



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:
{{item.tracking_number}}

Agenda Item Number: 3

Agenda Date: March 16, 2022

In Control: Governance Committee Meeting

DEPARTMENT: Health Department

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Claude Jacob

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Response to Council Consideration Request filed on January 11, 2022 by Councilman Jalen McKee-Rodriguez (District 2); and Councilwoman Ana Sandoval (District 7) regarding the creation of a Food Access Master Plan

SUMMARY:

Metro Health Chronic Disease Prevention section staff will present recommendations for responding to the Council Consideration Request filed on January 11, 2022 by Councilman Jalen McKee-Rodriguez and Councilwoman Ana Sandoval that directs City staff to establish a strategic master plan to address disparities in food access across San Antonio.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

On January 11, 2022, Councilmembers Jalen McKee-Rodriguez and Ana Sandoval filed a Council Consideration Request (CCR) directing City staff to establish a strategic master plan to address

disparities in food access across San Antonio. The CCR further recommends that the plan include the following:

1. Programs to expand or incentivize development of healthy food retail,
2. Development and incentivization of local food gardens,
3. A city-owned vacant lot program that encourages community gardening,
4. Expansion of the food forest pilot program to city-owned land, and
5. Collaboration with VIA to establish bus routes that connect neighborhoods without existing access to fresh, quality, affordable food to a network of grocery stores.

Food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Eating fresh and nutritious foods is the best defense against chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, yet these conditions are prevalent in San Antonio and are consistently the top causes of mortality within Hispanic and Black communities.[1] Many San Antonio residents don't have access to a steady supply of fresh and nutritious foods, especially in high needs areas of the city. Decades of policymaking have created communities where the healthiest choices are the most expensive ones, and where entire neighborhoods rely on a single corner store or fast-food restaurant.

Approximately 14% of Bexar County residents are food insecure, and the child food insecurity rate is even higher, affecting 1 in 5 children in Bexar County.[2] Unfortunately, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to more food insecurity in several areas of San Antonio and have impacted the food systems even further. Decades of evidence show that food insecurity increases risk for obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. In turn, these diseases are the same 'underlying conditions' that significantly increase risk of COVID-19 hospitalization and death. The highest rates of child and adult obesity are in zip codes with the highest socioeconomic needs, within the West, East and South sides of the city. Most of the zip codes with the highest obesity rates also have moderate to high rates of diabetes hospitalizations.[3]

[1] CDC WONDER Cause of Death 2019

[2] Feeding America Map the Meal Gap - 2019 data

[3] San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, Informatics (2019). Council Districts: Health Profiles.

ISSUE:

Metro Health is currently implementing several programs that support the requests in this CCR aimed at increasing education, awareness, and access to healthy nutrition. Metro Health expanded the Office of Health Equity to assist its programs in utilizing an equity framework to address racial and health disparities. Healthy nutrition has been a strategic priority of Metro Health's since 2016 and has resulted in the creation of several key projects related to the recommended programs included in the CCR including the Healthy Corner Stores program, the development of community gardens, the Fruit Tree Project, the Food Forest pilot project at Padre Park, and the development of Healthy Food and Fitness Council District Resource Brochures that highlight nutrition and fitness resources in each district. These projects are summarized below.

Healthy Corner Stores: Started as a pilot program in 2018, the Healthy Corner Stores project was created in partnership with the Food Policy Council of San Antonio, UIW, and the Healthy Neighborhoods program and included 8 participating stores. The program currently resides within the Healthy Neighborhoods program and has 34 participating stores. The program incentivizes store owners in selling fresh fruits and vegetables at their stores, which are selected based on being located within a food desert area, accepting SNAP benefits, and store owner interest in supporting the health of the community.

Community Gardens: Metro Health's Healthy Neighborhoods program supports community gardens and teaching gardens within prioritized neighborhoods as a way to connect residents, teach about nutrition and food sovereignty, and support a vibrant community. Currently several gardens are supported by the program to include the Pecan Valley WIC Teaching Garden, the Garden Club at Villarreal Elementary School, and the Presa Community Center Garden. Additionally, community health workers with the program are available to neighborhood associations and residents for technical support and organizing garden workdays or teaching days.

The Fruit Tree Project: Metro Health's Healthy Neighborhoods program supports community members with fruit trees in the collection and distribution of excess fruit to local food pantries within the neighborhood that the fruit was grown in. This initiative addresses both food waste and food insecurity by connecting excess food with a distribution center.

Tamox-Talom Food Forest: Initiated by the Food Policy Council of San Antonio and through funding from the City's Office of Innovation, a food forest is being developed on the County's Padre Park, located on the Southside of San Antonio. Healthy Neighborhoods community health workers have facilitated a critical role in ensuring community engagement throughout the visioning, planning, and implementation steps of the project and brought indigenous community members and organizations to the project to play a central role in determining the purpose of the space as a way to teach the youth about native culture and local food and medicine producing plants. The name Tamox-Talom means Fire Spirit and honors the connection between the sacred ceremonial fire and the sun which provides energy and warmth for our people and the plants we grow.

Healthy Food and Fitness Council District Resource Brochures: Metro Health has developed resource brochures for all 10 City Council Districts (in English and Spanish) that highlight the availability of Diabetes Prevention and Self-Management workshops, Por Vida restaurant partners, free Fitness in the Park activities, WIC services, and Healthy Corner Stores within each council district. The brochures are a valuable addition to Community Health Workers and outreach teams across Metro Health.

FISCAL IMPACT:

none at this time

ALTERNATIVES:

There are no viable alternatives other than the recommendation provided.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends further research by a collaborative of CoSA departments (Office of Sustainability, Development Services, Center City Development Office, Public Works, Planning, Office of Historic Preservation, Neighborhood and Housing Services, and Parks & Recreation, the Office of Innovation, Metro Health, the Mayor's Fitness Council, and the Food Policy Council of San Antonio) on the feasibility of using city-owned vacant lots for creating and establishing additional community gardens as well as establishing a relationship with VIA to study the feasibility of ensuring that established bus routes connect residents to grocery stores or a consideration of new routes to do as such.