



American Planning Association

Making Great Communities Happen

FOOD SYSTEMS AND PLANNING IN RHODE ISLAND



Reuniting Planning and Public Health

Planning in the United States originated with a public health purpose. The planning and public health professions were united by a focus on urban reform and a goal to prevent outbreaks of infectious disease. As planning diverged from its common roots with public health, the profession's attention moved to managing land use, physical development, and supporting infrastructure. In contrast, public health professionals worked to address individuals' health. These separate missions have led to a siloed approach to influencing the social determinants that significantly impact individual and population health. Plan4Health works to break these silos and to reconnect planning and public health through a shared vision of healthy places, making the healthy choice easier.

Health equity means everyone has an equal opportunity to take advantage of resources that will help them live a long, healthy life. It focuses on differences in population health that are related to unequal economic and social conditions in specific locations. These conditions are both systemic and changeable.

Achieving health equity requires creating equal opportunities for health by eliminating health disparities, assuring healthy childhood development, preventing and controlling disease and disability, and working to make the environment healthy. Working toward health equity means reducing differences in health outcomes between different groups in a population.

Rhode Island Department of Health

HEALTHY PLANNING IN RHODE ISLAND

The state of Rhode Island has strong healthy planning practices, offering an important platform for the implementation of Plan4Health. The Rhode Island Department of Health's [Healthy Communities](#) initiative identifies four components to advance healthy places: [community assessment](#), [community engagement](#), [community health workers](#), and [health equity](#). The community assessment guidance prominently features planning and the built environment as key levers for making healthy choices easier. Recommendations from the Department of Health highlight how public health professionals hope to engage planners making it easier to be healthy:

Review your comprehensive plan.

Cities and towns all have documents that were developed with a broad public participation process that describe the community and set out actions for municipal improvements. Comprehensive plans are updated every 10 years and are powerful tools to set the stage for healthy policies and practices. Compare your comprehensive plan to the recommendations in the Rhode Island Department of Health's [Healthy Communities Plan](#). Identify where you can strengthen goals, objectives, policies, strategies, and implementation plans in your comprehensive plan.

Learn about the environmental health of your community.

A community's physical environment can support healthy behaviors or limit healthy choices. The [YMCA Community Health Living Index](#) provides tools to assess the built environment of a community, such as the design of streets and parks or access to farmers markets. Use walking and biking environment audits to assess your community's walkability and bikeability. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) food retail resource will help you identify existing data and more tools to assess the food situation in your community.

Plan4Health

Anchored by American Planning Association (APA) chapters and American Public Health Association (APHA) affiliates, with funding through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Community Health, [Plan4Health](#) supports creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions. The 35 coalitions participating in the Plan4Health project are working to increase access to nutritious foods or to increase opportunities for physical activity. All coalitions include planners and public health professionals as well as a range of community-based organizations, such as universities, local governments, and others committed to building healthy, vibrant communities.

The investments that APA and APHA have made in members across the country will potentially impact millions of residents through policy, systems, and environmental improvements. The same investments will potentially impact more than 60,000 planners and public health professionals who will have access to the best practices and lessons learned from their peers involved in Plan4Health. Plan4Health speaks to a larger effort to connect community members and local professionals through national associations—and to sustain this work through the institutionalization of health and planning practices in coalitions and organizations throughout the country. Plan4Health is one initiative in the movement to build healthy communities, shifting daily decisions in professional practice to view planning as a public health intervention and improving the built environment as an essential strategy for chronic disease prevention.

THE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES MOVEMENT

Coalition-based work to advance healthy, vibrant communities has been led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and countless community members and nonprofit organizations across the country.

Plan4Health has benefited from the investments of others and the ongoing commitment to prevent chronic disease. For more information about work at the intersection of the built environment and health, refer to the selected resources below:

- [Making the Case for Active Cities: The Co-Benefits of Designing for Active Living](#)
- [Intersections: Health and the Built Environment](#)
- [Summarizing the Landscape of Healthy Communities](#)

MOUNT HOPE COALITION TO INCREASE FOOD SECURITY

Mount Hope Coalition to Increase Food Security is a coalition of community partners that aims to educate youth and adults in Providence about the health and economic benefits of producing locally grown food. Through hands-on training, residents will learn of alternatives available to them when it comes to securing fresh, healthy food.

