

# Health & Food Systems

## Master Plan Element

Developed by the Planning Healthy Communities Initiative at the Edward J. Bloustein School for Planning and Public Policy for the Trenton Healthy Communities Initiative

May 2016

### Purpose

There is growing consensus in both the planning and public health professions that the way we have designed our communities over the past 50-60 years plays an important role in determining health outcomes. While prior interventions by the public health community have contributed to a drop in the transmission of infectious diseases, chronic health problems such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and asthma have become more prevalent. Greater focus on public policy decisions impacting land use stands to help arrest and reverse the prevalence of chronic diseases given that land use decisions impact access to health factors such as physical activity, nutritional food, healthy housing and public transit to health care facilities, along with cleaner air, water and soil in the environs. An instrument to link the impacts of land use decisions and health is a Health & Food Systems Element (HFSE), an adoptable element of a Municipal Master Plan. The process and action of adopting an HFSE additionally lays the foundation toward a *Health in All Policies* approach to lead a community towards a decision framework that emphasizes health outcomes in consideration of land use and related policies. Health in All Policies (HiAP) is a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas.

The Master Plan, (AKA Comprehensive Plan in most of the Country), provides a long-range vision for the built environment of a community. It guides the appropriate use of lands within a municipality in order to protect the public health and safety and to promote general welfare. Among other issues, the Master Plan can identify:

- *Suitable locations for commercial, housing and mixed-use development;*
- *Locations where the city should increase density, use redevelopment, or intervene in other ways;*
- *Opportunities to extend and/or improve open space, recreational areas, and civic facilities;*
- *Strategies for increasing economic development;*
- *Environmental, historic and cultural resources that need conservation; and*
- *Strategies for roadway and network design aimed at including all modes of transportation but most importantly pedestrian and bicycle, while solving congestion and improving transit services.*

The municipal Master Plan has a direct relationship to its residents and other users within a municipal jurisdiction, such as business owners and employees. The Master Plan establishes a shared vision and set of goals for a community. In New Jersey, the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) requires that all municipalities have a Master Plan in order to effectuate zoning laws.

The Municipal Land Use Law in New Jersey contains a list of mandatory and recommended elements in its listing of Master Plan Elements. While it does not specifically refer to a “Health and Food Systems Element, it does make the following statements concerning the master plan and public health within the Purposes section of the Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-2);

*“Encourage municipal action to guide the appropriate use or development of all lands in this State, in a manner which will promote the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare;”*

The Health & Food Systems Element (HFSE), like all Master Plan Elements, is intended to guide land-use decisions and provide the basis for ordinances addressing Health in All Policy (HiAP) issues. For many communities, this element is a good first step at introducing health concepts into local planning documents. Ultimately, it is most effective when towns take the step of infusing a more holistic approach throughout each of their Master Plan Elements while ensuring consistency among elements and with the community’s overall vision.

Municipalities also are granted the authority to adopt laws and regulations to protect public health and welfare and to promote the general welfare in their communities outside of the planning and zoning powers. These types of environmental and health-based regulations and ordinances pertain to all property in a municipality. Examples of some regulations include: zoning, tree protection ordinances, stream corridor protection ordinances, recycling ordinances, wildlife protection ordinances.

### **Who should lead and be involved with this action?**

The municipal planning board has the power to adopt and/or amend the municipal Master Plan. However, not only is it “best practice” to work with the Mayor and governing body, as well as the Green Team, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Board of Health, Board of Education, Environmental Commission and any other boards or organizations that do work related to the HFSE, it is imperative toward instilling an HiAP approach to governance. In addition, input from the public should be incorporated at various points in the development of the Master Plan Element, as well as through an official public hearing.

### **Timeframe**

The time needed to adopt a Health & Food Systems Element is largely a function of local processes, but as an estimate, could take anywhere between 10 and 18 months. A factor in the timing is the amount of available staff, consultant and/or volunteer time, and meaningful public participation necessary for the process. In addition, because the content of the HFSE includes topics outside the scope of the typical Master Plan Element, some additional research and time may be needed to compile and evaluate the new information.

