

RESIDENT FOOD EQUITY ADVISORS

2018 SMALL FOOD RETAIL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BALTIMORE FOOD POLICY INITIATIVE

2018 RESIDENT FOOD EQUITY ADVISORS



The Resident Food Equity Advisors (RFEA) work with the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI) to collectively drive equitable food policies through an inclusive, resident-led process. Sixteen advisors were selected out of 80 applicants and were compensated for their time. RFEAs attended six meetings to learn and share their expertise related to small food retail. BFPI staff provided RFEAs with briefings and presentations from subject matter experts to equip the advisors with an appropriate understanding of the state of small food retail and potential policy and programmatic tools.

RFEA RECOMMENDATIONS: After an intensive process of learning, sharing and engaging, RFEA have generated four key recommendations on small food retail with a goal to not only serve existing customers but to also attract and encourage more residents to shop within their communities. These recommendations will be further researched and vetted by BFPI, and then incorporated into the Healthy Food Environment Strategy. These recommendations will be implemented in partnership with and by various stakeholder organizations and residents.

SMALL FOOD RETAIL

Corner stores and other small food retailers are an integral part of urban landscapes. These stores can be a food resource for many residents who lack access to reliable transportation, a supermarket in walking distance, or other fresh food options; however, pre-packaged and highly processed foods are abundant at small food retailers – with few healthy options. Many of these establishments exist in the absence of a system to codify or standardize their operations. These facts – coupled with the prevalence of small food retail in low-income neighborhoods, compared to higher income jurisdictions – are representative of systemic inequities in urban food systems.

The 2017 cohort of RFEA identified small food retail (corner and convenience stores) as a policy issue they wanted to address in 2018. The advisor priorities were further underscored by the *Baltimore City's Food Environment: 2018 Report*, which showed there are over 708 small food retail stores across the city, and that on average, these store types carry the lowest amount of healthy food while remaining plentiful in unhealthy foods and beverages.

Meeting topics included: Defining food justice and equity, understanding policy tools and processes, examining the current state of small food retail, cultural biases related to store owners and communities, zoning, staple food ordinances, and business licenses. BFPI staff briefed advisors on policy best practices, existing regulations and ordinances, and brought in subject matter experts to equip the advisors with an understanding of the state of small food retail and potential policy and programmatic tools. RFEAs prioritized changes within the small food retail system to address — this document presents their recommendations to BFPI and other stakeholders.

GOAL 1: IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF STORES TO PROVIDE A CLEAN, SAFE, AND ACCESSIBLE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

OVERVIEW: The physical environment of small food stores can vary considerably, but concerns about sanitation, layout, signage, and infrastructure arise frequently. The City of Baltimore does not have a specific definition for small food retail, corner stores, convenience stores, or similar food stores in the zoning code, building code, or for licensing. The lack of definition makes it difficult to track the number and location of these stores, making it more challenging to both regulate and provide technical assistance and support to these small independently-owned businesses. This also creates lack of transparency for neighborhoods that remain unaware of what type of store is coming until it opens.

STRATEGY 1: Define “small food retail” and improve minimum standards for exterior and interior of stores.

- **ACTION A:** Define “small food retail” in the Zoning Code. Draw from national models to create standards that can be applied to store density, store size, use of square footage, signage, lighting, etc.
- **ACTION B:** Increase resident ability to influence when small food retail stores may enter a community by better publicizing Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals (BMZA) conditional use hearings for these establishments and training advisors and community members to engage in the hearing process.
- **ACTION C:** Explore the Building Code and other voluntary or enforcement mechanisms to ensure stores are physically accessible for all shoppers. Consider the use of plexiglass, line of sight and other common features of small food retail that may impede access and safety.

STRATEGY 2: Support stores to improve compliance and coordinate enforcement of various regulations.

- **ACTION A:** Improve and streamline licensing processes citywide to provide guidance and assistance that encourages high performing small businesses and model store behavior from the onset.
- **ACTION B:** Better coordinate between agencies and entities that inspect and enforce rules and regulations for small food retailers. Centralize processes to identify delinquent stores and create a mechanism to hold repeat offenders accountable.

“Today, systems that reinforce racial inequities in the form of zoning policies, food system regulation and concentrated poverty gravely impact life outcomes including education occupation and economic opportunities. While I see corner stores as convenient staples in our food system, these establishments can have very different consequences for a community depending on the surrounding neighborhood dynamics.”

