



Somerville Food Action Plan 2022 Progress Report

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Introduction

Background

In 2018, the Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities (OFHAC) (formerly Shape Up Somerville), published Somerville's Food System Assessment in close partnership with the Somerville Food Security Coalition. The assessment led to a 2019 Food Action Plan to address gaps identified in the assessment's goal areas (to see the full assessment visit somervillema.gov/ofahc). With over 61 unique stakeholders participating in an 18-month process, the Food Action Plan serves as a guide to collectively building an equitable, secure food system in Somerville.

During the launch of the Food System Assessment, myriad community-based organizations met to outline priorities for a Food Action Plan, identifying different organizations to act as lead or co-lead in the goals and recommendations. The community took immediate action and had a productive year before COVID-19 hit and disrupted many networks and structures, the food system a main target.

The start of the pandemic in early 2020 resulted in a change in direction and goals for the community. It caused sharp increases in food insecurity, but also shone a spotlight on pre-existing inequities in food and nutrition access. While before, food system work had focused on policy and program improvements to create a better food environment, the pandemic created a massive immediate need to get food out to people who could not afford it or could not leave home to obtain it. At the same time, while the pandemic presented huge challenges to food access, the unprecedented situation made policy changes that had seemed out of reach suddenly feasible. Universal school meals, cash assistance to feed school-aged kids, and online food shopping with SNAP benefits are all examples of longer-term goals that became realities and provided proof of concept.

Federal funding supported the City and community response. Initially, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds reimbursed for activity directly connected to the pandemic, including food aid. Then in 2020 funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) became available via a city application. A host of strong community food providers received funding, including Project SOUP, Elizabeth Peabody House, Shepherds Kitchen and Food4All. Local businesses and nonprofits also collaborated to support food access. For example, Community Cooks, Forge Baking Company and OFAHC partnered to provide ready-to-eat meals for isolated or quarantined residents.

As CARES funds ended, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided additional federal funds, which have been distributed nationally to states and municipalities.

The City of Somerville received \$77 million in ARPA dollars and is currently managing the implementation of these monies. The funds are being utilized to address ongoing urgent needs and develop longer-term sustainable solutions to benefit those most impacted by COVID-19, with food access and nutrition security a priority.

As the nation and the Somerville community continue to recover, food system stakeholders seek to create long-term resiliency by preserving key innovations and addressing critical gaps the pandemic exposed. Now is the moment to revisit and reprioritize food system goals and pair them with new innovations and funding opportunities. Before we look ahead, however, we pause to acknowledge and document our collective progress.

Progress Report Overview

The following report is a summary of activities and progress made since the publication of the Food Action Plan. Its purpose is to help food system actors remain accountable to all stakeholders, celebrate successes, and determine next steps to address the continuing gaps and inequities. Given the length of time since the initial Plan was released and the robust food system activity that took place due to the pandemic, this report will focus on the past 2-3 years, with some nods to earlier work at the conception of the Plan. The report reflects programming through the end of 2022 and captures data through October 31 of that year.

It has been a dynamic time in the world of food systems, access and security. Significant strides have been made, but there is more work to do. The next steps in this report are inspired by conversations with constituents, providers, and best practices across the country. The Somerville Food Security Coalition will vet these ideas to help determine priorities and players before moving forward.

Use this report to:

1. Get an up-to-date account of the food security landscape in Somerville as of Fall 2022;
2. Inform innovative ideas on how to best address remaining gaps and inequities and who would be best to take the lead;
3. Support your personal and/or organizational priorities for the upcoming year.

The pandemic catalyzed positive action in some ways, but exacerbated disparities in others. Most importantly, the pandemic showed us yet again what the Somerville community can do when it works together. We invite you to share this report with friends, family and colleagues and be part of the ideas and actions to improve food security in Somerville.

I. Transit

All transit options in Somerville and the region support equitable access to healthy food.



Special note – The initial focus from the Food System Assessment was improving how people get to their preferred stores. The onset of the pandemic quickly shifted how people perceived online ordering and food delivery. It increased preference for delivery and food distribution systems pivoted to go where people live. Since there is no goal in the Food Plan that calls out bringing more free or low-cost food to people, we have divided this goal into two parts to summarize, first, “Getting food to people” and, second, “Getting people to food”.



A pop-up food pantry at North Street-Clarendon Hills. Feb 2022

Local Highlights

Getting Food to People

Just Eats Boxes at Public Housing: In 2021, Food For Free created the Just Eats program to bring staple food items and fresh produce to the largest public housing sites and public schools in Somerville. This program grew out of pandemic need to bring food closer to people and, with ARPA funding awarded in 2022, has grown to support 8 housing sites in

Somerville; Mystic Housing, Clarendon Hill/North St Housing, Ciampa Manor, Highland Gardens, Brady Towers, Properzi Manor, Bryant Manor, and Capen Court.

Free Pantry Delivery: Deliveries by the Project SOUP Home Delivery Program grew tenfold to an average of 209 deliveries/month from April 2020-April 2022, with support from CARES Act funding through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

Public Housing Partnership: In 2022, Shepherd’s Kitchen partnered with tenants at nearby Highland Gardens to deliver groceries and offered two pop-up pantries at Mystic and Clarendon Hill housing to fill gaps in programming at these sites.

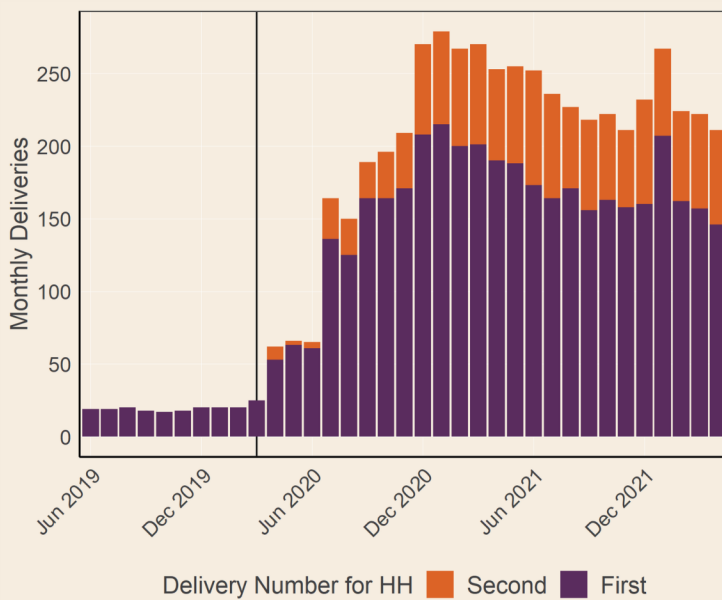
Pantry Home Delivery

What is it?

