



LAND USE

THIS IS AN EXCERPT FROM THE MINNESOTA FOOD CHARTER FOOD ACCESS PLANNING GUIDE.

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GOAL STATEMENT

Use land use guidance and regulations to improve local households' proximity to healthy food and support food-related businesses and activities.

OVERVIEW

Local government sets the parameters for how development occurs. The pattern, type, density, and characteristics of development are all heavily shaped by zoning ordinances and other local government regulations. Other sections of this Guide encourage review of local land use regulations for a number of purposes, such as to support a development pattern that reduces the distance between households and food stores, to encourage food businesses, to allow for food production activities, and to preserve farmland.

Many communities developed during the last few decades were designed for a household with two parents, children, and cars. This resulted in large suburban areas of large-lot, single-family homes, and neighborhood goods and services located in widely spaced retail areas. There was less emphasis on new, dense housing development in urban centers. This development pattern can consume large swaths of land (including agricultural land); food retailers can thus end up quite a distance from residential areas, making access difficult without a car.

Many urban, suburban, and rural communities are reconfiguring these development patterns. Communities are now:

- Reducing lot sizes in new residential subdivisions
- Reducing the amount of unused land and parking areas surrounding commercial areas

- Clustering multi-family housing around areas well served by commercial goods and services, including food stores and transit
- Reconsidering the long-term wisdom and impacts of permanent elimination of agricultural lands

All of these actions bring food physically closer to households. These actions and policies result in a development pattern that is supportive of existing and potential transit, while preserving farmland and natural spaces and improving environmental sustainability. This approach is also fiscally sustainable, as a more compact development pattern means there are enough taxpayers to support the cost of maintaining roads and utilities over the long run.

Land use regulations also affect the development of local and regional food supplies in their degree of flexibility and support for food- and farm-related activities. Community gardens, farmers' markets, food- and farm-focused enterprise zones, and commercial kitchens are just some of the options that require a supportive regulatory framework. Regulations can also have an important impact on the relative ease of establishing a farmer's market or opening a farm stand.

LAND USE SAMPLE PLAN LANGUAGE

POLICY I

[Local government] will support development patterns that preserve agricultural land, and decrease the distance between households and retail food options.

- Adopt policies that support infill development and redevelopment over greenfield development
- Analyze existing retail patterns to determine where to locate new commercial areas
- Encourage and zone for higher-density or mixed-use housing near transit lines and commercial areas
- Consider minimum density requirements for new residential and mixed-use projects and other types of development
- Employ an approach to planning processes that treats health equity, healthy food access, and food systems development as primary considerations when making major land use decisions such as zoning, transportation planning, climate action plans, and other policy changes

POLICY II

[Local government] will review, and simplify or remove its regulation of food- and farm-related land uses, in order to improve the variety and availability of healthy food outlets.

- Review and update regulations governing backyard gardening, community gardens, and urban farming to foster an expansion of food production in the community
- Review and update regulations governing food processing businesses—such as commercial kitchens, flash freezing businesses, and small scale home kitchen businesses—to increase business growth
- Review and update regulations concerning food outlets, such as grocery stores, small food stores, farmers' markets, seasonal food stands, and farm trucks to support growth in the types and number of food outlets throughout the community and their hours and locations

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- While development patterns and pressures are different in urban, suburban, and small town settings, increasing development intensity has similar benefits in terms of supporting retail, making more efficient use of public infrastructure, and saving farmland at the periphery of the developed area.
- New home builders tend to stay in their comfort zones when laying out new developments. Cities and counties may need to stand their ground—and be patient—in order to achieve the development patterns they want.
- Retail market analysis may be helpful in determining how close neighborhood commercial districts can be located to each other and still be healthy and viable, given the population size of an area.

“The Cass Clay County Food Systems Advisory Commission was established by our regional planning agency to increase access to healthy food, foster economic development, and support food production. At Metro COG, we connect planning and health.”

Adam Altenburg, *Community Transportation Analyst, Metro COG*