

MEETING MINUTES

Rhode Island Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC) Q2 Meeting

Chair, Director Terry Gray

Thursday, July 11, 2024 | 9:30 - 11:00am

RI Commerce Corporation

315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101 (Narragansett Room)

[Council members must attend in person, per RI Open Meetings policy.](#)

Members of the public can attend in person or via zoom.

IFNPAC was established by the general assembly in 2012 to serve as a coordinating body between 8 state agencies to examine regulatory and policy barriers to developing a strong sustainable food economy and healthful nutrition practices. Since the launch of the 2017 State Food Strategy, Relish Rhody, the Council has served as a coordinating council to drive outcomes toward the Strategy which include: preserving and growing agriculture and fisheries; enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses; ensuring food security for all Rhode Islanders and minimizing food waste in the waste stream.

Q2 Meeting Minutes

July 11, 2024

Location: RI Commerce Corporation

COUNCIL MEMBERS (present): Ken Ayars, Terrence McNamara, Maria Cimini, Randi Belhumeur, Juli Stelmaszyk, Jessica Patroliá

Other attendees: Rachel Newman Greene, Alison Macbeth, Sarah Blau, Max Mason De Faria, Jesse Rye, Josh Luz, Denise Greene

Guest Speakers:

Sarah Blau, RI Department of Health

Rachel Newman Greene, RI Food Policy Council

Tony and Jen Silbert, Spartina Consulting

Denise Greene, RI Food Policy Council

1. Welcome and Introductions

Welcome – Ken Ayars chaired the meeting in the absence of Director Gray.

2. Approve Q2 Meeting Minutes

Held until quorum was met.

3. Welcome DCYF to the Council

Agenda item held for next meeting.

4. Proposed Sub-committee on Local & Healthy State Food Procurement (Sarah Blau, RIDOH)

Has been conducting research on how to grow institutional procurement of local food and state agency procurement practices. Since the presentation at the Q1 meeting, there has been some updates, at the end of April- beginning of May there was a food purchasing commission to study a bill was introduced. It did not pass but had the same directive as the proposed state agency procurement subcommittee. The Healthy Eating, Acting Living Program is proposing a values-based state food procurement sub-committee that includes IFNPAC members or designees, community representatives, and organizations involved in state food purchasing:

- To study, report on and advance the adaption of Good Food Purchasing principles.
- Suggested list of members includes Farm Fresh RI & SCLT, Farm Bureau, animal welfare, FINE, RIFPC, interested constituents/members of the public, and any interested parties, groups, or individuals.
- Scope and Goals- 3 primary objectives (research and report writing, contract revision, and review existing legislation) that align with GFPP standards.
 - Research and report writing- being done by reviewing state agency's purchasing practice and look at how it would be feasible for RI's purchasing system to adopt said values and principles
 - Contract revision- an example would be the MPA which currently doesn't have a lot of local distributors. This will be contingent on the research and report writing process.
 - Review existing legislation- as noted from the last meeting, our policies are in writing only and are not enforceable. We can use this sub-committee to identify some potential solutions.

Terrence McNamara asked if there were any opportunities to discuss with State Purchasing. Sarah notes that she has not been able to connect with State Purchasing but would like to work closely with them.

Dir Cimini asked about consultant support for subcommittee. Sarah Blau's role through the CDC funding supports some of these activities.

Juli Stelmaszyk asked if there are other committees and councils who have successfully implemented a subcommittee structure. Sarah notes commission to study was January 2026. Will still need to figure out meetings and logistics.

Ken Ayars would like to advance concept and discuss it further before coming to a final decision. Sarah Blau will work on working out logistics before next meeting, like staffing, how they would be writing the reports and how frequently the meetings are.

Terrence McNamara notes the challenges with rules and regulations that local farmers have to follow in order to meet MPA requirements.

Ken Ayars notes that the laws on the books specify that the state has to purchase locally but the challenges are often budgetary or volume. Rhode Island is small, possibly think regionally. There is vast capacity in fisheries.