The coalition identified the following goals to guide the work of Plan4Health:

- Establish gardens to engage and educate the community, build a stronger sense of social connection within the neighborhood, and increase neighborhood access to fresh produce.
- Expand coalition membership.
- Expand and engage Community Health Workers focused on nutrition education and community engagement.

Empowering Residents

Residents in the Mount Hope neighborhood of Providence are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. Described by Community Health Innovations of Rhode Island founder Dr. Dannie Ritchie as experiencing a “food mirage,” many low-income community members in Mount Hope “can see healthy options, but can’t access them.” The neighborhood is located in a wealthier part of town with upscale supermarkets. But, the options are not affordable, leaving residents with limited choices.

The Mount Hope Coalition, however, intentionally centered the project on neighborhood assets, rooting the work in the knowledge and experiences of residents. Developed around the core strategy of training community residents to become Community Health Workers, the coalition aligned the values and skills of residents with food systems work. To learn more about Community Health Workers, read the special section below.

“Our increasing food security work is dependent on our building community capacity to address the challenge. This starts with developing community health worker food access advocates for the Mount Hope neighborhood. Our recent food system workshop helped to raise awareness around the extent and gravity of the issue of food insecurity, in general, and in our community specifically and the need to act now.”

Dannie Ritchie, MD, Founder, Community Health Innovations of Rhode Island and Plan4Health Project Manager

Expanding Partnerships

The leadership team, including the five newly trained Community Health Workers, expanded the coalition, bringing unique partners into the conversation. From faith leaders willing to host coalition meetings to a job training program that designs garden fences, the coalition worked to engage diverse perspectives.

DEFINING COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

Community Health Workers are front-line public health workers who are trusted members of the community they serve. This trusting relationship enables them to serve as a liaisons, links, and intermediaries between health and social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural responsiveness of service delivery.

Community Health Workers build individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as engagement, community education, social support, and advocacy. Community Health Workers hold a unique position within an often rigid health care system in that they can be flexible and creative in responding to specific individual and community needs.

The unique strength of Community Health Workers is their ability to develop rapport with people and other community members due to shared culture, community residence, chronic condition, disability, language, and life experiences. They are also able to enhance the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of care and help to counteract factors such as social exclusion, poverty, and marginalization. An important role of the Community Health Worker is to advocate for the socioeconomic, environmental, and political rights of individuals and their communities.

Community Health Workers often link people to needed health information and services. Community Health Workers address the social and environmental situations that interfere with an individual or community achieving optimal health and well-being. Community Health Workers may have various titles, as it is used as an umbrella term.

—Excerpt from Rhode Island Certification Board,
Certified Community Health Worker, Job Analysis
and Standards (2016)

PLAN4HEALTH PROJECT PARTNERS

- Community Health Innovations Rhode Island
- Green Circle Design
- Groundwork Rhode Island
- Mount Hope Learning Center
- Mount Hope Neighborhood Association
- Olney Street Baptist Church
- Partnership for Providence Parks
- Southside Community Land Trust
- Rhode Island Chapter of APA
- Rhode Island Food Policy Council
- Rochambeau Library
- Vincent Brown Recreation Center

