



Food System Planning in Plymouth County Steering Committee Meeting, August 27, 2025

Meeting recap

The steering committee meeting began with introductions and updates on ongoing project workstreams, including an RFP for consulting services and the first Community Advisory Board meeting. The group discussed plans for public education and outreach, including upcoming events and strategies for engaging different segments of the food system. Various community engagement ideas were presented and discussed, with a focus on reaching food pantry clients, farmers, processors, and entrepreneurs, while emphasizing the importance of building trusted relationships and gathering local knowledge.

Next steps

- All: Provide comments on the RFP draft by the end of the week
- Joanne: Issue the RFP
- All: Reach out to farmers in Plymouth County who were underrepresented in the first CAB meeting

Summary

RFP Updates and Community Engagement

The meeting began with introductions and updates on the RFP for additional consulting services, which participants were encouraged to comment on by the end of the week. Joanne and Rita provided updates on the first Community Advisory Board meeting, which was led by Rita, and mentioned that the recording and minutes would be available on the website. The group discussed plans for public education and outreach, with Joanne inviting input and ideas for projects.

Food System Infrastructure Assessment Planning

The steering committee discussed the upcoming RFP for food system infrastructure assessment, which will be released on September 3rd and advertised through various channels, including state bulletins and local newspapers. Joanne explained that the RFP will focus on physical infrastructure needs, such as farm capacity and cold storage, and the committee will serve as advisors to the consultant. Rita reported on the July Community Advisory Board meeting, where they reviewed indicators related to natural resource management and farmland preservation, with plans to continue discussing theme one and move on to theme two, focusing on community health and well-being. The committee also discussed plans for a series of engaging events to gather local knowledge and raise public awareness about the food system.

Community Engagement Food System Ideas

Joanne presented five ideas for community engagement in the food system project, including community food forums, stakeholder roundtables, local food and local voices community dinners, mini grants, and a capstone event. Tim expressed preference for the stakeholder roundtables, emphasizing the need to reach those working at the grassroots level, and suggested combining it with an economic development forum. The group discussed logistics and potential challenges of each idea, with Joanne noting that all feedback would be considered as they move forward with planning.

Food Pantry Engagement Strategies

The group discussed strategies for engaging with food pantry clients and stakeholders in the region. They explored the possibility of conducting focus groups with food equity advisors and reaching out to pantry coordinators to gather data and insights. Howard emphasized the need for sensitivity when collecting client information, suggesting a focus on demographics and food distribution rather than personal stories. Rob proposed the idea of a "100-mile meal" event featuring Plymouth County farms and seafood, as well as a mobile food event using a Mayflower moving van to engage communities. The group also discussed the importance of building trusted relationships with stakeholders and the need to include both food bank clients and home-delivery recipients in their efforts.

Food System Engagement Strategies

The steering committee discussed strategies for engaging different segments of the food system, including farmers, processors, and entrepreneurs. Hampton highlighted the need to connect local agriculture with food distribution in Plymouth, while Judith shared insights from a successful brunch event that brought together small-scale producers and government representatives. Joanne noted the challenge of engaging middle-tier food chain actors, such as restaurants, and mentioned plans to explore focus groups and interviews with established businesses. The group agreed to continue brainstorming event ideas, with suggestions including mini-grants, curated dinners, and leveraging existing venues like Sauchuk Farm and the Y in Stoughton. Joanne encouraged further input on the RFP and education strategies before the next meeting.

Attendees

Alyssa Papantonakis, OCPC
Bill Napolitano, OCPC
Courtney Rocha, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Frank Basler, Plymouth County
Hampton Watkins, Resident
Howard Randall, Resident
Joanne Zygmunt, OCPC
Judith Henze, Food System Consultant
Kerrie Liroso, Resident
Liz Wiley, Marion Institute
Molly Vollmer, Plymouth County Co-Operative Extension Services
Nikki Galibois, South Shore Community Action Council

Rob May, City of Brockton
Rita Higgins, Marion Institute
Tim O'Neil, Wellness Croft, Inc.
Victoria Alfaro, Town of Mattapoisett

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