

Food System Plan: Draft Goals, Policies, & Opportunities

Planning Commission

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Guiding Principles

Equity - A food system should support food security with an emphasis on those community members that experience the greatest inequities.

Sustainability - A balance between environmental health, economic profitability, & social equity creates a resilient food system that meets current food needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Stability - All community members should have reliable access to sufficient, safe, appropriate, & nutritious food, even in the face of unexpected challenges.

Resiliency - The food system should maintain its functionality & continue to provide food security & nutrition under various adverse conditions.

Efficacy - The audience for the plan is the City of Tumwater, therefore, the objectives & actions in this plan will be the areas where this level of government can have the most impact.



**Goal 1: Provide access to fresh,
nutritious, culturally appropriate
food for all members of the
community.**



1.1 Expand access to healthy, culturally relevant, & affordable food from both local & non-local sources across all neighborhoods.

- 1.1.1 Partner with the Thurston County Food Bank to establish a satellite brick-and-mortar food bank in Tumwater near the new Tumwater Community Center.
- 1.1.2 Work with regional partners to make free and subsidized community garden plots available citywide and prioritize funding for low-income households.
- 1.1.3 Support farmers to become certified to accept EBT/SNAP benefits from customers.
- 1.1.4 Work with interest groups to identify and address barriers to consistent scheduling to support increased weekly operations of the Tumwater Farmers Market during its core season and explore off-season openings.
- 1.1.5 Use Tumwater's communication channels to increase access to and visibility of food assistance programs (e.g., food banks/pantries, SNAP, Market Match, SUN Bucks) and to promote food bank satellite locations and donations.
- 1.1.6 Continue to support food access through senior meal programs, city-sponsored events, and youth programs where allowable, and prioritize the inclusion of fresh, seasonal, and culturally relevant local foods, particularly in services benefiting low-income or vulnerable populations.



1.2 Enhance public education & outreach related to the local food system.

- 1.2.1 Integrate food, gardening, and nutrition learning opportunities into city sponsored programming with incentives to participate, such as classes offered through the Department of Parks and Recreation and at community events.
- 1.2.2 Promote partner led, community-based initiatives such as cooking classes, gardening workshops, and nutrition education tailored to underserved populations.
- 1.2.3 Continue to support funding for Tumwater school garden maintenance and education.



1.3 Increase opportunities for individual & community self-reliance.

- 1.3.1 Engage with Thurston Conservation District to support community garden expansion, GIS studies for urban agriculture land identification, soil testing, and code review.
- 1.3.2 Expand partnerships for edible landscaping and urban fruit and nut tree planting in public spaces including parks and along pedestrian corridors with scheduled community care and harvest days.
- 1.3.3 Build relationships with homeowner associations to better understand their needs and to provide support and remove barriers that would allow home food gardens and climate-resilient landscaping which conserves water for food production.



1.4 Ensure supportive infrastructure, zoning, & land use policies.

- 1.4.1 Encourage walkable and bikeable neighborhoods with access to fresh food outlets, including farmers markets and grocery stores to reduce food deserts.
- 1.4.2 Support siting the Tumwater Farmers Market near a community gathering area.
- 1.4.3 Explore including food access as a design consideration for new developments including access to food retailers and spaces for urban agriculture/community gardens.
- 1.4.4 Explore opportunities to allow temporary or pop-up food distribution sites (e.g., food share hubs, mutual aid stands, gleaning events) through clear guidelines and permitting processes that balance flexibility with neighborhood and safety considerations.
- 1.4.5 Develop and maintain a GIS map of free food pantries, neighborhood-based food distribution sites, food bank satellites, and other free food distribution sites to support coordination, identify service gaps, and improve visibility for those seeking food assistance.



1.5 Ensure supportive infrastructure, zoning, & land use policies.

- 1.5.1 Advocate for regional funding and coordinate cross-jurisdictional planning, investments, and grant applications for shared infrastructure.
- 1.5.2 Improve emergency preparedness and climate resilience by collaborating with Thurston County Emergency Management to integrate food security into disaster preparedness plans including identification of nearest non-impacted supply chains and ensuring food storage, recovery, and redistribution plans are part of emergency response frameworks.
- 1.5.3 Improve emergency preparedness and climate resilience by developing and coordinating policies and staffing models for rapid response food systems during future crises, including sourcing, safety, and volunteer mobilization.
- 1.5.4 Support existing pop-up food distribution efforts as part of community emergency response capacity.