Prior to the pandemic, Project SOUP operated a home delivery program for about 20 households per month. In June 2020, SOUP took over a COVID-19 pop-up city pantry delivery program and has since been organizing about 250 deliveries a month for homebound individuals and those in quarantine or isolation for COVID-19.

Data Highlight: Deliveries by Month

Total Project SOUP home deliveries, June 2019 to April 2021



Purple shows the first monthly delivery for each household. Second deliveries to households from April 2020 onward are marked in orange

From June 2019-April 2021, deliveries increased approximately tenfold. These numbers reflect an increase in regular clients, the option for those needing more support to have bimonthly delivery, and the number of one-time COVID-19 related deliveries. A spike in deliveries to quarantine households is visible in December 2020 and January 2021, following waves of the pandemic.

How did it help?

Many pantry and meal programs adapted to offer home delivery during the pandemic, including Hearty Meals for All and the Somerville Hispanic Association for Community Development's Food4All. These programs allowed COVID-19-positive residents and exposed households to stay isolated and reduced the hardship they experienced due to lost income from missed work. They also supported residents at high risk for COVID-19 or those unable to get out due to child or elder care responsibilities. The sudden availability of delivery options shone a light on how many residents regularly struggle to get to a grocery store or a food pantry to obtain adequate food. Despite a reduction in COVID-19 cases and risk, the need for the service has remained steady as homebound residents continue to be referred to the program.

Adding Deliveries to Accompany Community Meals: Hearty Meals for All, which has provided a monthly community meal in Davis Square since 2009 and continued to do so throughout the pandemic, added delivery and to-go options, as well as in-person dining when it was safe to do so. The delivery option included dinner, food staples, and health supplies. It initially served guests who felt unsafe due to the health risks of leaving home but has continued and expanded to serve those who have a harder time accessing traditional support systems in the post-pandemic environment.

Free Delivery from a Lower Cost Grocer: Daily Table, an affordable grocery store with a location in Central Square, Cambridge, began offering free delivery within a 2-mile radius. This includes much of the Union Square, parts of East Somerville, and Brick Bottom neighborhoods.

Getting People to Food

Food Access and Transit Grant: To better understand how to improve the intersection between food and transit, a multi-sector collaboration between the City, Tufts University, MIT and community researchers sought and received a \$15,000 Tufts grant to engage the community on improving access to affordable food.

Taxi to Health Grant: The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) funded both the Council on Aging and OFAHC (November 2020 – December 2021) to provide low-income, transit-dependent residents with free rides to get to food and medical appointments. Starting in March 2022, ARPA funds supported Somerville's "Taxi to Health" program.

Healthy Retail Study

What is it?

To better understand how to improve the intersection between food and transit, a multi-sector collaboration between the City, Tufts University, MIT and community researchers sought and received a \$15,000 Tufts grant to engage the community on improving access to affordable food.

Of 578 survey respondents, 1 in 5 were at risk for food insecurity, 1 in 3 were transit dependent, and 1 in three self-reported as non-white.

Data Highlight: Survey Results

The survey results showed that respondents at risk of food insecurity would be more likely than food secure residents to use all five of the proposed food access models. The survey also revealed important insights about each of the models. For instance, respondents without access to a household car would be more likely than those with access to a car to use a rideshare program. Older adults would be less likely than adults under age 60 to shop at neighborhood markets with affordable and/or pre-chopped produce.

Advocacy for Transit to Grocery Stores: City advocates worked with the MBTA to expand the number of non-transfer (or one-seat) rides included in the Proposed Bus Network Redesign.

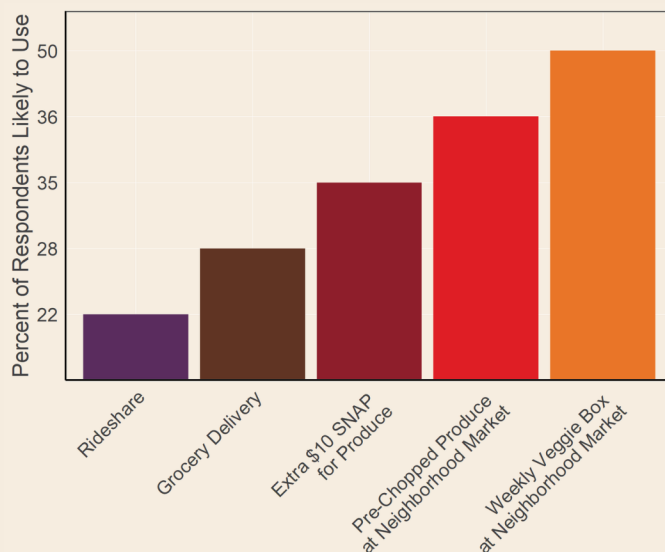
State & Federal Highlights

Online Grocery Delivery with SNAP: The Department of Transitional (DTA) approved SNAP for use in online ordering and delivery, including affordable retailers like Daily Table and Aldi. To date, 17 stores in Massachusetts accept SNAP as payment for online food orders. Delivery fees are not covered by SNAP.

Next Steps

- Find consistent funding for community-based organizations to strengthen free and low-cost delivery options, acknowledging that through the pandemic, home delivery access has become a new standard.
- Set up pantries in buildings with high food assistance needs.
- Reassess group transport options to get a post-pandemic understanding of where and how shuttle services operate; for example, from public housing sites to popular grocery stores, pantries, and farmers markets.
- Use various program data to inform the next iteration of sustainable ways to get food to people, and get people to food.
- Use ARPA funding to expand free MBTA Charlie Card passes to food insecure households not connected through the public schools.
- Connect more people with limited mobility to the SNAP online program.

Preferred Models to Access More Fresh Fruits and Vegetables



How did it help?

The project wrapped up in early March 2020. Coincidentally, due to COVID-19, most of the models conceptualized in the survey became realities, such as enabling SNAP online ordering and delivery, improving transit access to food locations through the Taxi to Health grant-funded program, and increasing purchasing power for some households through either P-EBT, the SNAP emergency allotment or additional WIC grocery store benefits during the summer months.

