

Shifting from Vision to Reality:
Perspectives on Regional Food Policies
and Food System Planning Barriers
at the Local Level

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Résumé

Les leaders en planification et en santé publique ont endossé une série de principes partagés pour des directives afin d'effectuer un changement de politique alimentaire à l'échelle du système. Toutefois, les considérations en matière de système alimentaire sont relativement nouvelles pour les planificateurs. Il est nécessaire d'examiner les politiques actuelles et les pratiques qui peuvent entraver le soutien d'une activité de planification au niveau local. En utilisant la Région de Waterloo comme étude de cas, des entrevues en profondeur furent effectuées avec des intervenants clés. Les résultats montrent des lacunes dans le système de planification alimentaire et de politique de coordination régionale, et une législation provinciale en matière de planification alimentaire. Des obstacles patrimoniaux, industriels et de gouvernance furent identifiés comme présentant des défis. L'identification des obstacles liés à une planification alimentaire fournit d'importantes opportunités pour l'amélioration à l'accès alimentaire au niveau local.

Mots clés: systèmes alimentaires, santé publique, politique, gouvernance, utilisations des sols, planification communautaire

Abstract

Leaders in planning and public health endorsed a set of shared principles to guide systems-wide food policy change. Yet, food system considerations are relatively new to planners. There is a need to examine the current policies and practices that may be hindering supportive local planning activity. Using Waterloo Region as a case study, in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. Findings revealed gaps in regional food system planning and policy coordination, and provincial food planning legislation. Legacy, industry and governance barriers were identified as challenges. The identification of barriers to food-related planning provides important opportunities to improve food access at the local level.

Keywords: food systems, public health, policy, governance, land use, community planning

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, ‘food systems’ and ‘food systems *planning*’ have emerged as areas of academic and professional interest and have sparked early community planning consideration and policy attention. In particular, a growing recognition of the impact of planning decisions on health has prompted leading professional organizations in the United States (US), including the American Planning Association (APA), to develop a set of shared principles to guide system-wide food policy change. Principles of a healthy and sustainable food system are endorsed by leaders in planning, public health, dietetics and nursing and reflect the importance of health, sustainability, resilience, diversity, fairness, transparency and economic balance (APA 2010).

Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999, 2000) were among the first to examine the role of planners in a healthy, and sustainable food system. Driven by a concern for community food security, the authors surveyed senior-level American planners in 22 city planning agencies and found that few considered food systems issues and only 38% felt planners should be “more involved” in food-related planning in the future. Factors affecting food system planning were: market concerns, turf considerations, rural planning perspectives, and perceived cost barriers (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000). This work initiated an important dialogue among a subset of concerned planners in the US and led to special issues in practice journals and conference tracks devoted entirely to food system planning (Kaufman 2009; APA 2007). Outside the US, an emerging body of international literature also points to the growing interest and experience in urban and rural food planning. Examples from Canada, Brazil, and the United Kingdom shed light on some of the early successes surrounding: the establishment of a food policy council as a way to support successful food planning (Blay-Palmer 2009); city government efforts to create an alternative food system for food security (Rocha and Lessa 2009); and the development of the London Food Board and Food Strategy to advance sustainable food planning principles (Reynolds 2009). In contrast to findings from the previous decade (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000), these developments capture an important shift in professional planning interest in food. As Morgan (2013) notes, “food planning looks set to become an important and legitimate part of the planning agenda in developed and developing countries alike” and increasingly, planners have become concerned with the environmental, economic and social impacts of food system planning.

To support greater food planning consideration and action among professional planners, several important food policy resources have been developed, including: a food systems white paper, an APA Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning (APA 2007), and a Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Report (Raja, Born, and Kozlowski Russell 2008). The PAS Report examines a number of progressive food planning examples in the US and recognizes the Regional Municipality of Waterloo (Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada) for its early and significant food systems work on the Canadian front.

PROBLEM: FOOD SYSTEM PLANNING IN A CANADIAN CONTEXT

Food system planning has developed more slowly in Canada relative to the US. Special sessions at the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) annual conference were held in 2008 and 2009, and a special issue of CIP's practice journal examined food security as a growing concern among Canadian planners (Jensen 2009). More targeted efforts to promote food system planning are occurring at provincial and regional levels. For example, in 2010, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) drew together planners for a two-day symposium to explore urban and rural planning for food (OPPI 2010). OPPI's recent survey of over 900 Canadian planners suggested that, despite growing interest, current involvement in food system planning is limited by: resource constraints, political will, a lack of the "organization's intersection with food issues" and trained staff (OPPI 2011). Other recent reports offer potential solutions and ways to move Ontarians closer to a more local and sustainable food system. Based on the successes of several initiatives that are currently being promoted in the province, planners have an integral role to play in ensuring that there is strong multi-sectoral cooperation among key stakeholders in civil society and between all levels of government. Specifically, several central food system planning ideas from a recent report include: (1) supporting producers of locally produced fruit and vegetables; (2) changing official plans and zoning bylaws to ensure agriculture is recognized as an urban land use; and (3) planning for the future of farming and food by undertaking a food systems planning approach to protect and strengthen farms and production in the province (Baker, Campsie and Rabinowicz 2010). A recent case study of the Waterloo Region showed that these types of food planning actions and ideas are best supported when strategic partnerships exist between planning and public health professionals and when there are appropriate food policy and planning changes to facilitate them (Wegener, Hanning, and Raine 2012; Wegener, Raine, and Hanning 2012). The Regional Municipality of Waterloo is at the forefront of food systems policy making and planning (Wegener, Hanning, and Raine 2012; Wegener, Raine, and Hanning 2012; Desjardins, Lubczynski, and Xuereb 2011; Raja, Born, and Kozlowski Russell 2008) and as of 2012 is the only regional municipality in Canada to adopt prescriptive food system planning policies. Yet food system policy considerations are relatively new to Canadian planners and little is known about the potential for *regional* official plans (OP) to influence the local level changes necessary for achieving a healthy and sustainable food system.