Juli Stelmaszyk asked if there is a baseline understanding of local purchasing. Sarah Blau shared from current research that local procurement in state agencies is limited. Ken Ayars notes that this will be a component of the Food System Preparedness and Recovery Plan and enhancing connectivity will increase our response in the state. Sarah Blau notes that URI does not have to use the MPA system.

Jessica Patroliia notes that proposal focuses on policy but this conversation is own barriers for food producers. Also, this proposal is focused on good food purchasing practices – local is only one tenant.

Will continue discussion in next meeting.

5. State Planning Updates

RI Food Systems Planning for 2030 (Juli Stelmaszyk): At the end of phase 2 with 23 food system issue briefs written by about 40 contributors and authors. We also held a Summer Forum that served multiple purposes including ecosystem mapping, recommendation prioritization, and networking. Our next phase of plan development will include listening sessions to fill in the gaps, internal review, and public comment. Juli Stelmaszyk asked when the council would like to see the plan and how to elevate the plan to leadership. The project team is discussing ways to keep the plan alive and iterative.

IFNPAC has existed since 2012 and when Relish Rhody was published in 2017 it held the plan with the Director of Food Strategy. What are the changes or additions that we are allowed to make in statute to give ownership and accountability to the new plan? Want to make it more collaborative. The EC4 is a good example. There is an opportunity to bring in more formally the organizational, non-state government partners.

Randi Belhumeur requested to hear more about Hawaii and how they kept it going. On online format, will check on the RIDOH cancer plan. The interactive format with GIS capabilities is not the future its now. An evaluation component of the plan is important to check in on metrics. Also need to think about funding – if the food plan acts as a backbone of sorts with IFNPAC. Funding for the Hunger Elimination Task Force was originally unfunded, but RIDOH has been carrying funding and would propose that all IFNPAC would allocate funding.

Juli Stelmaszyk asked the best format to expand IFNPAC. Ken Ayars noted all the food planning happening and how these plans should drive policy in the state. A lot of the things happening building the food system have been funded through COVID funding – much of that funding is ending in 2025. Federal or state money needs to fill the gap. Hope to have room in the state budget to keep funding this work. Juli Stelmaszyk asked if IFNPAC has ever released recommendation from the council to the general assembly. Randi Belhumeur noted conundrum of council members needing to go back to leadership. Also, noted that there are things a lot of things advocated in the plan but not packaged. Shares a possible need for a coordinated effort like a fund that gets allocated to different issues.

Jessica Patroliia recommends going back to the general assembly and seeing what recommendations have gone forward and which ones have not due to funding. Also recommended that the council report on progress in a quarterly report.

Ken Ayars agrees that a coordinated interagency approach would be helpful.

Maria Cimini discussed the Governor's Commission on Aging that took ownership of the state plan on aging that is utilized to draw down funds. At each commission, Maria Cimini gives an brief update on the dashboard. At IFNPAC, each agencies could own components and share. It gives accountability and has helped to think about how to create a state aging plan in the future. To the point of where directors get involved in plan, there's an Adult Behavior Health Planning group. Every agency has 1-2 subject matter experts that are in regular meetings. There is a subset the wrote the plan. A 75% completed version of the plan. The subject matter experts read and asked questions. The regular attendees were empowered to make decisions. If there were any issues, those agency members would elevate to directors, but the agency directors gave final sign off. Maria Cimini also shared the Healthcare Systems Planning Cabinet. There are appointed members to the cabinet and every member has a subject matter expert that attends the working group.

Randi Belhumeur elevated that quarterly IFNPAC meetings without work in between is not working. Juli Stelmaszyk noted the need to elevate to leadership.

RI Food System Preparedness and Recovery Plan (Rachel Newman Greene, Jen and Tony Silbert)

The RI Food Policy Council was granted ARPA was granted funding via the Governor's office and the legislature in the Rhode Island Recovery Office to develop a food recovery plan for the state. After much workshopping the plan is called the "Food system preparedness and recovery plan." The plan is focused on how to make sure the next time a major disruption (like COVID) happens to our food system, we are still able to give vulnerable communities the food they want and need. The planning process started in January. Meeting with the core planning team and advisors. A lot of the

discussion right now is where the plan will live? Who will implement? How will the plan be funded? The RI Food Policy Council is running the process, but it will be the state's plan.