Somerville's Taxi to Health Program

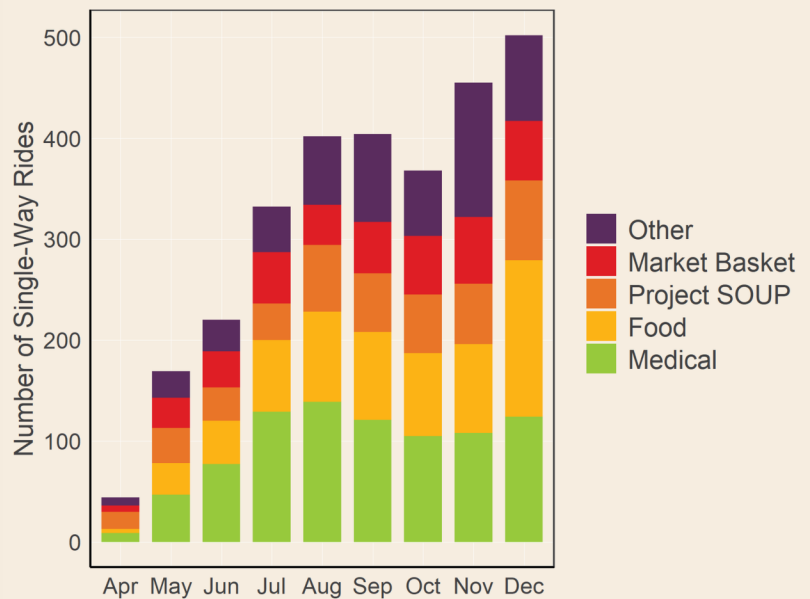
What is it?

The Taxi to Health program, currently funded through ARPA, offers free taxi rides to grocery stores, pantries, and other food sources for low-income Somerville residents. It also supports free rides to medical appointments and prescription pickup. The desire for easier trip options to full-service stores with an affordable array of products was a common theme during the Food System Assessment focus groups. The Healthy Retail Study (described below) followed and asked people their preferences around four theoretical models to reduce this identified barrier and/or improve access to food..

Data Highlight: Rides by Month

Single-Way Rides by Month and Type, April 2022-December 2022

From April to December 2022, the City of Somerville offered 2,886 rides to limited-income, transit dependent residents. Reaching 156 unique users by December, participants used a median of 2 rides per month to access food, medical, and other health-supporting needs. Among food access destinations, Somerville's Market Basket and the Project SOUP Food Pantry were the most popular destinations.



Note: Rides that included both food and medical destinations are classified as 'Food', thus data shown under-represents use of the program for medical reasons.

How does it help?

Transportation is a major barrier to accessing healthy, affordable foods. The program provides a short-term solution to those with lower income who rely on transit to access affordable full-service grocery stores. Program recipients report that, previously, they would primarily take the bus or pay for a cab, and they save money as well as time and purchase more food with this program. The program operates in conjunction with the Council on Aging's Taxi Program, which offers up to three rides a week for older adult residents to Somerville food locations, pharmacies, and medical appointments in the Boston Metro Area.

II. Cultural Relevance & Inclusion



People and organizations designing policies and programs to improve healthy food access and intake are diverse and represent a range of incomes, ages, ethnicities, cultures and communities.

Local Highlights

Community Engagement and Equitable Policies: The pandemic highlighted disproportionate rates of poverty, income instability, poor working conditions, and lack of access to healthy environments among communities of color. As a result, City community engagement has deepened its focus on reaching all residents, and city policies and programs have reaffirmed a commitment to centering equity.

A New Immigrant Centered Coalition: The Immigrant Services Unit (ISU) was formed during the pandemic. It brings multilingual, multicultural city and community partners together weekly to coordinate basic needs provision for immigrant communities. Information about food resources and needs are shared at each meeting, and highlights are included in weekly newsletters in targeted languages.

The Expansion of Immigrant Services: The Fiscal Year 2022 City budget expanded the Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA) by hiring a director and additional community engagement specialists fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Nepali. FY2023 saw the addition of a Chinese engagement specialist and increased capacity for more commonly spoken Somerville languages.

Mutual Aid: Somerville has become a hub of mutual aid through Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville (MAMAS). This entirely volunteer-led organization supports equity-driven, culturally appropriate mutual aid networks, and affirms that giving and receiving always go in both directions. Since starting in early 2020, MAMAS has redistributed over \$600,000 in individual donations through language-inclusive and need-blind mutual aid.

New Ways to Engage: Remote meetings and mobilization during the pandemic brought new stakeholders to the Somerville Food Security Coalition, elevating underserved voices in our community to address new and emerging challenges and lasting impact of the pandemic.

State & Federal Highlights

Drivers License Bill: In June 2022, the MA legislature passed a bill to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license, overriding a gubernatorial veto in a huge show of support for this legislation. Public support was affirmed when a 2022 ballot amendment overturning the law was defeated. This will allow undocumented workers to drive to work, food, childrens' schools, or childcare.

Public Charge Reversed: In March 2021, the restrictive version of the Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds final rule of 2019 was stopped. In September 2022, a new final rule ensured that SNAP and other important public benefits are not considered in public charge determinations. Outreach to mitigate the chilling effect of the 2019 rule is ongoing.

Next Steps

- Set formal equity goals within the Food System Assessment framework and develop systems to track those goals.
- Continue to broaden engagement in the Food Security Coalition to raise up diverse voices and concerns.
- Build public engagement in the Food Security Coalition by returning to in-person outreach at community events and adding new ways to engage, including holding evening and hybrid meetings.
- Work to pass the LIFT the BAR Act, which would allow all lawfully present immigrants to access public benefits, including SNAP.

