that was also funded by the first HEAL mini-grant, to determine whether continued support was needed in that area. The Council identified initial potential funding need in the following areas: CropMobsters, gleaning, WIC, CalFresh, and Market Match (perhaps in West Marin), and agreed to learn more.

Healthy imaging and messaging discussion:

Council chair Janet Brown presented the topic of healthy imaging and messaging for discussion by referring back to her introductory remarks around individuals being formed within their environments and the importance of removing inconsistencies between what we tell children generates health in a community, and what we then turn around and do. Council Representative Rebecca Smith brought up the issue of healthy messaging and public transit, noting the largely unhealthy advertisement that covers the transportation method that is used mainly by youth of a lower socio-economic status. She offered to speak with the Supervisor that is on the Golden Gate Transit Board, pointing to the GG Transit Policy Statements that prevent the advertising of tobacco, alcohol, and political and religiously divisive messages. Council Representative Liza Crosse suggested that education about advertising might be a

more efficient and effective use of resources rather than targeting one source, since there are so many other sources of unhealthy imaging and messaging through various other forms of media. Council Representative Miguel Villareal supported the potential success of education, citing examples from Novato High School, and suggested working with curriculum developers to develop new curriculum as well as to add it to existing wellness policies. Council Representative Deborah Schoenbaum agreed with power of educating youth, and suggested even greater results from empowering them to do the educating themselves, by engaging in activities such as the store makeovers that the Youth Leadership Institute has taken on in Fresno and San Mateo counties. The youth-run campaign to remove alcopops in Novato was also cited as an example. Council Representatives Deborah Schoenbaum and Denise Trevino agreed to the possibility of starting similar store makeover programs with youth in Marin, as well as to the possibility of having youth from the Youth Leadership Institute participate in an upcoming Food Policy Council meeting. Council Representative Rebecca Smith reported that youth are doing some of this in the Canal and Marin City via CX3, and suggested that some of them join an upcoming meeting as well, combined with the CX3 report back. Council Representative David Lewis questioned the Council's role in this issue, and the Council responded with the following possibilities: drafting a global statement on education on advertising, working with curriculum developers and existing wellness education policies, engaging with Youth Leadership Institute and CX3 youth at an upcoming meeting, and drafting language addressing Golden Gate Transit ads using templates from tobacco etc. policy.

Policy Agenda and Action Plan share and discussion – David Lewis:

Council Representative David Lewis shared the draft Policy Agenda and Action Plan that is currently being built, based off of existing policy work that the Council has done and projecting into future work, and opened it up to suggestions of what additional policy work the Council may be interested in, with the following suggestions:

- Support for home gardeners – i.e. the Canal residents that are being told they cannot garden at their apartments
- Commercial production – i.e. looking at existing policy in the Countywide Plan that the Council could help support further
- Connect West Marin youth with rest of Marin youth – i.e. farm workers who don't have access to the food that they are growing and harvesting
- Continued work with CalFresh – i.e. a change in the system so that families can enroll in less than 6 months' time
 - Council Representative Alexandra Danino shared the following recent Marin/SF Food Bank work: expanded training for Marin Application Assistors, \$55 incentive for every approved application, working with HHS on easing eligibility requirements, state-level work on the potential for dual-eligibility with MediCal, and hiring two Promotores to help work in the community debunking myths.

Shared Use Agreements share and discussion – Richard Waxman:

Council Representative Richard Waxman shared a handout for a presentation on Shared Use Agreements next Thursday, September 26th, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. He spoke about the documented benefits of Shared Use, from the increase in physical activity to being able to

grow and eat more healthy food. Novato and Lagunitas have done some work with Shared Use, but there is no County-wide policy supporting it; it is largely up to individual districts and principals, and there are many questions, concerns and myths surrounding the issue.

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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