1.5 Ensure supportive infrastructure, zoning, & land use policies.

- 1.5.5 Assess cold storage needs and explore opportunities to expand infrastructure such as shared-use refrigeration at community centers, food hubs, or partner facilities—while supporting efforts to increase capacity and ensure reliable access during emergencies.
- 1.5.6 Map existing food production, storage, and distribution resources within Tumwater to support internal planning and emergency response coordination.
- 1.5.7 Improve emergency preparedness and climate resilience by supporting increased financial resources for community-led organizations working to enhance food security in Tumwater and the surrounding region.



Goal 2: Reduce food waste.



2.1 Collaborate on strategies to prevent food waste at all stages of the food system.

- 2.1.1 Support local schools to reduce food waste by providing a minimum of 20 minutes of seated lunch time, which improves nutrition and reduces plate waste.
- 2.1.2 Partner with Thurston County Public Works and food assistance organizations to reduce edible food waste at transfer stations by creating clear donation guidance and outreach for truckers and other supply chain actors, addressing common barriers like time pressure, lack of information, and logistical challenges.
- 2.1.3 Collaborate with regional partners to develop and distribute customized educational materials and mailers to residents and businesses focused on source reduction.
- 2.1.4 Promote food waste reduction among local businesses through campaigns that highlight cost savings, environmental benefits, and compliance with Washington's commercial organics recycling requirements—while encouraging participation from businesses of all sizes, including those not subject to the mandate.



2.2 Partner with Thurston County to increase community-wide food waste education & engagement.

- 2.2.1 Participate in and promote Food Waste Prevention Week and related events at the Tumwater and regional level.
- 2.2.2 Offer community compost giveaways and food waste education events through the Department of Parks and Recreation and other community programs.
- 2.2.3 Create and promote engaging social media campaigns and signage to inform the public about food waste prevention best practices and available composting programs.
- 2.2.4 Include food waste prevention as a component of relevant grant funding criteria such as neighborhood matching grants.
- 2.2.5 Offer workshops on food storage, preservation, and meal planning to help individuals and businesses reduce food waste.



2.3 Expand food recovery & redistribution systems.

- 2.3.1 Ensure composting systems are used at all Tumwater public facilities and programs.
- 2.3.2 Partner with Thurston County Public Works to educate businesses and residents on proper composting practices to reduce contamination and increase participation.
- 2.3.3 Reinvigorate regional food rescue initiatives by identifying historic and resident-led models and new opportunities.
- 2.3.4 Support the creation of a regional, centralized database or platform to connect food waste producers with organizations that can redistribute food to those in need.



Goal 3: Support local food processing & production.



3.1 Reduce barriers and provide incentives for local growers & producers.

- 3.1.1 Collaborate with local, regional, and state partners, such as those involved in the Craft and Warehouse districts, to support and promote opportunities for local producers to access and expand markets.
- 3.1.2 Explore partnerships to improve access to land, water, and infrastructure for food producers by supporting shared-use models, facilitating connections to underutilized private or public land, and leveraging programs such as land leases and technical assistance.
- 3.1.3 Review existing land use regulations to identify barriers that disproportionately limit food production opportunities for low-income households and those on smaller lots.
- 3.1.4 Support water access and explore potential rate reductions for urban agriculture, community gardens, and school gardens such as stormwater fee waivers, fire hydrant access, and subsidized or waived system development charges—recognizing their role in strengthening food security, fostering education and community resilience, supporting local economies, and contributing to emergency preparedness.



3.1 Reduce barriers and provide incentives for local growers & producers.

- 3.1.5 Facilitate networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities among local growers, processors, and market operators to strengthen community connections and business viability.
- 3.1.6 Explore ways to support local direct-to-consumer programs, such as bakery shares (subscription-based access to baked goods) and produce pickup sites, to diversify market options for producers and consumers.
- 3.1.7 Develop a comprehensive toolkit for aspiring and current local food producers, including farmstands, community gardens, p-patches, and backyard poultry—detailing permit requirements, best practices, available resources, and contacts for technical assistance.
- 3.1.8 Explore opportunities to connect culinary entrepreneurship and food system innovation with arts and cultural events and technology funding streams, including vertical farming and agritourism.



3.2 Support access to land for local food production by historically underserved & aspiring farmers, & coordinate with partners to conserve agriculturally viable lands in appropriate areas.