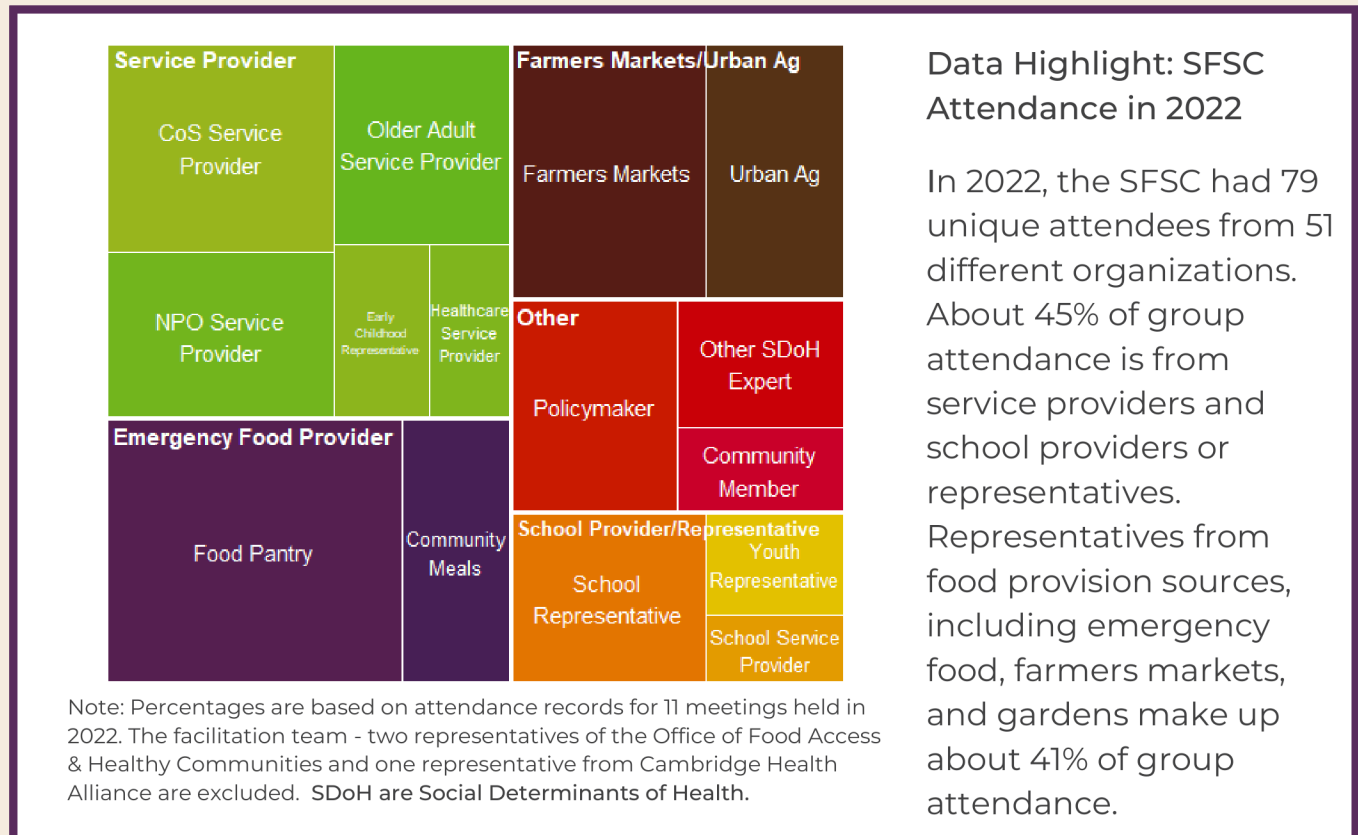


A tour for Somerville service providers at the Union Square Farmers Market on how to use food benefits, including the SNAP match and HIP program. Summer 2022

Somerville Food Security Coalition Representation

What is the Somerville Food Security Coalition (SFSC)?

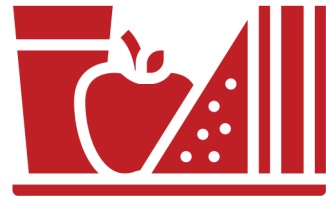
The Somerville Food Security Coalition brings together stakeholders from community organizations, food distribution non-profits, government and non-profit service provision organizations, and the Somerville community.



How can the SFSC continue to grow?

A stated goal of the coalition is to broaden representation, especially to include more community members impacted by policies, programs and practices coming out of SFSC. The coalition is seeking funding to offer stipends to members whose attendance is not part of their professional responsibilities. In addition, coalition leaders and members make an effort to bring information to key stakeholders who cannot attend meetings regularly due to capacity constraints.

III. Food & Nutrition for School-Aged Youth



School-aged children have access to all the wholesome food needed to support their growth and development.

Local Highlights

During School

Free School Meals on a National Scale: Federal waivers during the pandemic enabled flexibility for school meals across the country, including making them free to all students. Since March 2020, the Somerville Public Schools Food and Nutrition Department has been providing free meals to all students, first as a “grab and go” option when schooling was remote and then in person in the cafeterias.

Massachusetts Legislature Voted to Continue Free Meals: The federal waiver ended June 2022, but Massachusetts became one of five states to pass legislation allowing universal school meals to be provided for the 2022-2023 school calendar. Of note, school breakfast has been free in all Somerville public schools since 2008, so this bill impacts lunch locally.

Supper Meal Programs Added: In Spring 2022, The Winter Hill Community Innovation School piloted a once-a-week supper program for children and parents, primarily funded through the federal government’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The program transitioned to the Healey School with a new format in Fall 2022. Somerville Public Schools (SPS) was also awarded a grant from the Education Leaders of Color Foundation to support a twice weekly meal at East Somerville Community School. The program began in December 2022.

Nutrition Education Changes: As of Fall 2022, there are two SPS Health Educators for grades 1-8 teaching the Health Smart curriculum to all classrooms across the district. The curriculum will cover nutrition and healthy eating. UMass Extension will continue to support schools that qualify for their programming, including the Healey School, East Somerville Community School, Next Wave Full Circle and Winter Hill Community Innovation School.

Out of School

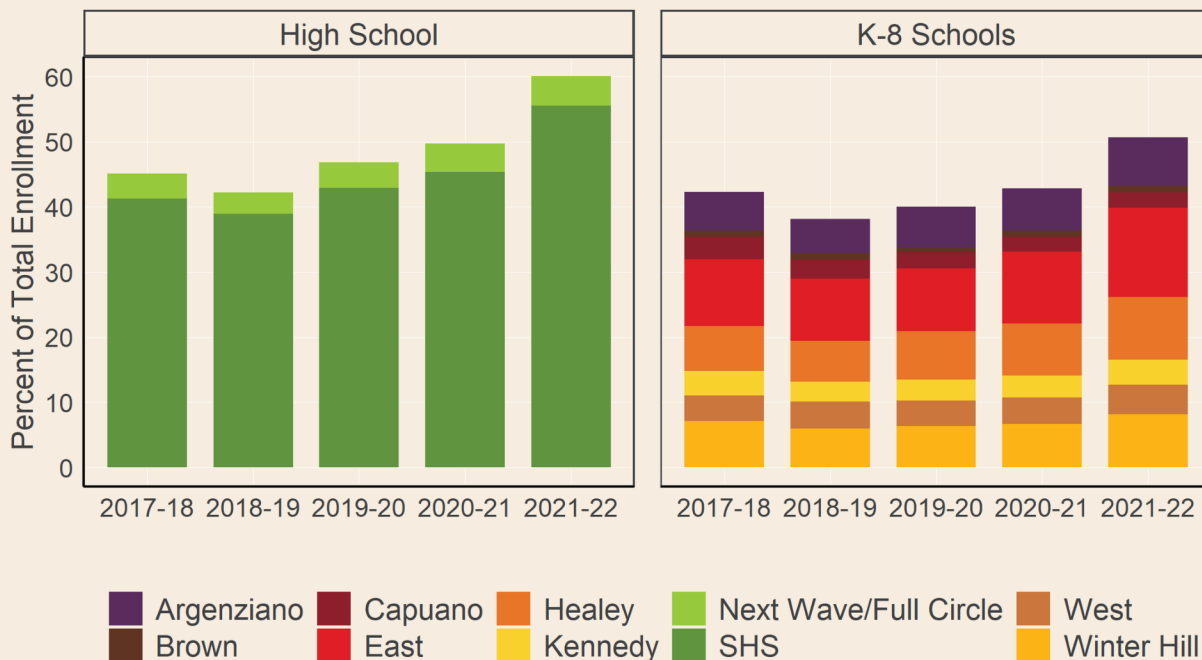
Ready to Eat Frozen Meals: Food For Free re-introduced Heat-n-Eats, a program providing ~50 frozen, ready-to-eat meals at three different SPS locations.