Establish Gardens

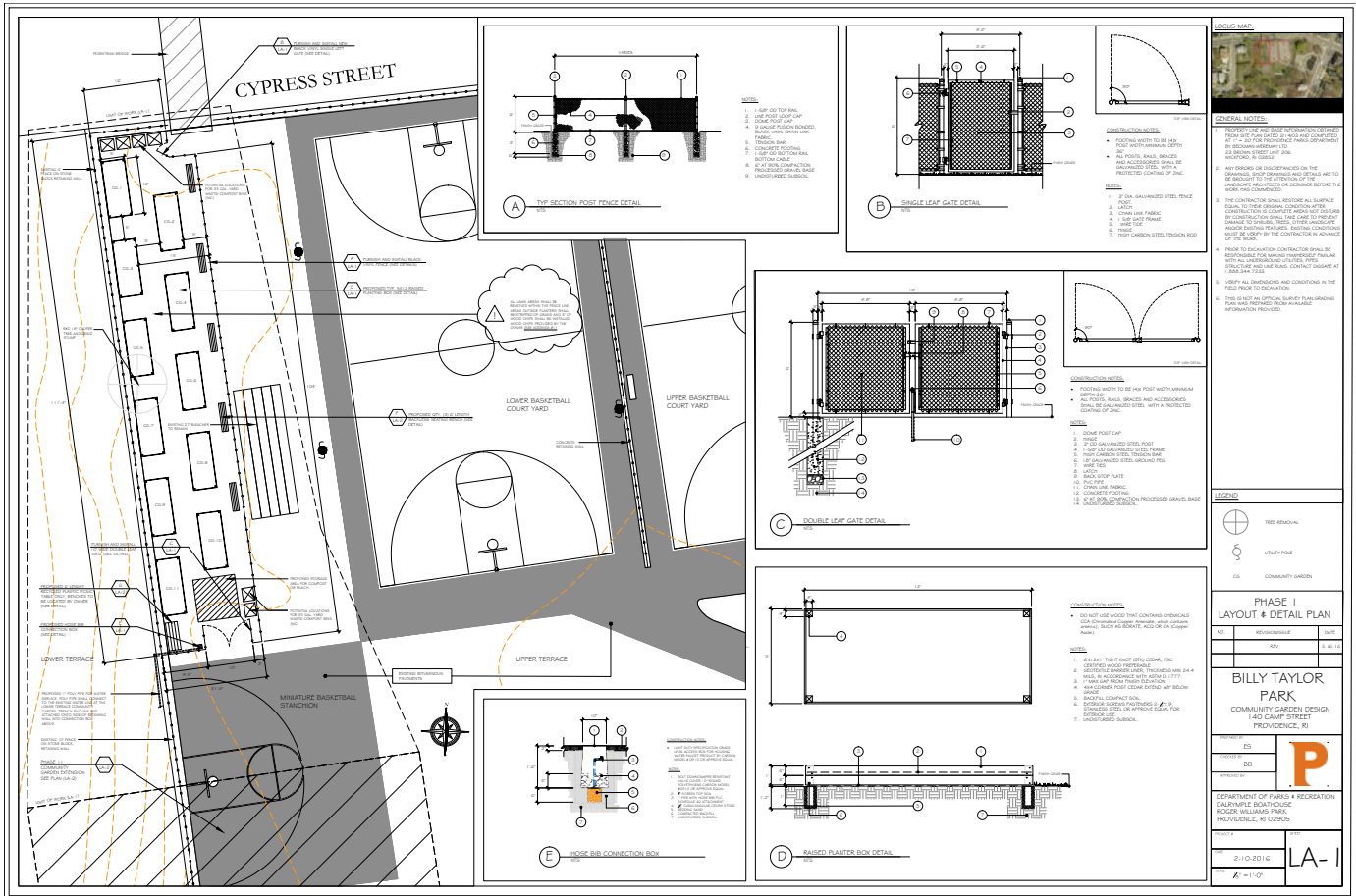
Working with Community Health Workers and partners, the coalition established two raised bed gardens in the Mount Hope neighborhood: a sharing garden in Billy Taylor Park and a teaching garden at the Vincent Brown Recreation Center with 4 additional raised beds.

Billy Taylor Park, an institution in the community with a playground and basketball court, offered the perfect location for residents to grow their own food. The coalition worked with a master gardener to provide educational programming, engaging residents during festivals and holiday celebrations.

Partnering with the after-school program at the Vincent Brown Recreation Center, the teaching garden bed is focused on educating kids. Children in the after-school program designed and painted the garden fence. The fence was created

by SteelYard, a nonprofit welding and public arts organization. Pairing this environmental change with programming, the coalition has successfully activated youth. From the excitement of their first crop of carrots to taste testing their homegrown herbs, the garden has offered students a chance to grow their own food. Throughout the project period, more than 250 children and adults have had a chance to participate in activities at the gardens.

Providence's comprehensive plan established a policy of promoting and supporting community gardens in parks. This provision in the plan laid the foundation for the success of Plan4Health, ensuring that staff members from the parks department were able to advise and collaborate with the coalition. The 14-member Garden Squad, led by Community Health workers, will ensure opportunities continue to be available to the residents of Mount Hope.



Plan of Billy Taylor Park sharing garden.

