Food security at the city-scale is achieved when people of all socio-economic backgrounds have physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their nutritional needs. Over the past decades, cities in developed countries have enjoyed an unprecedented level of prosperity. However, malnutrition affecting certain sectors of society remains a reality for many. Generally, attempts to curb food insecurity are piecemeal approaches yielding little positive effect. Food banks, government food stamps and similar approaches rarely solve the conditions causing food insecurity.

Efforts to address food insecurity must acknowledge the complexity of the food system. Food production, harvesting, processing, transportation, wholesaling, and food waste disposal must be understood as an overall series of processes that ensure the nourishment of urban populations. Communities around North America have realized that the best approach to positively influence the food system is through a comprehensive approach.

Food policy councils have emerged as a viable alternative to fully promote actions that effectively reduce malnutrition at the community level. Food policy councils have increasingly been used in North American cities to promote coordination between public, private and civic stakeholders. These councils act as advisory groups that provide independent and unbiased support regarding food issues. The councils are conceived embracing a multi-sectoral and cross disciplinary approach; facilitating coherent and concrete actions among stakeholders.
Promoting Coordinated Municipal Action on Food Systems Planning: Winnipeg’s Food Policy Council Working Group (WFPCWG)

Planning is a profession engaged with a broad variety of topics. Yet, ensuring the wellbeing of people is an overarching goal leading the profession. In planning documents, the emphasis on wellbeing translates into the encouragement of liveable and complete communities. For the City of Winnipeg this implies the creation of sustainable economic, social, and environmental conditions. Considering this, it would be hard to identify a topic with more far reaching effects on wellbeing than food.

The concept of food security represents the capacity of individuals to have physical and economic access at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their nutritional needs and cultural preferences (Pothukuchi 2004; FAO 2003). Achieving food security involves a series of activities that together represent the food system. These activities provide communities with the nourishment for a fulfilling and healthy life. Kaufman (2004) explains the food system is “… the chain of activities that begin with the production of food and moves on to include processing, distribution, wholesaling, retailing, and consumption of food and, eventually, to the disposal of food waste.”

Planning has a direct influence over many of the activities that are encompassed within the food system. However, many planners often consider food issues as a topic outside the scope of their professional practice (Clancy 2004). Usually food issues are seen as rural in nature, but a closer analysis would indicate that food has strong connections with urban areas too. Identifying the connection between the individual elements of the food system is a complicated endeavour. Efforts to increase food security are often performed in a piecemeal approach. For example, in many cases government departments approach food security in their own particular way, yet fail to implement a coordinated strategy with other stakeholders.

Achieving greater food security requires a multi-sectoral and cross disciplinary approach. Recognizing the complexity of food issues and the variety of stakeholders must be a priority. Over the last few decades, cities across the world, especially in North America, have make use of Food Policy Councils to promote more coordinated and coherent efforts between public, private and civic entities.

A Food Policy Council is generally conceived as an independent
advisory group that provides support regarding food system issues. The council acts towards the development of actions and policy that acknowledges the connection between aspects such as food, the built and natural environment and lifestyles (Lang et al, 2004). These councils have proved to be effective at promoting positive changes within the food system; this has managed to counteract some of the effects of obesogenic environments.

As the financial and human cost of diet-related illnesses continue to increase, a growing interest has developed for solutions that tackle food issues in a comprehensive manner. Winnipeg is among one of those communities that have developed an interest for the benefits provided by the implementation of Food Policy Councils. The following article explores the development of a proposal for the creation of a Food Policy Council and the implications and role that planning has in the process. A short overview of the particular Winnipeg case will be presented and outcomes and lessons to be learnt from it would be identified. The article has been prepared with the helpful assistance of people directly involved with the process or widely knowledgeable about food system.

**Facts of the Case**

Food system issues in the province of Manitoba have gained attention over the last decade. The establishment of non-profit organization such as Food Matters Manitoba or initiatives like community supported agriculture accentuate a growing interest about food.