Universal School Meals

What are Universal School Meals?

During the pandemic, all public school students across the nation were able to access free school meals due to a federal waiver. Although the provision has ended on the federal level, Massachusetts has extended this eligibility through the 2022-23 school year. Prior to COVID-19, students had to apply for free or reduced-price school lunch unless the school was certified to supply free meals under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Data Highlight: Low-Income Students by School & Year



Note: Data is drawn from Department of Education records of students who are 'economically disadvantaged' from 2017-2021 or 'low income' for SY21-22. Low income recently replaced economically disadvantaged as the category name with very minor changes in definition. The percent of students in this category is shown for the HS programs and the K-8 schools, with color breakdowns for each school or programs

More than half of Somerville Public School students qualify for free or reduced price meals, with eligibility increasing steadily since the 2018-19 school year. Through 2021-22 Universal School Meals during the pandemic, FNS saw a 20% increase in school lunch participation, with average daily participation in Spring 2022 totaling 3,518 lunches per day out of 5,218 enrolled students.

How Does it Help?

Universal free meals at schools reduces the administrative work for caregivers of students and staff in Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), and it increases participation in the school lunch program. This yields more reimbursements or revenue for FNS and reduces the stigma around who eats school lunch. For more information, check out Project Bread's Feed Kids Campaign.

Free Food School Markets: For school year 2022-23, Food For Free, in partnership with school-family liaisons, is hosting monthly free food markets at four schools where families can choose the items they prefer. These markets serve about 400 families each month.

Reloadable Food Cards: Food For Free transitioned its weekend backpack program to cash assistance ‘Carrot Cards,’ which replaced backpacks of childrens’ food with reloadable debit cards that families can use to purchase groceries.

State & Federal Highlights

Pandemic Cash Assistance for Food: Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) and summer P-EBT offered families cash assistance to supplement school meals starting in 2020, allowing for more choice and supporting households with kids in Somerville.

Universal School Meals: Universal Free School Meals were introduced across the country during the pandemic, lowering the administrative challenges and stigma of applying for free and reduced-price meals.

Action Against Meal Shaming: In October 2021, Massachusetts passed an act prohibiting schools from denying students with unpaid meal debt a hot lunch. The act also requires all districts or schools with at least 50% free and reduced-price lunch eligible students to apply for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Permanent Summer P-EBT: In December 2022, Congressional spending legislation included a permanent, nationwide Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program. This will provide families of eligible children \$40 per month per child to make up for school meals children miss during summer break.

Next Steps

- Advocate for Universal Free School Meals beyond the 2022-23 school year.
- Make affordable, healthy food options available afterschool, especially targeting high school students where there remains a food resource gap.
- Re-introduce nutrition or food systems education for all public-school students, regardless of school income level.

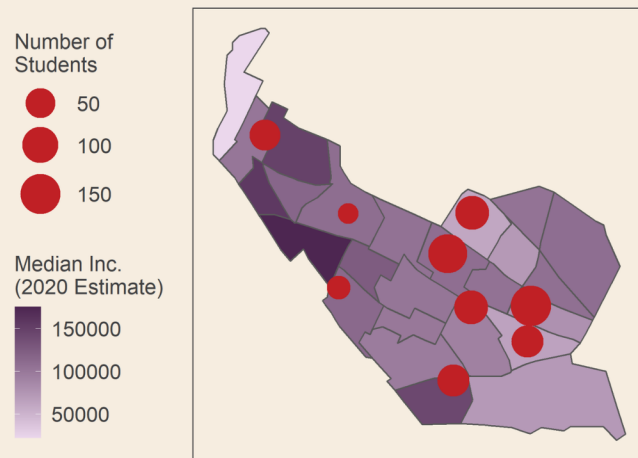
Food For Free Carrot Card Program

What is it?

The Carrot Card program provides cash assistance to public school students in food insecure homes. Prior to the pandemic, the program existed as the Backpack program, which provided ready-to-eat foods for students to take home in their bags. The program switched to remotely loaded debit cards during the pandemic, and families overwhelmingly preferred the freedom of choice offered by cash assistance. As a result, the cash assistance model remained in place when students returned to in-person learning. For the 2022-2023 school year, eligible families may receive up to \$290 per school year per child: \$25 in months with no holiday break and \$35 for those with a holiday break. The cards can only be used at in-person locations that sell groceries.

Data Highlight: Carrot Card Use by School, 2022

Use of the Carrot Card program ranges from 151 and 136 students at the East and Winter Hill Schools, respectively, to 23 and 26 students at the Brown and Kennedy Schools, respectively.



How Does it Help?

The program supplements a household's food budget, filling a critical gap for economically unstable families that are not receiving any or enough benefits. To date, it has helped over 850 students in 500 families across all 10 Somerville Public Schools. This accounts for over 18% of the total SPS enrollment. The innovative cash distribution model reduces the stigma associated with handing out bags of food and lets families choose culturally acceptable, preferred food items from their preferred retailer.

IV. Resources

Awareness & Use



All constituents know about the available resources in the community to support their ability to get sufficient, healthy food.

