



Food System Planning in Plymouth County Steering Committee Meeting, July 30, 2025

Meeting recap

The meeting focused on establishing a Steering Committee to oversee a countywide food system initiative in Plymouth County, discussing project goals, structure, and representation needs. The group reviewed plans for engaging consultants, developing an RFP, and creating assessment tools to evaluate the county's food system infrastructure and resilience. The discussion concluded with refining procurement terms and outlining next steps for public involvement, including the formation of a Community Advisory Board (CAB) to review the CARAT assessment indicators.

Next steps

- Joanne to send out Terms of Reference and Scope of Work to Steering Committee members for their review
- Joanne to send to members a list of interested participants for the CAB and Steering Committee, so members may suggest additional recruitment
- Members to help identify and introduce potential participants missing from key food system sectors, geographies, and demographics
- Joanne to provide update on public participation plans at next meeting

Summary

Steering Committee Meeting Registration Challenges

Joanne and Frank discussed the low registration numbers for the Steering Committee meeting due to the vacation week, but proceeded with the meeting as planned. Joanne explained the technical setup for the meeting, including registration and an automatic survey feature at the end. They also briefly discussed the benefits of AI tools for note-taking and organizing meetings. The meeting was scheduled to start at 11:05 AM, with Joanne making Frank a co-host to help manage participants. Joanne also explained the use of AI tools to support note-taking and meeting organization.

Plymouth County Food System Initiative

The meeting introduced participants to a collaborative project between Old Colony Planning Council (OCPC) and Plymouth County to develop a countywide food system initiative. Joanne Zygmunt, the project manager, outlined the agenda, which included introductions, roles and responsibilities, and the focus on creating a scope of work or hiring consultants for asset mapping and planning. Frank Basler, representing Plymouth County Commissioners, expressed enthusiasm for the partnership, while Liz Wiley and Rita Higgins from the Marion Institute

highlighted their role in facilitating the Community and Agriculture Resilience Audit (CARROT) project. The group discussed next steps, including developing an RFP and engaging with various stakeholders, with Tim Wellnesscroft offering insights on food systems sustainability and economic development.

Plymouth County Food System Assessment

Joanne explained the steering committee's role in guiding a food system assessment project for Plymouth County, emphasizing collaboration and stakeholder engagement. She outlined the committee's responsibilities, including providing strategic oversight, reviewing deliverables, and serving as thought partners to ensure actionable outcomes. Joanne highlighted the project's focus on creating a resilient food system over the next decade, rather than producing a comprehensive document. She also mentioned the need for diverse representation in stakeholder engagement and the importance of effective communication and outreach.

Steering Committee Membership and Structure

Joanne explained the structure and goals of the steering committee, emphasizing that membership is open and not capped, with meetings facilitated by Old Colony Planning Council or their designees. She outlined the meeting schedule, which will occur monthly through June 2026, and mentioned that minutes and recordings will be available online. Joanne noted that about 35 people expressed interest in joining, with representation across sectors but gaps in areas like food production, restaurants, and retail. The group aims to fill these gaps in the coming months.

Steering Committee Representation and Roles

Joanne discussed the need to fill gaps in the steering committee's representation, particularly in food production, and invited suggestions for additional participants. She emphasized that while formal meeting attendance might be challenging, there are multiple ways for people to contribute, such as through interviews, focus groups, or by reviewing recordings and minutes. Joanne and Liz from Marion Institute clarified the roles of the steering committee and the community advisory board, noting that while the steering committee would oversee the action plan development, the community advisory board would focus on broader community engagement. Joanne also outlined plans to hire consultants for asset mapping and planning, with their work feeding into the final action plan by June next year. Liz clarified that the CAB's work is structured around reviewing and scoring 101 qualitative indicators using the CARAT tool, while the Steering Committee will advise on the plan's direction, consultant deliverables, and public engagement.

Community Food System Assessment Review

The Community Advisory Board (CAB) will meet monthly to review the Carrot assessment, which consists of 101 indicators across seven themes related to the food system. Rita explained that Cab members will identify existing community assets, programs, and projects for each indicator, and help connect the team with knowledgeable sources for any gaps. After completing the indicator review, the group will assign scores to provide an aggregate resiliency

score, which will inform future planning and identify opportunities for improvement in Plymouth County's food system.

County Food System Assessment Plan

Joanne explained the need for a consultant to assess the county's food system, focusing on production, distribution, and infrastructure. She outlined the scope of the RFP, which includes examining physical assets like distribution centers and food pantries, as well as identifying opportunities for improving the food system's resilience. Joanne emphasized the importance of a 10-year plan and the need to identify both short-term and long-term projects. The project's background, goals, and website were discussed, with Joanne committing to send the scope and indicators list to the group for review.

Carrot Tool Integration Planning

Joanne discussed the integration of the Carrot tool process with broader planning efforts, including state-level initiatives like the Resilient Soils Action Plan and Farmland Action Plan. She highlighted the need for consultants to align with local, regional, and state goals, emphasizing data-informed community-vetted priorities and actions. Joanne also mentioned the collaboration with MAPC on the food systems map, aiming to build on existing tools rather than creating separate ones, and the potential development of a municipal self-assessment tool to support the food system. Joanne noted the importance of aligning with ongoing state-level efforts, such as the Resilient Soils Action Plan and Farmland Action Plan, to ensure that recommendations can support multi-level implementation and funding alignment.

Climate Impact Assessment RFP Development

Joanne discussed the development of an RFP for a consultant to assess climate impacts on the regional food system and infrastructure needs. She outlined the scope of work, which includes evaluating farm vulnerability to climate change, conducting stakeholder engagement, and drafting a resilience plan. Joanne emphasized the importance of launching the RFP soon to allow for a 9-month consultation period, with a budget of \$125,000 allocated for the project. The RFP will be issued with an anticipated consultant budget of \$125,000 and an expected timeline of 9 months for project completion.

Municipal Procurement Terms Review

Joanne led a discussion on refining the draft terms of reference for a municipal procurement project, emphasizing the need for feedback by August 8th. Frank highlighted the importance of the scope of work and the need for a robust team to achieve the best outcomes. Joanne mentioned that the county would assist with the procurement process and requested volunteers for consultant interviews. She also planned to send out a list of interested participants for the Community Advisory Board and steering committee. The next meeting would focus on updates on the procurement process and public participation strategies.

Attendees

Bill Napolitano, OCPC

Courtney Rocha, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Frank Basler, Plymouth County
Howard Randall, Resident
Joanne Zygmunt, OCPC
Judith Henze, Food System Consultant
Kerrie Liroi, Resident
Liz Wiley, Marion Institute
Molly Vollmer, Plymouth County Co-Operative Extension Services
Nikki Galibois, South Shore Community Action Council
Rita Higgins, Marion Institute
Tim O'Neil, Wellness Croft, Inc.
Victoria Alfaro, Town of Mattapoisett

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