As the awareness about food systems increases the shortcomings of the conventional food system become quickly apparent. In a province with a large proportion of Canada’s prime agricultural land (13.1%), it is worrisome that 31% of the total youth population and 30.4% of total adult population are overweight or obese (Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiative [MAFRI], 2010; Margot Shields, 2008; Michael Tjepkema, 2008). Food bank recipient numbers in 2009-2010 increased by 21% to affect nearly 58,000 Manitobans (Food Banks Canada, 2010, p. 6). This situation indicates that nutritious and healthy food is not fully accessible to the population despite the regional food production capacity.

Recognizing the need for an improved food system, a number

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<th>Table 1: Arguments for and Against a Policy Council</th>
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<td><strong>For</strong></td>
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<td>Give coherence and coordination to stakeholder actions</td>
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<td>Provide leadership for policy development</td>
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<td>Promote public awareness</td>
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Adapted from Lang et al (2004, p. 14)
of stakeholders voluntarily organized. The Winnipeg Food Policy Council Working Group (WFPCWG) was established to lobby for the improvement of the city’s food system (Paul Chorney, personal communication, April 1, 2011). Initially, the group chose to focus upon encouraging the City to develop a Food Policy Council that was embedded within the City’s structure. Meanwhile, the City as part of the process of updating its long-term plan, called “Our Winnipeg,” was committed to engage the community on a variety of topics through the consultation process named “Speak Up Winnipeg” (Ian Hall, personal communication, April 8, 2011). These combined circumstances provided an ideal opportunity for a fruitful discussion about food systems at the city level.

An initial discussion was held involving people with interest and expertise regarding food systems. This dialogue was hosted in coordination and support of the City of Winnipeg Planning department. A subsequent meeting was held afterwards by a smaller stakeholder group to prioritize the previously developed recommendations (Winnipeg Food Policy Council Working Group [WFPCWG], 2010a; WFPCWG, 2010b). It was concluded that establishing a Food Policy Council embedded within the City’s structure was the most important action that could be undertaken to advance a better food system. Ideally, the proposed Food Policy Council should be composed of representatives of farmers, businesses, public health workers, neighbourhood development corporations, environmental, anti-poverty, aboriginal and community organizations. Through the combined expertise of this partner organization the group is expected to be capable of providing informed and comprehensive advice regarding the improvement of food systems.

The initial discussions and the subsequent recommendations developed by the WFPCWG influenced the City’s long-term plan “Our Winnipeg” (WFPCWG, 2010a). While a Food Policy Council has not yet to the date been officially established by the City “Our Winnipeg” was positively modified as a result of the WFPCWG efforts. For the first time ever, food was recognized as a topic deserving attention from the municipal government. The policy included as part of “Our Winnipeg” provides for a variety of actions over which the City has an influence. Additionally, it emphasizes the willingness of the City to collaborate and support community food initiatives (Ian Hall, personal communication, April 8, 2011).

Currently, the establishment of a Food Policy Council continues to be debated. The discussion arises from the uncertainty regarding the distribution of responsibility over food systems among different levels of government. Regardless of this uncertainty the WFPCWG has continued its work. After all, the goal of the WFPCWG is supporting the establishment and development of more food secure communities for the benefit of all Winnipeggers (Paul Chorney, personal communication, April 1, 2011).

“We have more food than we have hunger, We have more resources than we have problems. It costs more not to solve the problems than to solve them.”
- Wayne Roberts

Reproduced from Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2001, p. 7)
Conclusion and Outcomes

The establishment of the WFPCWG was effective at influencing the food system of the city. The update of the long-term plan for the city provided an opportunity to engage in fruitful discussion (Ian Hall, personal communication, April 8, 2011). The public consultation embedded within the plan’s update provided an effective venue for the development of recommendations that could positively influence the City’s position on food system issues. The efforts of the WFPCWG brought into attention the interconnection of food issues with several other topics such as poverty reduction, health and community empowerment. The establishment of a Food Policy Council within the municipal structure has yet to be achieved. However, the policy included in “Our Winnipeg” provides for the potential creation of a Food Policy Council at one point in the future.