- 3.2.1 Partner with the Community Farm Land Trust and Thurston County to explore mechanisms such as urban growth area swaps and farmland easements for conserving high-value agricultural land adjacent to Tumwater's Urban Growth Area, while supporting farmland transitions to new farmers.
- 3.2.2 Promote and expand access to food production on suitable underutilized private and public or quasi-public lands within city limits by supporting programs such as those offered by community-based organizations, where feasible, and consistent with land use and environmental constraints.
- 3.2.3 Consider reviewing and amending development regulations to allow small-scale farm stands, including in residential neighborhoods, to support local growers and increase access to fresh food.
- 3.2.4 Map locations where city-owned or managed resources (e.g., land, water access, infrastructure) are currently used for food production. Use this data to inform land use planning, resource allocation, and future urban agriculture initiatives.



3.3 Strengthen local food system infrastructure.

- 3.3.1 Support regional partnerships to develop shared-use food infrastructure, such as processing, cold storage, and commercial kitchen facilities, by leveraging city assets and pursuing state, federal, and philanthropic funding opportunities. Evaluate the feasibility of repurposing existing sites in Tumwater, including underutilized or public facilities, where appropriate.
- 3.3.2 Explore strategic investments and partnerships with food hubs to expand regional aggregation and distribution capacity that supports small- and mid-scale producers and improves food access.



3.4 Promote local food purchasing and community engagement.

- 3.4.1 Educate and engage the community on the value of local food by coordinating public education efforts highlighting the health, environmental, and economic benefits of local food systems, including the role of regenerative agriculture in climate resilience and carbon sequestration.
- 3.4.2 Educate and engage the community on the value of local food by celebrating local food and producers through storytelling, city-sponsored events, informational signage, and communications platforms—focusing on systems and practices rather than promoting specific businesses.
- 3.4.3 Raise awareness of the broader impacts of food choices by educating residents about the social, environmental, and economic costs of industrial food systems and the value of local purchasing. Strategies may include community events such as a local food or film festival, themed messaging on city social media and newsletters, and interactive booths at public gatherings like the Tumwater Farmers Market or Arbor Day celebrations, for example.



3.4 Promote local food purchasing and community engagement.

- 3.4.4 Strengthen local markets and values-aligned public purchasing by identifying existing barriers and exploring mechanisms and partnerships to support the Tumwater Farmers Market's scale and sustainability, such as operational funding, expanded schedules, improved signage, and vendor subsidies.
- 3.4.5 Strengthen local markets through support of local food hubs by educating and engaging the community with the model and providing distribution sites on city-owned property.
- 3.4.6 Consider local policy options, such as permit fee reductions, for food producers operating at small scale or using conservation practices.



3.4 Promote local food purchasing and community engagement.

- 3.4.7 Assess opportunities to align City purchasing practices where applicable with values-based criteria such as local sourcing, environmental sustainability, and equity. Where Tumwater's procurement is limited, promote public awareness of these values through communications and support similar efforts by partner agencies, when feasible.
- 3.4.8 Encourage farm-to-table connections by collaborating with regional food system partners to support initiatives that help local restaurants, bakeries, caterers, and butchers to access regional ingredients. This may include promotional campaigns, networking events, or technical assistance.



3.5 Form partnerships to increase local food production capacity.

- 3.5.1 Foster workforce development and support new farmers by continuing to support educational activities through the Tumwater School District, including the Tumwater FRESH Program at Isabella Bush Park, alongside partnerships with New Market Skills Center and South Puget Sound Community College to build a skilled food and agriculture workforce.
- 3.5.2 Explore partnerships to foster workforce development and encourage new farmers by supporting Thurston Conservation District's FarmLink and Farm My Yard programs and creating pathways for new farmers to access land, training, and technical support.
- 3.5.3 Foster workforce development and support new farmers by supporting community-based organizations and existing commercial kitchens, such as Enterprise for Equity, ASHHO, and Our Community Kitchen, to offer business incubation and mentorship opportunities for beginning food processors and producers.



3.5 Form partnerships to increase local food production capacity.

- 3.5.4 Promote the economic viability of small-scale farming by supporting efforts to make small-scale and urban farming financially sustainable by exploring ways to reduce regulatory barriers, promoting cooperative models, connecting growers with local markets and procurement opportunities, and exploring access to business support services, microgrants, and relevant state or federal funding.
- 3.5.5 Promote the economic viability of small-scale farming by encouraging creative models such as agritourism, culinary arts partnerships, and vertical farming that align with local zoning and community values.