Planners4Health

Planners4Health was a chance to think about health at the APA chapter level. It was designed to go beyond place-based projects—working in a specific neighborhood, city, or county—and to bring a focus to health at APA. The initiative gave members and chapters time to think about their roles when it comes to strengthening healthy communities and building shared capacity to work across sectors.

Every chapter is different, and every chapter faces unique challenges and opportunities. Some things about Planners4Health were universal: connecting planners and public health professionals, and figuring out what the community does really well when it comes to health. Other things about Planners4Health were unique: understanding the role of an established healthy communities coalition or connecting with a graduate program that offers a joint planning and public health degree.

And, it was intended as a collaborative learning period, allowing Plan4Health coalitions, APA chapters, and allied professionals to share experiences.

PLANNERS4HEALTH CURRICULUM

A cornerstone of Planners4Health is an online course and a six-part curriculum series guiding members through each step of the project.

Building Healthier Communities: Integrating Public Health into Planning is a free [online course](#) for planning and health professionals. This is an interactive course with audio. **CM | 1**

Five of six sessions are available for On Demand CM credit:

[Session One: Assessing the Healthy Communities Landscape](#)
CM | 1.5

[Session Two: What We Measure Matters: Metrics, Data, Sources, and Methodologies](#) **CM | 1.5**

[Session Three: Applying an Equity Lens](#) **CM | 1.5**

Session Four: Building Coalitions and Engaging the Community (live session at the 2017 National Planning Conference)

[Session Five: Communications: Framing, Messaging, and Marketing](#) **CM | 1.5**

[Session Six: Sustaining Momentum](#) **CM | 1.5**

APA is grateful for support from Prevention Institute to develop this series. Prevention Institute is a nonprofit organization based in Oakland, California, bringing cutting-edge research, practice, and analysis to today's most pressing health and safety concerns.

Rhode Island Planners4Health

Building on the momentum of Plan4Health, the Rhode Island Planners4Health task force brought together a number of organizations, professional groups, and agencies to bridge the worlds of food access, food systems, planning, and public health in Rhode Island.

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council has been engaged with the planning community since its inception in 2011, and the Rhode Island Chapter of the APA has been engaged in conversations touching on food policy for years. The Plan4Health project, however, offered an opportunity to increase trust across sectors by responding to identified needs, utilizing data in new and dynamic ways, and offering an interactive tool to improve understanding of food access issues and planning or program development related to food access.

PLANNERS4HEALTH TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Leo Pollock	Rhode Island Food Policy Council
Nate Kelly, AICP	APA Rhode Island
Sumana Chintapalli	Rhode Island Food Policy Council, Conservation Law Foundation
Sue AnderBois	Office of the Governor, State of Rhode Island
Chris Ausura	Rhode Island Department of Health
Lauren Conkey	Rhode Island Department of Health
Shayna Cohen	Karen Karp & Partners
Ben Kerrick	Karen Karp & Partners

HEALTH EQUITY ZONES

Beginning in 2015, the Rhode Island Department of Health, in partnership with the CDC, funded 10 [Health Equity Zones](#) (HEZ) throughout Rhode Island to support innovative approaches to health at the local level, with the specific goal of improving the social and environmental conditions of neighborhoods across five counties statewide.

HEZ groups were identified as key partners in our Plan4Health, given the geographic diversity of efforts, the fact that they had collectively already done local assessments, and because they generally were interested in the intersection of food access and public health. The approach of HEZ, the emphasis on place-based change, aligns with planning, bringing a grassroots advocacy perspective to APA Rhode Island's commitment to creating healthy communities.

We were honored to invite representatives from the HEZs to join our Southern New England APA Conference in Providence, Rhode Island. The opportunity to connect planners with HEZs and HEZs with planners will continue the cross-sector momentum of Planners4Health—and will ensure that public health professionals think of us as allies in creating safe and just places for all.