The WFPCWG has continued to lobby for the creation of the Food Policy Council. The group has increasingly engaged with different levels of government. These discussions with provincial and municipal representatives have managed to raise awareness and clarify the role of the different stakeholders in regard to food systems. These improvements have provided incentives for concise changes in the attitudes regarding food systems. The City of Winnipeg is now better aware of its influence over food systems. Once “Our Winnipeg” is approved ways of implementing and operationalizing the new food system policy would need to be developed. For example, zoning and land use policies could potentially be reviewed to better reflect the City’s interest on liveable and complete communities. At a political level the WFPCWG has also engaged elected officials. As a result, during the last municipal election food was discussed as part of the political campaigns (WFPCWG, 2010c).

In conclusion, the efforts of the WFPCWG demonstrate that community initiatives have the capacity to positively influence the food system. The objectives of the group have not been fully achieved, but considerable improvements have been attained in a relatively short period of time, despite the limited resources available to the WFPCWG. As the working group continue to evolve, and mature, its priorities are likely to adjust to the changing circumstances of the

Direction 8: WORKING THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, RESPOND TO FOOD NEEDS AS IDENTIFIED BY COMMUNITIES.

Enabling Strategies:

Collaborate on local food opportunities that are part of community development initiatives.

Include food in planning for neighbourhood revitalization strategies.

Within the City’s mandate, pursue opportunities to support local food production.

Develop planning tools to manage the sustainability of existing community gardens and to enable the creation of new permanent or temporary gardens.

Maintain an inventory of City properties suitable for food production.

Reproduced from City of Winnipeg (2010, p. 82)
Vision and Mission of the Winnipeg Food Policy Council

Vision: A just and sustainable food system for the City of Winnipeg.

Mission: To achieve a food secure City of Winnipeg characterized by a food system that:

A. Ensures equitable physical and economic access to adequate, safe, and nutritious foods for all citizens, particularly low income citizens and children.
B. Produces, processes, distributes, and sells food in a way that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable and equitable.
C. Fosters human and environmental health, community economic development, and the local agricultural economy.

Reproduced from WFPCWG (2010b)

Lessons Learned

The Winnipeg Food Policy Council Working Group has originated from the work of a number of stakeholders concerned with the food security of the city. These stakeholders seek to translate the food needs of the community into local government systems. As a grassroots organization its available resources are limited, yet it has achieved positive changes in the food system of Winnipeg. The diverse stakeholder organizations involved with the working group have provided the necessary expertise and legitimacy regarding food issues. These conditions demonstrate that Food Policy Councils effectiveness is widely dependent on its constituency.

A diverse constituency provides the working group with the capacity to establish an agenda aimed at the improvement of the food security of the larger community and not only benefiting a limited percentage of the population. The working group while not officially endorsed by the City has positioned itself as a de facto Food Policy Council. The legitimacy of the group was proved by the willingness of the municipal government to consult with the group on food issues (WFPCWG, 2010a).

The collaboration between food stakeholders and the municipal government originally occurred in the context of the update of the City’s Official Community Plan named “Our Winnipeg.”
Planning represented an effective venue for discussion (Ian Hall, personal communication, April 8, 2011). Planning processes are an effective entry point for new ideas such as Food Policy Councils. Food issues have previously received limited attention from government authorities in the City of Winnipeg. Yet, planning provided the working group with access to decision makers and government staff. The collaboration between the working group and the City resulted in the inclusion of a policy dedicated to food within “Our Winnipeg.”

Achieving the inclusion of food issues within long-term planning documents is valuable to further solidify the City’s support for the creation of more complete and liveable communities (Janine de la Salle, personal communication, April 20, 2011). The initial contact and collaboration with the City represents for the working group a solid basis for subsequent engagement and discussion with the government. Nurturing meaningful relationships with government authorities is essential for the fulfillment of the working group’s goal towards more food secure communities.