Ava Richardson, District 13

FOOD POLICY WITH AN EQUITY LENS

BFPI has taken an equity lens to its work and seeks to drive processes that lead to more equitable outcomes related to food for residents. Collectively generating ideas between City agencies and residents helps to ensure that policies will be viable and have the intended results. In addition to producing policy recommendations, this process develops long-term relationships that create a committed group of informed and active residents who can advocate with their communities and access the power structures of city policymaking.

GOAL 2: INCREASE QUALITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND AVAILABILITY OF FOOD TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH

OVERVIEW: The product mix and food quality varies greatly between the 700+ small food retail stores in Baltimore. Not all residents have equal access to supermarkets, but everyone wants a certain level and variety of food in their neighborhoods to buy the components for a healthy meal at their local stores. Federal nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP provide models for categories and varieties of healthy foods that stores could be required to carry.

STRATEGY 1: Create policies for small food retail stores that increase healthy food availability and quality, and ensure that all residents have access in their neighborhoods to the ingredients to make a healthy meal.

- **ACTION A:** Consider legislative solutions that prioritize and fund the types of support necessary for small food retail stores to increase the variety and quantity of food offered for sale to increase healthy food availability.
- **ACTION B:** Convene and engage stakeholders (retailers, residents, wholesalers, supply chain modelers, etc.) to develop the specific requirements and implementation plan that would meet health standards, are culturally appropriate, and are economically and operationally feasible.

STRATEGY 2: Increase demand for healthy foods at small food retail stores.

- **ACTION A:** Seek funding for incentives to support increased consumption of produce from small food retail stores to increase familiarity and affordability.
- **ACTION B:** Provide education to consumers to increase demand at the same time as supply. Support existing nutrition education programs in linking curricula to new requirements for small food retail.
- **ACTION C:** Create a citywide marketing and education strategy to see small food retail as a place to pick up items to make a meal.

STRATEGY 3: Ensure small food retailers have greater access to supply chains that distribute healthier foods at affordable prices, passing on savings to consumers.

- **ACTION A:** Improve sourcing of healthy staple foods. Work with wholesalers to ensure that required staple food products are available and affordable, and support cooperative buying networks of multiple stores.
- **ACTION B:** Expand or create alternative sourcing models such as urban farms and food recovery networks and support merchants in handling produce and other perishables.

“ I appreciate the convenience of corner stores. I will go in to pick up eggs, milk, and cheese from my nearby corner store depending on my time constraints and flexibility. If I could guarantee that the corner store would also have other needed items such as fruit I believe I would frequent them more. ”

Theodore Jackson, District 10

“ In terms of racial inequity, corner/convenience stores are denser in neighborhoods that are higher proportion of African-American residents, while in other neighborhoods that mainly serve residents that are majority non-African-American, they have more eateries that serve fresh cooked food and greater access to markets. ”

Nicole Butler, District 8

GOAL 3: BUILD MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STORES AND COMMUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN AND REINFORCE NEIGHBORHOOD VALUES, NEEDS, AND DESIRES

OVERVIEW: Research in Baltimore shows that while the majority of residents are black, the majority of small food retail store owners are non-black persons of color including Korean, Indian, Middle Eastern, and Latinx. Racial and economic dynamics have created a history of racial triangulation that begets prevailing attitudes of mistrust and cultural misunderstanding between communities and store owners. For small food retail to flourish in a way that benefits all parties, cultural and racial reconciliation strategies must play a part to build relationships. Simultaneously, State and local governments can support opportunities for community members to pursue store ownership.

STRATEGY 1: Create more opportunities for retailers and community to establish or build upon relationships, including greater communication and cultural exchange.

- **ACTION A:** Use community organizations embedded in neighborhoods as a foundation to establish dialogue and build partnerships between residents and store owners.
- **ACTION B:** Host racial justice and cultural competency trainings to bridge racial and ethnic divides between store owners and communities and understand larger structural forces that cause and exacerbate this tension.
- **ACTION C:** Use art as a medium to share different narratives regarding store experiences.

STRATEGY 2: Establish the corner store as an asset to build economic empowerment in the community and give residents a greater ability to shape their food- retail environment.

- **ACTION A:** Support business models and practices that encourage greater ownership of corner stores by neighborhood residents, such as worker-owned cooperatives, apprenticeships, transition planning or first right of refusal for sale to neighborhood residents.
- **ACTION B:** Support interested stores in specializing in specific products (i.e., fresh meat, seafood, farm stand, juice bar) in order to have a specialty revenue stream and provide neighborhood-level access to high-quality products.
- **ACTION C:** Support retailers by creating a volunteer ambassador model to assist store owners with compliance and effective merchandising.