## **Project Costs and Resource Needs**

Towns that have a planner on staff may be able to develop the HFSE in-house, whereby the costs associated with the Element would be limited to the staff time devoted to the project. Many communities hire a planning consultant, which can cost between \$35,000 - \$85,000, depending on the amount of volunteer time dedicated to the project, the scope of the public outreach process and the availability of data. Knowledgeable volunteers, including local Health care professionals, Green Teams, the American Planning Association, and the American Health Professional Association can save towns' considerable money in research and drafting.

Foundations like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and others, the American Health Professional Association (AHPA), or Sustainable Jersey program may have small grants available to support this work.

## **Why is it important?**

The Municipal Master Plan creates the foundation for the local zoning and land ordinances that govern development and redevelopment within a community. The HFSE is intended to guide land-use decisions and provide the basis for ordinances addressing public health, physical activity, and land use issues.

The Health and Food Systems Element is intended to provide a policy framework and action agenda for: expanding access to and uptake of healthy foods; increasing opportunities and pursuit of physical activity; improving health literacy and access to healthcare services; and addressing unhealthy housing conditions with any given community. The element also should highlight the relationship between health and other Master Plan elements. It is anticipated that implementation of the strategies described in the HFSE as well as the other Master Plan elements will lead to material changes in economic, social and physical environment over time, which will improve the health and wellness of residents.

## **What to do, and how to do it (“How to”)**

The Planning Board adopts a Health and Food System Element as part of the municipal Master Plan. The adopted Element should include all of the topics outlined in the “What to Include in a Health & Food Systems Element” section below.

We have provided guidance and recommendations for implementing the action. You do not need to follow this guidance exactly as long as your final product meets the needs of you residents.

## **What to Include in a Health & Food Systems Element**

The following are the basic components of a typical Health & Food Systems Element (HFSE). The topics listed should be analyzed as part of the planning process. The 2016 PILOT completed by the Planning Healthy Communities Initiative at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers, The State University for the American Planning Association and the

American Public Health Association, on behalf of The City of Trenton, can be utilized as an example. Other resources are listed below in the resource section.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The HFSE should define the terms by which a health in all planning and public policies approach is applied to your town and explain: 1) the importance of applying public health to land use decisions, community development and redevelopment decisions, natural resource protection; housing; and, crime and public safety; 2) the importance of the Master Plan in defining and achieving a desired future for the community; 3) the general purpose and focus of the plan, and 4) the need for changes in ordinances, policies and practices that the municipality will need to make in order to advance a public health perspective.

The Plan should include references to the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) as the authority for the Master Plan adoptions and revisions, and the statutory context for this Element. Towns also have the authority to pass ordinances that are not limited to issues governed by the MLUL. The HFSE could indicate which ordinances should be adopted through planning and zoning provisions and those that will be implemented through the general municipal law and regulatory authority.

## **II. VISION**

The HFSE includes a vision that incorporates health, wellness and access to healthy food options in all policies concepts. The community's vision should also delineate physical and mental health's importance toward community development and redevelopment priorities and practices, land-use decision-making and natural resource protection, in order to help achieve a thriving future in every aspect of community life.

## **III. ASSESSMENT**

The HFSE includes an assessment of how a community ranks in relation to a number of health determinants. While history is important to understanding the why of community health statistics, , the present is critical in determining future direction. While every community will vary greatly, from city to suburb to exurb, many of the core issues surrounding a community's need to change remain constant; its physical attributes, resources, and the opportunities available.

Some of the health indicators necessary to assess how a community *may* proceed depends on the community. Some communities may already have up-to-date information on built environment determinants of health but may yet require updates or more current assessments, such as the physicality of a place (its connections neighborhood to schools to park to shopping, etc.). Other communities may require more extensive analysis of many factors and may have to reach across many government and non-governmental departments and jurisdictions (police, housing, social services, etc) to accomplish a robust assessment.

Collection of data should consider the following:

- Access to Healthcare
- Healthy Food Options
- Community Gardens
- Bike & Pedestrian amenities, connections, and safety
- Safety and Crime Statistics
- Physical Assets
- Environmental Hazards (e.g., , Lead, Air and water quality, brownfields, etc.)
- Social determinants (e.g., income disparities, literacy, obesity rates, social mobility)

These factors may intersect with other elements of a Master Plan -- land use, circulation, housing, community facilities, open space and recreation, etc.—and also extend beyond them.