Local Highlights

Pantry Visitorship Increases: Local pantries have seen increases in the number of visitors since the start of the pandemic, partly driven by higher need, but also showcasing the success of efforts to spread the word about available resources. For example, the Hispanic Development Association’s Food4All pantry expanded to meet the new level of need and now has Community Development Block Grant funding.

Engaging Community Partners: The SFSC, city offices, and food provision organizations continued to draw on community partners to share information across diverse communities.

SFSC Website: The pandemic shifted how information was shared. Instead of relying heavily on paper materials, most information was accessed via websites. With the support of a Tufts intern, the SFSC concentrated on maintaining the accuracy of the SFSC website as a central source of food resource information.

SFSC Instagram: The SFSC launched an Instagram account to aggregate and share real-time events and programs. As of the end of October, the page has 390 followers and reached 730 accounts over the summer of 2022. Followers include community service providers, school counselors, local decision makers and community members.

SNAP Outreach: Project SOUP became a SNAP Outreach Partner, providing back-end access to the DTA for more effective SNAP application support. The City of Somerville received an additional DTA kiosk station for SNAP sign-ups.

Progress on SNAP Gap: The number of people in Somerville eligible for SNAP but not enrolled, also known as the SNAP Gap, dropped by an estimated eight percentage points from 61% in 2016 to 53% in 2020. The city now has a SNAP Practice Group which brings together service providers to coordinate and share best practices on SNAP enrollment.

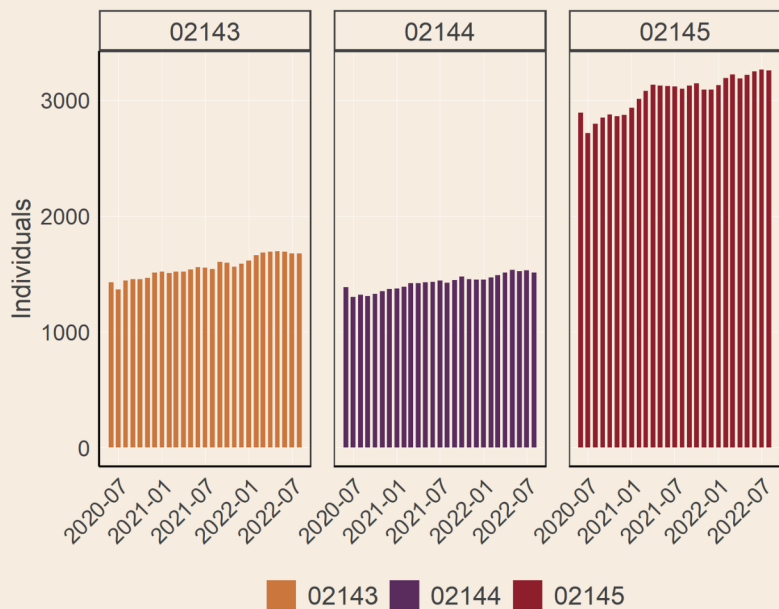
The SNAP Gap in Somerville

The SNAP gap is the number of people eligible for SNAP who are not enrolled, usually measured by the number of people eligible for MassHealth who do not also have SNAP. Figures are adjusted to reflect the reality that many lawfully present immigrants can receive MassHealth while many cannot receive SNAP. The adjustment is an estimate, however, so SNAP gap figures should also be seen as estimates.

Since early in the pandemic, SNAP has offered extra support to eligible households through emergency allotments (EA). In April 2020, Congress authorized states to boost SNAP benefits to the maximum amount per household size. As a result, eligible households have received at least \$95 per month extra, with a majority of SNAP households receiving more. Congress ended the EA in December 2022, and the final EA payment will be made on March 2, 2023. Given the barriers to enrolling in SNAP and the end of the EA, historical trends indicate the SNAP gap will increase.

Data Highlight: SNAP recipients by zipcode, June 2020-Aug 2022

The pandemic prompted many households to look for food support and gave organizations the opportunity to raise awareness of SNAP as a resource. Reports estimate that by December 2020, the number of eligible SNAP recipients not signed up had fallen by about eight percentage points. The 02145 zip code in Somerville has seen the largest increase in SNAP enrollment since summer 2020, although enrollment has increased across all parts of the city.



How Does it Help?

SNAP is the main food assistance program in the U.S., helping households to meet their food needs with agency and dignity. Through SNAP, a family of four can receive up to \$939/month for food purchases. However, many food-insecure households who are eligible do not apply due to stigma, fear of public charge or other immigration implications, or lack of capacity to navigate complex application processes. Consistent and ongoing outreach is needed as we continue to expand access to this key program.

V. Food Retail

All food retailers in Somerville will sell food that meets the affordability, accessibility, preference, and health needs of everyone in Somerville. Shoppers' demand and utilization of small food retailers will support improvements to existing models.



Local Highlights

Universal SNAP Match at Farmers Markets: Starting in 2020, the Somerville Farmers Market Coalition received funding to provide a weekly \$15 SNAP match program for residents using benefits at any Somerville farmers markets.

A new farmers market in East Somerville: East Somerville Main Streets piloted the East Somerville Farmers Market in the summer of 2022. Despite some challenges, they were able to host a vegetable farmer who accepted SNAP and the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) every Sunday, May through October. SNAP and HIP processing increased as the season progressed.

Net Gain in Neighborhood Markets: At least three new neighborhood markets opened in Somerville: 1) Los Toritos in East Somerville; 2) Tapias Convenience in East Somerville; and 3) Neighborhood Produce opened a second grocery store in a low food-access area near Ball Square, which accepts SNAP.

A Discount for All Shoppers: The Somerville Mobile Farmers Market completed its 12th season, providing locally sourced, culturally relevant produce at affordable prices in four Somerville locations. In 2021, the 50% discount was applied for all shoppers. It had previously only been available to shoppers with SNAP, farmers market coupons, residents in public housing, and MassHealth clients. Nearly 1,700 transactions occurred over the course of 60 markets or 15 weeks.

State & Federal Highlights

Expansion of Healthy Incentive Program: Massachusetts continues to allocate funds for HIP, which reimburses \$40-80 per month of SNAP spending on fruits and vegetables purchased at farmers markets. 2021 saw the extension of the HIP program to year-round operation, making it available to Somerville Winter Farmers Market shoppers.

Next Steps

- Request a food system stakeholder join relevant planning meetings with the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) to consider how to retain, adapt or add food retailers that are both accessible and affordable, as neighborhood development continues.
- Consider if Mass Food Trust Healthy Food Financing would be appropriate for the above work.
- Support roll-out of the Restaurant Meals Program, which will allow households with older adults, persons with disabilities, and persons experiencing homelessness to use SNAP benefits at participating restaurants.
- Expand the Somerville Mobile Market to serve more locations.
- Ensure culinary space and teaching kitchens are part of strategic planning conversations around space in the city.