Currently, wrapping up discovery stage. Spartina conducted interviews, focus groups and surveys to harness some wisdom and collect knowledge about experiences. In design phase and will be hosting an in-person strategy retreat on August 26th to identify strategies for preparedness and recovery and map next steps finalize strategy. Specifically looking at what needs to be reimagined going forward. Developing discovery themes that will take on the pillars of preparation and recovery into strategies. The strategy retreat is being created to have systemic shared vision.

This plan lives between the State's food plan and the RIEMA plan. Out of discovery, it is also noted that the pass off on roles need to be identified. Possibility of having this plan as an annex to RIEMA's plan and will continue exploring this possibility. The plan is to have drafts produced in September and November, and looking for a public release in November.

Ken Ayars notes the budget cliff and letting leadership know what is happening from a funding perspective. Important to share with them that we are doing our homework and need to keep raising awareness. Randi Belhumeur notes a meeting with DHS to discuss Eat Well, Be Well and Bonus Bucks. Possibly discuss omnibus approach. Maria Cimini shared OHA will also be under pre-COVID rates. Jessica Patroliia shared how RIDE's funding is also impacted by participation rates

7. HETF Workgroup Recommendations (Rachel Newman Greene)

Hunger Elimination Task Force has been convening since 2017. In 2021 RI Food Policy Council started facilitating the meeting. This year, to be action oriented, action working groups were coordinated to work on priorities brought up in the year prior. The first action group met in March and May and came up with recommendations around the issue of food delivery to vulnerable homebound elder or food insecure populations. The recommendations are directed to state agencies and focus on actionable steps to reduce hunger. The recommendations on for this action group was delivered to Director Gray and Director Stelmaszyck.

(Denise Greene, West End Community Center) Shared the action group's recommendations.

- RIDOH and other IFNPAC agencies to conduct a landscape review of food delivery activities taking place across the state for vulnerable communities.
- Commerce, RIDOH, and other IFNPAC agencies, should develop and fund a pilot that coordinates statewide food delivery system for those underserved communities.

Rachel Newman Greene asked about how to continue discussing and implementing these recommendations. The next action group is focused on coordination for state agencies to provide food in times of emergency.

Maria Cimini asked about definitions for medically vulnerable, homebound and food insecurity for recommendations. Rachel Newman Greene referenced that it was a broad understanding. Maria Cimini shared that the OHA fund ongoing delivery of food – home and community care commission and the Long-term coordinating council (convened by Lieutenant Governor's office) which does not have nutrition piece but does discuss care for older adults. Happy to discuss on how to have these conversations on food on a long-term basis.

Randi Belhumeur notes the need to get clear in the recommendations who is doing what.

Juli Stelmaszyk asked if DHS is part of food delivery. Maria Cimini notes that DHS is now part of the conversation post-COVID that allows SNAP purchases on food delivery products. They do work with refugees and Rhode Island works families but there is no formal food delivery services. Medicaid sits within OHHS, eligilibty through DHS. Anyone who is eligible for Medicaid is eligible for food delivery. There has been efforts by Meals on Wheels to extend the population that Medicaid would cover. Through the Medicare program, there has been an increase of Medicare plans that include

food delivery services. Newport did a pilot program for homebound seniors via funding by van Beuren Foundation for Newport residents. (as confirmed by Nessa Richman in the chat).

Rachel Newman Greene also noted a separate conversation on produce prescription programs.

Jessica Patroliia elevated that there are programs that already exist that provide food delivery in the face of a future funding cliff. Noted the work of Meals on Wheels delivering to Block Island. There are opportunities for expansion.

Meeting Minutes approved unanimously via quorum.

8. Public Comment

Meghan Grady in the chat noted that they are delivering food statewide, including Block Island and serving expanded populations. They are serving 25 children in Block Island, and it could be as many as 100 next summer!

Meeting adjourned.