—Nate Kelly, AICP, APA Rhode Island

Health Equity Zones:

- Bristol Health Equity Zone
- Newport Health Equity Zone
- North Providence Health Equity Zone
- Olneyville Health Equity Zone
- Pawtucket and Central Falls Health Equity Zone
- Providence Health Equity Zone
- Southside, Elmwood, West End Health Equity Zone
- Washington County Health Equity Zone
- West Warwick Health Equity Zone
- Woonsocket Health Equity Zone

Mapping Access

The initial assessment period of the grant offered an opportunity to identify key challenges and issues around food access and food insecurity: poverty, transportation, service information, and more. Starting with the Task Force, the project manager reviewed a number of assessments that have been completed in Rhode Island in the last 12 to 24 months, including the two reports highlighted below:

- Year One (2015) assessments from communities participating in the [HEZ](#) initiative, funded by the Rhode Island Department of Health with the goal of promoting health equity and eliminating health disparities using place-based strategies to promote healthy communities. While HEZ grants were not focused exclusively on access to healthy food, food access (and challenges around transportation with respect to food access) came up as an issue in almost all the assessments.
- Karen Karp & Partners' Update to the [Rhode Island Food System Assessment: 2011–2016](#) (commissioned by the Rhode Island Food Policy Council). This assessment dove specifically into demographics of Rhode Island's population, where food is accessed, and health disparities in the state, and included some static maps showing food access relationships (for example, retail locations accepting SNAP, and percent of households enrolled in SNAP). A number of leverage points identified in the update connected issues of food access, economic security, and the need for better coordination, and were instrumental in helping the Task Force think about the functional needs of a tool that would bridge planning and public health needs and data.

As the task force scanned and assessed previous food planning and food access work, the idea of having a “deep dive” map was identified. Task force members felt that there needed to be some way of interacting with the map and expressed a desire for a more dynamic interface. The Planners4Health project wanted to respect work that had already been done, and create a tool that added value and avoided creating redundancies or duplicating existing structures and efforts.

The task force decided to create a map that would pull data together in a comprehensive way. The tool itself would serve to increase understanding of the complexity of food access and food insecurity generally, and help planners and decision makers develop actionable strategies to address these challenges and issues based on information and lived community experience. Additionally, the task force determined that a Food Access Story Map would complement the Food Access (GIS) Map.

Leveraging Partners

Utilizing existing roundtables and gatherings—HEZ meetings and Rhode Island Food Policy Council meetings—the task force successfully engaged a wider range of food system experts. Based on the combined feedback the task force revised the tool over the summer of 2017.

The Plan4Health team also hosted a [Mapping Food Access as Part of a Statewide Food Strategy](#) webinar. The

webinar featured the range of members of the Rhode Island Planners4Health Task Force. The final project in late August brought together stakeholders from the public health, food systems, and planning sectors. The meeting highlighted local efforts and gave the task force the opportunity to publicly release the Food Access Map and to walk through the map's functionality.

PLANNERS4HEALTH ROUNDTABLE

At the Planners4Health end-of-grant convening, we brought together groups whose paths do not always intersect, but whose work could benefit from collaboration and contact with one another. We saw this gathering as a conversation at the intersection of planning, public health, and food access, and had a range of attendees, from practitioners working in food access, to town planners, to public health researchers. It was an opportunity to highlight the work going on in these various fields, as well the intersections among these fields.

We had a presentation from Plan4Health grantee, Dr. Dannie Ritchie, on the incredible work she is spearheading with the support of the Plan4Health grant on a neighborhood and community level. Sue AnderBois, director of food strategy for the state of Rhode Island, spoke about how food access, planning, and health all fit in with the larger Rhode Island Food Strategy unveiled in May of this year. Representatives from three Health Equity Zone backbone organizations shared about the health and food access work happening at the local level across the state.

A story map

Healthy, Affordable, and Delicious: Mapping food access in Rhode Island

In 2017, Rhode Island unveiled its first statewide food strategy: *Relish Rhody*. "The Rhode Island Food Strategy envisions a sustainable, equitable food system that is uniquely Rhode Island; one that builds on our traditions, strengths, and history while encouraging innovation and supporting the regional goal of 50 percent of the food eaten in New England be produced in the region by 2060." This strategy builds on and is informed by earlier work completed by the *Rhode Island Food Policy Council*: the 2011 RI Food Assessment, and the 2016 update to that assessment.