The SNAP Match

What is it?

Somerville farmers markets provide a \$15/week SNAP match for anyone using SNAP or P-EBT at a farmers market. Customers can exchange up to \$15 of SNAP funds for \$30 of tokens which can be used to purchase any SNAP-eligible item at the market. The program operates at Union Square Farmers Market, Davis Square Farmers Market and the Winter Farmers Market.

May-Dec 2021 SNAP Match Use				
Market	Davis	Union	Winter	Total
2021 Shoppers	1043	920	~800	1963
SNAP Matched	\$14,724	\$14,384	\$9,067	\$38,174

How does it help?

The SNAP match makes high-quality, nutrient-dense foods available to all, while at the same time supporting local food producers. Price comparisons show that with the SNAP match and HIP funds, shoppers can purchase farm fresh vegetables and fruits at or below supermarket prices. Ongoing outreach efforts continue to make farmers market spaces more welcoming to all residents.

VI. Food Jobs & Food System Workers



People working in the Somerville food economy have the potential to achieve or exceed the average income earnings of other workers in Somerville and are engaged in future food systems planning efforts.

Local Highlights

Nibble Kitchen at Bow Market: The Nibble Kitchen opened in Bow Market near Union Square in 2018, building on the constituent-driven Nibble Program to provide a restaurant space for developing immigrant entrepreneurs. Participants rotate use of the space to sell menu items that represent their cultural cuisine. Since its brick-and-mortar opening, eight entrepreneurs have cycled through and shared cuisines that span seven countries.

Formation of the Somerville Worker Center: Run by The Welcome Project, in collaboration with MassCOSH and the Brazilian Worker Center, the Somerville Worker Center's mission is to ensure all residents receive their hard-earned wages and return home safe and well. The Center was created during the pandemic and funded by the City of Somerville's job creation and retention trust.

Creation of a Wage Theft Ordinance: The City of Somerville passed a wage theft ordinance and created a committee of external members to oversee its implementation.

Expansion of the Culinary Arts Program at the High School: The High School Culinary Arts program has bounced back from difficult pandemic school years with a state-of-the-art kitchen at the new high school building, training on industry standard software TOAST, and expanded partnerships with Project SOUP, Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, and Groundwork Somerville to support the community and provide practical experience for students.

Small Business Support: 145 Somerville businesses in the Accommodation and Food Service sector received COVID-19 related small business loans, protecting 1,815 jobs in the City. In November 2022, applications opened for the City of Somerville's Small Business Recovery Program, which provides forgivable loans of up to \$5,000 for home-based businesses and \$15,000 for businesses with a physical location and 20 or fewer employees.

Community Kitchen Assessment on Hold: Pre-pandemic, the SFSC began discussion about assessing opportunities for community kitchen spaces in Somerville. This effort was deprioritized with the onset of the pandemic.

Food Chain Workers Union: Employees of Forge Baking Company, Bloc Cafe, and Diesel Cafe, all three under united ownership, successfully unionized with the New England Joint Board UNITE HERE as Diesel/Bloc/Forge UNITED. Co-owners of the cafe group voluntarily recognized the union, providing a successful example of food system organizing.

State & Federal Highlights

Paid Family Leave: In 2018, Massachusetts passed the Paid Family Medical Leave law, which went into effect in 2021. The law draws on both employer and employee tax contributions to offer paid medical leave to almost all workers in Massachusetts, covering personal medical issues as well as care for a family member, newborn, or newly adopted child.

Raising the Minimum Wage: As part of the same act, known as the 'Grand Bargain', the minimum wage is set to increase to \$15/hour by 2023. This represented a significant step forward at the time of passage, although gains have been eroded by inflation in 2021-22.

Essential Workers: Food system workers were deemed essential workers in Massachusetts during the pandemic, allowing them to access additional benefits and premium pay.

Farm Working Conditions: A coalition of farm workers, lawyers, legal service agencies, and anti-poverty organizations have been advocating for the passage of the Fairness for Farm Workers Act. The bill would eliminate the state agricultural minimum wage, and allow farmworkers to earn overtime pay after 55 hours of work per week. Currently, farmworkers are barred from earning overtime and have a separate, lower minimum wage. This effort follows recent examples in New York and California to reform agricultural pay and worker conditions.

Food Service Wages: One Fair Wage has been advocating for the elimination of the tipped minimum wage in coordination with restaurant workers and restaurant owners around the Commonwealth, including Juliet in Somerville's Union Square. One Fair Wage also works in other states and at the national level.

Next Steps

- Investigate modes of supporting businesses to offer higher wages and meet worker demands for better conditions.
- Support the wage theft ordinance with outreach to food system workers about the complaint process.
- Support Mayor Ballantyne's commitment in allocating \$2.3 million of ARPA funds to close the gender wage gap.
- Advocate to increase the state minimum wage again to meet rising inflation.
- Pass the Fairness for Farmworkers Act.

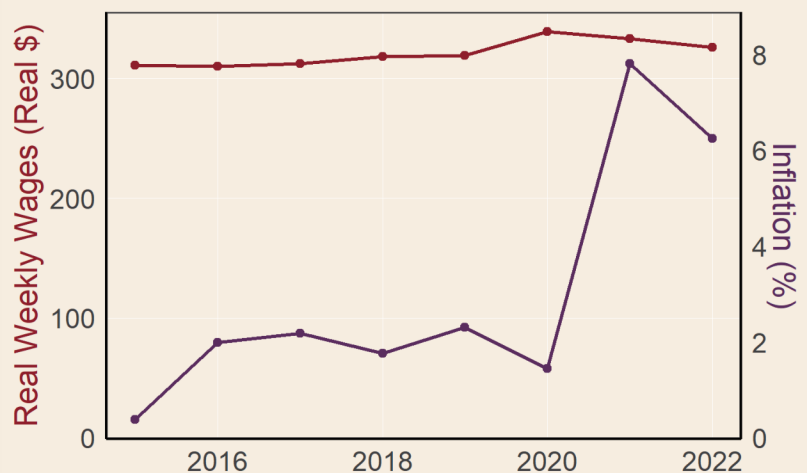
Real Wage Growth

What is it?

Real wage growth measures the change in hourly wages compared to the increase in prices in urban areas. An adjustment is made to account for seasonal variations in wages. Prices used for comparison include a broad array of necessities like food, electricity, rent, and clothes.