#### **IV. GOALS, MILESTONES, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS**

There are many ways to construct a Master Plan Element once the vision is developed and an analysis of the conditions is conducted and opportunities revealed. These may include;

- 1) Developing Goals and Objectives as a sub-chapter, with the Recommendations sections developed as another, or;
- 2) Packaging Goals, Milestones, Strategies and Actions in one chapter.

The Trenton PILOT initiative integrated Goals, Milestones, Strategies and Actions into topical areas. More specifically, this approach includes:

- **Goals** of the municipality through which it intends to address identified issues while capitalizing on assets and opportunities. Goals should be crafted as to detail the rationale as to why the goal is being pursued.
- **Milestones**, which are important as they provide the ability to measure success.
- **Strategies and Actions** to explicate how the community plans to realize the plan, including how the HFSE compliments and supports the other Master Plan Elements.

The goals and associated milestones serve as the basis for the HFSE's recommended Strategies and Actions. When knit together as guided by MLUL, the Master Plan provides a solid foundation to support development regulations and other ordinances.

#### **V. TOPICAL AREAS TO ADDRESS**

Communities are encouraged to address additional areas as appropriate to their circumstances. While the Master Plan is typically aimed at land use, environment, and infrastructure, government policies and programs, can have a tremendous influence on community health; associated polices can be a force of positive influence in a number of ways that extend well beyond the recreation department and into public works, buildings and grounds, and public safety. Similarly, school-based initiatives, such as nutrition programs and physical education can

lead individuals to become healthier people. General self-reliance programs that educate children on basic life skills, including how to build and maintain health are also very important.

Some of the goals a community may seek could include, but not be limited to, the following list. Depending on the level of interest/need in the community these goals will change. The depth by which a community delves into action and strategies also are influenced by community needs;

- 1) Improve Access to Healthy Foods and Nutrition
- 2) Assess and Expand Opportunities for Physical Activity
- 3) Ensure Equitable Healthcare and Health Literacy
- 4) Ensure and expand on a Healthy Housing Stock
- 5) Understand and Improve Environmental Impacts and Conditions

At a minimum, HFSEs include two focal areas: Food Systems and Physical Activity. These are further defined below with sample strategies.

- 1) **Food Systems** – Food system planning is the process of taking a comprehensive approach to the food supply chain, reducing energy and water consumption at each stage and supplying whole, and healthy foods to consumers within a food-shed. The HFSE can consider sustainable food systems planning and policies and address it from a number of perspectives such as; zoning for local and regional food outlets, school lunch and breakfast programs, and social services.
- 2) **Physical Activity** – Presenting opportunities for physical activity is more than the number of parks or workout facilities within a community; it is also about facilitating (passive) physical activity such that the default option is the healthy option. For example, when someone wakes up for school or work, walking or bicycling may be the easiest option if impediments such as lack of sidewalks or other safety issues are not present. To this point, improving opportunities for physical activity must be addressed through multiple aspects of a community's design vocabulary – e.g., architectural interest, safe streets that recognize the pedestrian, park and open spaces, programming, community policing, etc.

### **Spotlight: What NJ Towns are doing**

The Trenton HFSE is the first of its kind in New Jersey, based on a review of best practices from other jurisdictions in the U.S. and Trenton-specific factors. The Trenton HFSE moreover is one element of the updated Trenton Master Plan – the Trenton 250 Framework. It can be found here: <http://www.trenton250.org/>

Additional resources appear in the section below.

### **Resources**

<http://www.plan4health.us/tools-and-resources/toolkits/>

<http://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues>

Funding to support the development of this material was provided through a grant from the American Planning Association's Plan4Health initiative. Plan4Health connects communities across the country, funding work at the intersection of planning and public health. Anchored by members of the [American Planning Association](#) (APA) and the [American Public Health Association](#) (APHA), Plan4Health supports creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions. Plan4Health is supported by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and led by APA's [Planning and Community Health Center](#).

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