Relish Rhody Objectives

The Rhode Island Food Strategy establishes five guiding objectives:

- Preserve & Grow Agriculture, Fisheries Industries in Rhode Island
- Sustain & Create Markets for Rhode Island Food, Beverage Products
- Minimize Food Waste & Divert it from the Waste Stream
- Enhance the Climate for Food & Beverage Businesses

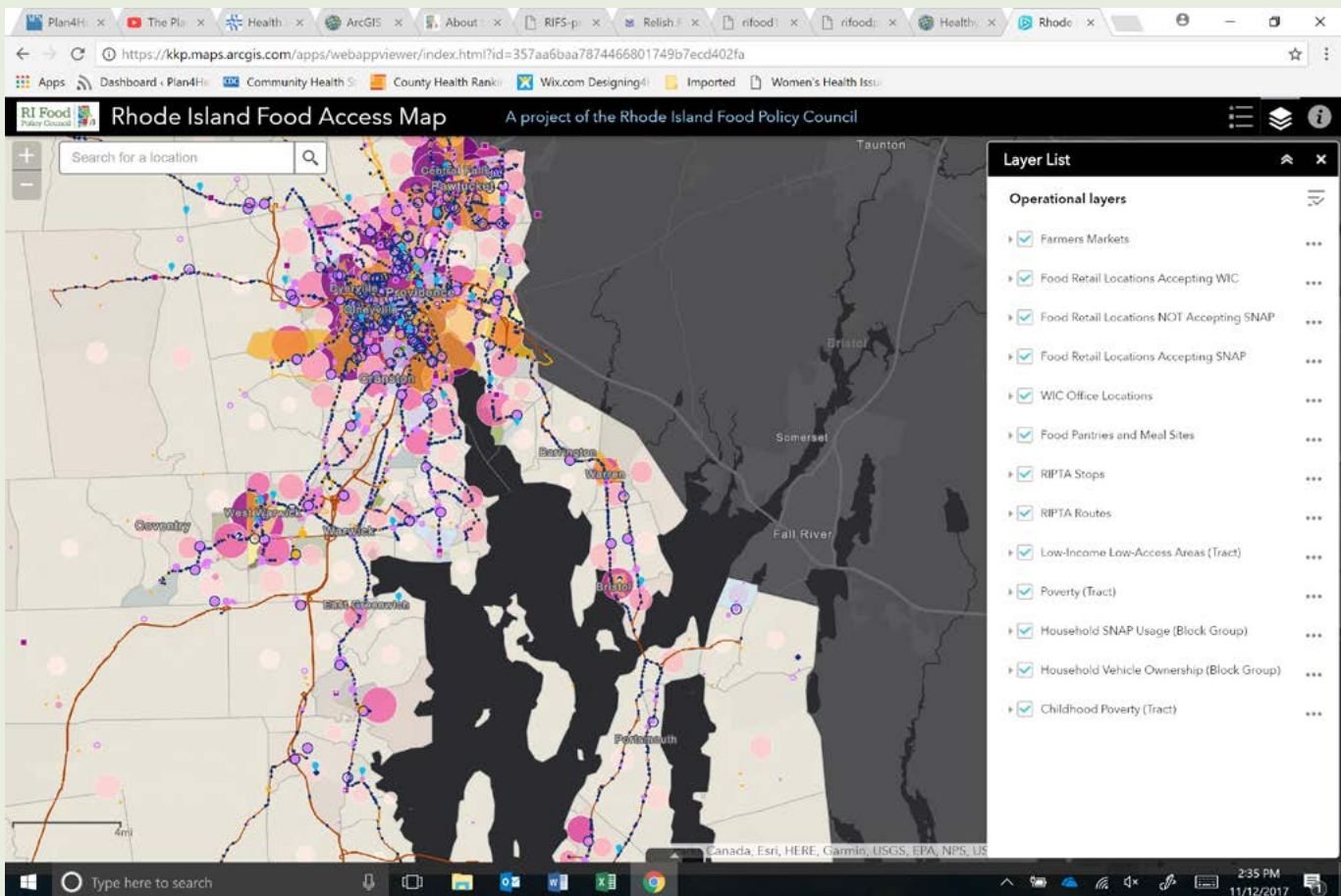
PLANNERS4HEALTH ROUNDTABLE (CONTINUED)

Bringing it all together, Shayna Cohen from Karen Karp & Partners presented the Food Access Map, a tool developed with the support of the Plan4Health grant awarded to the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Planning Association.