STRATEGY 3: Increase safety in and around small food retail stores.

- **ACTION A:** Partner with existing Violence Reduction Initiative efforts and community groups (violence reduction groups, faith-based organizations, seniors, etc.) to increase positive presence around stores.
- **ACTION B:** Support improved enforcement of loitering laws and work with law enforcement to develop strategies for crime and violence reduction that cluster around specific small food retail stores.
- **ACTION C:** Encourage stores to register surveillance cameras with the City.

“Businesses exist to make profit, however, at what expense? Most of these stores sell foods they would not give to their own children or feed to people in their communities, so why come into other communities and sell those foods? This behavior makes store owners and the businesses they operate predatory.”

Kelly Crawford, District 12

GOAL 4: SUPPORT STORES TO ENSURE THAT THEY HAVE THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO BE ECONOMICALLY VIABLE BUSINESSES THAT SERVE THEIR COMMUNITIES

OVERVIEW: For small food retail stores to meet the other recommended goals and proposed policies in an economically viable way, they will need increased financial and technical support. The Resident Advisors acknowledge that they lack the expertise in economic development and financing to recommend a full set of strategies and actions.

STRATEGY: City agencies should work with store owners to develop out a comprehensive strategy to support small food retail businesses.

With the wide array of services and supports already provided to some small businesses, we encourage the City to offer tailored financial and technical support packaged specifically for small food retail. This should include:

- Flexible and robust technical and economic assistance to fully meet the needs to small food retailers, who may or may not own the building their store is in and when the store owner may or may not be the primary employee
- Support and materials in languages other than English, including but not limited to Korean and Spanish
- Models that will increase store ownership, entrepreneurship and wealth building by and for local residents
- Opportunities for small food retailers to organize, share information and resources, and work with communities and the City to build stronger small businesses
- Partnership with existing retailer associations and empower the creation of new associations to convene and advocate for small food retailers

NEXT STEPS

RFEA worked collaboratively with BFPI to create these recommendations. Next steps will include:

- **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:** BFPI will help devise an implementation plan and timeline to identify agencies and partners to move these recommendations forward in partnership and collaboration with store owners, other City agencies, outside partners and additional residents.
- **HEALTHY FOOD PRIORITY FUND:** Funding is necessary to provide retailers with adequate resources and technical assistance to feasibly improve and transform stores. The creation of a Healthy Food Priority Fund will support creative approaches to improving the food environment, including store conversions, innovative store models, incentives to purchase and source healthy food, and community engagements with store owners, among other food system priorities.
- **RFEA NEXT TERM:** This cohort of advisors will continue from November 2018 through May 2019 to guide the implementation of these recommendations including drafting legislation, engagement, advocacy, and action.
- **EQUITY ANALYSIS:** Advisors will apply an equity analysis tool to evaluate potential actions, policies and programs for their potential to disrupt or uphold systems of power and privilege.
- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** Advisors will each host a food and equity conversation for every council district to discuss potential policies and programs related to small food retail.
- **RETAIL ENGAGEMENT:** Small food retail owners will be engaged to further develop strategies and to engage in relationship building with community. A microbusiness outreach coordinator will be hired specifically to work with store owners of Korean and immigrant descent.

2018 RESIDENT FOOD EQUITY ADVISORS*



Adamaah Grayse
Resident Co-Chair
District 6



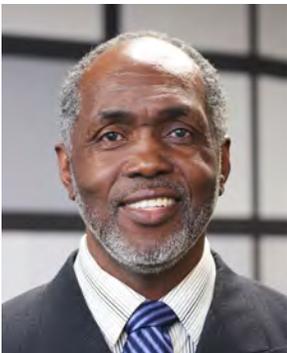
Jessica Pimentel
District 1



Mary Brown-Bey
District 2



Samone Flowers
District 4



Ewan Meiklejohn
District 5



Sheena Ham
District 7



Nicole Butler
District 8



Anthony Francis
District 9



Shareka House
District 10



Theodore Jackson
District 10



Valeria Fuentes
District 11



Kelly Crawford
District 12



Ava Richardson
District 13



Terrell Williams
District 14

FOR MORE INFORMATION

HOLLY FREISHTAT, MS

Baltimore City Food Policy Director
Baltimore Food Policy Initiative

holly.freishtat@baltimorecity.gov

<https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/resident-food-equity-advisors>

**Advisors from District 3 and 6 withdrew due to commitment conflicts
November 2018*