Data Highlight: Real Wages and Inflation 2014-2022

As inflation hovered between 0 and 2% from 2014-2020, weekly wages for production and nonsupervisory private employees remained steady or grew. The inflation spike in 2021 and 2022, however, caused real wages to decline for two consecutive years.



Note: This figure uses average hourly wage for production and non-supervisory workers adjusted by consumer price index. This index measures the change in prices for needs like food, housing, fuel, clothing, etc. Adjusted hourly wage is multiplied by average reported work week. Figures for December of each year are used to calculate percent change by year.

What are the implications?

While many employers have struggled to find employees and are offering better wages to attract workers, gains in wages for most workers are erased by the increased cost of living, including high costs for food and housing. Income underlies access to food and health, among other essentials, and fighting for higher wages is a key step in improving access to healthy diets.

VII. Food Recovery & Waste

Minimize the amount of food that is wasted in Somerville.



Local Highlights

Pandemic Restaurant Repurposing: During the pandemic, an emergency order allowed restaurants to repackage food to sell as grocery boxes. Community support enabled these boxes to go to food insecure households at no cost.

Community Fridges: Three community fridges now serve Somerville, one in Union Square, one in Winter Hill, and one just over the Medford line. Fridges are supported by donations of leftover produce from local businesses and the farmers markets, as well as community donations. Food For Free supports the Somerville community fridge with roughly 100 Heat-n-Eats meals per month and a weekly pick up of a half pallet of fresh produce.

Pantry Infrastructure: Project SOUP received a grant for a new, larger walk-in fridge-freezer, allowing better storage capacity for perishable food and food rescue donations.

Composting Programs: Pre-pandemic, the Somerville School District successfully piloted a cafeteria composting program, which was put on hold when the pandemic started. Plans are underway to resume these efforts through a kitchen compost pilot.

State & Federal Highlights

Less Commercial Food Waste: The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (Mass DEP) expanded its waste disposal ban by “lowering the threshold on commercial organic/food waste to facilities generating more than one-half ton of these materials per week”, effective November 1st, 2022.

Next Steps

- Support more local businesses to help manage food waste through donation or use of food rescue applications to pair donors, volunteers, and recipients.

VIII. Urban Agriculture & Gardens



Every person and business in Somerville who wishes to grow their own food can do so.

Local Highlights

Community Garden Processes: OFAHC assessed the community garden sign-up process and provided recommendations to the Conservation Commission to make it easier for residents. According to the Conservation Commission and looking at the waitlists, some changes have been introduced successfully; others have faced implementation challenges.

An Increase in Community Gardens: The City of Somerville’s Public and Urban Spaces Department has made 20 new community garden plots available since 2018 and decommissioned seven, for a net gain of 13 plots.

Urban Agriculture at Next Wave/Full Circle School: The City of Somerville transitioned the Urban Agriculture Ambassador program from serving mostly young, working professionals to target a younger audience by offering classes from Green City Growers at Next Wave/Full Circle.



Raised beds and greenhouse at Artfarm. Food grown here by Groundwork Somerville is sold at the Somerville Mobile Farmers Market. Summer 2021

Collective Gardening: Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville’s (MAMAS) Gardening Collective operates approximately 20 gardens in Somerville and nearby Medford. These spaces allow access to gardening for all who choose to participate in a mutual aid model where anyone can contribute (labor, materials, knowledge, space), and anyone can take the food that’s produced.

Groundwork Somerville Grows: Groundwork Somerville has intensified their urban farming production from 1,154 lbs of produce in 2020 to 2,338 lbs in 2022. In addition to the City of Somerville’s Mobile Market and Project SOUP, they now provide fresh produce to Neighborhood Produce for sale and the Union Square Community Fridge. The organization has also expanded opportunities for community involvement through school field trips, after-school programming in eight public schools, and management of the Mystic Housing Community Garden.

Community Engagement and Garden Programming: The Somerville Community Growing Center rolled out their community herb project in the 2021-2022 season; dried tea kits, herbs and flowers were packaged and donated to the Community Fridge in Union Square, Early Head Start, YMCA/Prospect Hill Academy (PHA), and the IMPACT Spanish-Language Mom’s group. The center continued to offer garden-based programming in partnership with the YMCA/PHA’s summer programs, HeadStart, and the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative, with particular focus on recent immigrants and sharing of foodways.

Next Steps

- Support more community-based garden spaces which allow many users to access gardening.
- Make small funds available to community groups already doing community gardening projects and support programming to engage people in gardening as a means of mental health management and engagement in the food system.
- As part of the next phase for food system planning, consider reconvening relevant stakeholders to update an urban agriculture strategic plan for the city. Reconsider the recommendations in the Food Action plan to update or re-prioritize. Examples that need revisiting include subsidizing rain barrels or figuring how the new zoning ordinance factors vertical and rooftop gardens into growth and development.

IX. Emerging Food System Areas of Focus



Emergency Food System and Networks: A series of multi-unit fires and water damage have displaced several lower income renters, leaving them and service providers to scramble for basic support, including prepared meals. The creation of an emergency food fund and network is needed so that future emergency victims and providers have a clearer path of where to go for temporary food support.

Food is Medicine: The community must tap into existing programs, networks and policies to better connect patients/constituents to affordable food. Avenues to achieve this goal include allocating more time participating in the Food is Medicine Massachusetts coalition to help innovate, as well as support advocacy on the state level.

Food Security Advocacy: Many challenges cannot be solved at the local level and the Somerville Food Security Coalition can be advocates for state-level changes to support food access. For a list of food system legislation for the 2023-2024 legislative session, see the Food Security Coalition Website.

X. Where Do We Go From here?

Thank you for reading the progress report on the Food Action Plan years 2019-2022. The collective impact in this area has been significant, with multiple organizations, community members, and sectors doing the work.

Going forward, the plan is to share this progress report widely and use it as a community engagement tool to gather feedback on food system priorities and goals for Somerville stakeholders. This summary, along with CHA's recently published 2022 Wellbeing report, will be used in the early months of 2023 to lay the groundwork for a public meeting to re-prioritize collective action on the Food Action Plan.

XI. Abbreviations

ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
CARES	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant
CEP	Community Eligibility Provision
DTA	Department of Transitional Assistance
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HIP	Healthy Incentives Program
MAPC	Metropolitan Area Planning Council
OFAHC	Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities
P-EBT	Pandemic EBT (or Electronic Benefit Transfer)
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps)
SOIA	SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children