We believe the [Food Access Map](#) can help at multiple levels of planning, food systems work, and public health initiatives—from the hyperlocal, to statewide. We have already learned of a number of different ways that people are utilizing this unique tool. A mobile food access program utilized the map

to determine the most effective locations for it to operate from, a nonprofit working on supporting urban agriculture initiatives used it to help identify cities and towns that could most benefit from that work, and AmeriCorps RI has recently started exploring this tool for shaping how and where they deliver services.

—Leo Pollock, Rhode Island Food Policy Council Manager and Planners4Health Project Manager



Thank you for including me and the West Warwick HEZ in the event last week. Sometimes the WIC work I do can feel like it's a little isolated from the other areas of food work, but I am grateful for the opportunity to showcase the West Warwick HEZ's work, and to meet other people across the state doing similar work in their own communities.

Planners4Health Roundtable Participant

Final Recommendations

The project offered a powerful example of partnership across the food access, food systems, planning, and public health sectors in Rhode Island. The process has also helped the task force identify specific action steps and focus areas for ongoing work:

Drive engagement with the traditional planning community on food access and public health issues.

The initial assessment period of the grant helped the task force recognize that many of the food access and public health efforts to date have involved nonprofits, service agencies, and community-based groups, but have not explicitly engaged the local planning community. At the final Planners4Health meeting, the task force discussed the possibility of hosting a workshop tailored for planners, with Certification Maintenance credits, as well as using webinar presentations from Plan4Health to offer a holistic introduction to integrating planning, public health, and food systems.

Inject food systems work and public health into other state planning efforts, including transportation.

Rhode Island is about to undertake a long-range transportation plan, providing an opportunity to elevate public health and food access work. While this will be challenging, Rhode Island's process for developing a State Food Strategy in 2016–2017 is viewed within state government as a model process for public engagement and multisector collaboration. There is a feeling of momentum within the Task Force: having worked together on the Plan4Health project, there is a strong foundation for cross-sector collaboration.

Ensure success and long-term thinking (and funding) for community-based partnerships and collaborations.

One of the powerful recognitions of the assessment period is that the work of the Health Equity Zones in Rhode Island has created a strong community foundation for systems work at the local level. The HEZ groups began with a period of assessment that was community led: identifying key issues and needs in local communities that touched on public health, public safety, transportation, and food access. The long-term goal of this work has been to support community-based leadership, encourage infrastructure and resource alignment, and to build data capacity for decision making at the local level.

The Rhode Island Department of Health is committed to the HEZ program, but funding for this work is a challenge. Much of the community-based food access and public health work has been primarily driven by the nonprofit sector, which has been hobbled by immediate resource needs, making long-term thinking (and planning) a challenge to sustain. The task force has begun to discuss ways to ensure that this work engages with, and is linked to, the wider planning community and business community, building a stronger base committed to working at the intersections of planning, public health, and food access.

RELISH RHODY: RHODE ISLAND FOOD STRATEGY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of her efforts to grow Rhode Island's economy and support healthy families and communities, in spring 2016, Gov. Gina M. Raimondo announced the hiring of the state's (and nation's) first director of food strategy to lead the development of Rhode Island's first comprehensive Food Strategy. With the support of many partners, this actionable vision builds on the state's momentum in growing its local food economy in a way that benefits all Rhode Islanders, enhances Rhode Island's environment, and celebrates the state's unique food cultures and landscape.

Rhode Island stands at an exceptional moment in time to release this Food Strategy. In addition to state-level leadership, there is a robust network of partners across business, government, and community who are engaged in and energized by this effort. Designed to be a five-year action plan, the strategy takes a holistic view of the state's food system and is organized around three core themes:

Health & Access, Economic Development, and Environmental Sustainability & Resiliency.

It is further broken out into five integrated focus areas:

- Preserve & Grow Agriculture, Fisheries Industries in Rhode Island
- Enhance the Climate for Food & Beverage Businesses
- Sustain & Create Markets for Rhode Island Food, Beverage Products
- Ensure Food Security for All Rhode Islanders
- Minimize Food Waste & Divert it from the Waste Stream

Learn more at relishrhody.com.

LEARN MORE FROM PLAN4HEALTH AND RHODE ISLAND



[Plan4Health: Mount Hope Coalition Project Impact](#)



[Mapping Food Access as Part of a Statewide Food Strategy Webinar](#)



[Food Access Map](#)



[Food Access Story Map](#)



[Plan4Health: Food Systems Toolkit](#)