In other cities, such as Vancouver, Food Policy Councils have also started as grassroots organizations. However, once these “unofficial” Food Policy Councils demonstrate their capacity to provide valuable advice government officials themselves often become strong supporters of the incorporation of the Council to the municipal structure.

### Purposes of City

5(1) The purposes of the City are

(a) to provide good government for the City;

(b) to provide services, facilities or other things that council considers to be necessary or desirable for all or part of the City;

(c) to develop and maintain safe, orderly, viable and sustainable communities; and

(d) to promote and maintain the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants.

Reproduced from Manitoba Legislation (2003, pp. 14-15)
levels of government.

The previous measures could help the Food Policy Group to eventually become endorsed by the City of Winnipeg. The working group must then be prepared to address the concerns that certain stakeholders might have with being associated with the government. In certain ways, being embedded within the government structure requires operating in a way that might be unnatural for some stakeholders. The working group should be able to adapt its work to a more “bureaucratic” system without losing its capacity to engage with diverse stakeholders as it has done to date (Janine de la Salle, personal communication, April 20, 2011).

The working group has had limited contact with the broader community (Paul Chorney, personal communication, April 1, 2011). The work of the group has mostly been guided by the input from food stakeholders that have an interest in the topic. However, having the support from the community is essential to catalyze change. Elected officials are more likely to support ideas that are well received by the citizenry. Ultimately, the goal of a Food Policy Council must be to act as a conduit for the community itself, and for itself, make food policy (Janine de la Salle, personal communication, April 20, 2011).

From a planning perspective the profession must be aware that food is clearly a topic that mutually influences, and is influenced by, planning practice (Kaufman, 2004). Planners possess skills that can advance food security initiatives such as Food Policy Councils. The profession is particularly proficient at acting as an intermediary between different stakeholder groups, facilitating discussion and consensus building (Caton, 2004). These professional skills can be applied within a Food Policy Council. Planning and Food Policy Councils share common goals; both are engaged in envisioning a better future that responds to the current and future needs of the community.

Planners can influence the City’s approach to food security. By reviewing and proposing improvements to land use by-laws and other applicable regulations planners can facilitate a coherent and coordinated approach to food issues (Muller et al, 2009; APA, 2007). Planners often perform the role of advisors to elected officials. The profession is also in close contact with numerous government departments (Janine de la Salle, personal communication, April 20, 2011). Planners enjoy a privileged position for the dissemination of ideas. Increasing the government’s understanding of food issues can be facilitated by planners.

Planners must see their involvement with food systems as simply an endeavour of filling the “gaps” in their practice. Moving beyond conventional planning will require individuals to be comfortable to become involved with new initiatives such as Food Policy Councils. Planners must acknowledge that the wellbeing of the population...
is influenced by food issues. The wellbeing of the population is too important to simply be left to market forces. The profession has the potential to help reduce the number of persons that on a daily basis face the effects of hunger and malnourishment.

A profession such as planning cannot accept an unjust food system. As Carolyn Steel (2009) points out planning for food is an endeavour that must receive its deserved attention. In the past, food was a determining factor on the location and size of our cities. The global food system undermined the connection between cities and their local food production capacity. However, sorely depending on the global food system is not a viable option in the face of fluctuating prices or peak oil. Planners as they have done in the past must identify the most effective alternatives to guarantee the food security of the community.

Food Policy Councils are effective tools that help translate the needs of the citizenry into concrete actions. A Food Policy Council is effective at tackling the complexities of the food system given their multi-stakeholder approach to food security. These Councils act as an intermediary between governments and concerned citizens facilitating the collaborative development of solutions among involved stakeholders.

The planning profession has in the past effectively contributed to the solution of the ailments of the community. The improvement of the current food system is a mostly uncharted territory that we, as planners, must be willing to explore.

Acknowledgements:
I would like to thank Ian Hall, Ian Wight, Janine de la Salle, and Paul Chorney for their valuable feedback and contributions for the development of this article.
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