Waterloo Region is located 120 kilometres southwest of Toronto, along the Toronto-Detroit highway corridor. The region's population is 543,700 (2010), of which 11% is rural and 89% is urban (Region of Waterloo 2011). The region's economic base is highly diversified and comprises a significant high technology sector (e.g., the global head office for BlackBerry), advanced manufacturing firms, health services, two of Canada's leading universities and a community college, plus the head offices of several major finance and insurance companies. In terms of governance, the

3.F ACCESS TO LOCALLY GROWN AND OTHER HEALTHY FOODS

The regional food system consists of the chain of activities related to the production, processing, distribution, consumption and eventual disposal of food. A strong and diverse regional food system provides many benefits to the community. It facilitates peoples' access to locally grown and other healthy foods, which contributes to healthier eating choices and the achievement of broader public health objectives. It also encourages a range of food destinations within easy walking distance of where people live and work. Such a system helps shorten the distance that food travels and that people travel to buy food, thereby reducing the demand on transportation infrastructure and the growth in vehicle emissions. As well, a strong regional food system supports local farmers and contributes to the vitality and economic strength of rural communities and Waterloo Region as a whole. For these reasons, this Plan seeks to strengthen and diversify the regional food system.

3.F.1 The Region will support the development of a strong regional food system through the policies in this Plan that:

- (a) establish a Countryside Line to protect the countryside for long-term agricultural use;
- (b) permit a full range of agricultural uses, farm-related uses and secondary uses to support the economic viability of local farms;
- (c) provide for a mix of land uses, including food destinations, within close proximity of each other to facilitate residents' access to locally grown and other healthy food products; and
- (d) provide a range of human services including affordable housing, subsidized daycare, employment and income supports that seek to ensure all residents have adequate incomes to be able to afford to buy locally grown and other healthy food products.

3.F.2 Area Municipalities will establish policies in their official plans to permit temporary farmers' markets, wherever appropriate, in existing and newly planned neighbourhoods, particularly in areas where access to locally grown food and other healthy food products may currently be limited.

3.F.3 Area Municipalities will establish policies in their official plans that encourage community gardens and rooftop gardens.

3.F.4 The Region will support community gardens, wherever feasible, by granting access to Regional lands, and by providing rain barrels, composting bins, compost, wood mulch or other forms of in-kind support.

3.F.5 The Region will collaborate with stakeholders to continue to implement initiatives supporting the development of a strong regional food system.

3.F.6 The Region supports food system planning as a means of improving the regional food system.

FIGURE 1: Excerpt from the Council-Adopted Regional Official Plan, Region of Waterloo (2009)

Province of Ontario has Constitutional authority to establish the land use planning framework and laws that govern municipal planning (e.g., Planning Act, Municipal Act, Provincial Policy Statement). All regional and local government planning must comply with provincial government laws and policies. The province can also create or dismantle any regional or local government body. Region¹ is classified as an upper-tier municipality in the Ontario framework. Matters of regional importance and scale (e.g., regional land use planning, public health, transit) are planned and managed at the regional government scale; all other matters of a community or neighbourhood character are the responsibility of area municipalities. This would typically include city-wide and community land use planning, the creation of local official plans, zoning, and development review functions.

Using Waterloo Region as a case study, this paper explores identified gaps in food system coordination and planning legislation as shown through multi-sectoral perspectives on regional food policies and practice barriers at the local level. In January 2010, the Regional Municipality of Waterloo's *Regional Official Plan* (ROP) was approved by the Province of Ontario as a twenty-year plan for long-term growth (Region of Waterloo 2009). The process of food system policy making, including the initiation, development and adoption of first-ever food policies in the ROP, is described elsewhere (Wegener, Hanning, and Raine 2012; Wegener, Raine, and Hanning 2012). Together, the policies and accompanying preamble (Section 3F, Figure 1) set out a *vision* and direct policy and planning action to the Regional Municipality of Waterloo and its seven urban and rural area municipalities. In accordance with the Planning Act, municipalities must bring their official plans (OP) into conformity with the regional official plan and the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2011). Yet, in order to effectively support the vision for the regional food system, an assessment of current policies and practices affecting food-related planning at the local level is needed. Multi-sectoral insight into the current planning realities within the seven municipalities could help to address potential barriers that may potentially slow, or impede the realization of plans for a healthy and sustainable food system.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Following ethics approval, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (n=47) were conducted with key informants including: regional decision makers (n=15); professional planners (n = 10); public health experts (n=6); and food system stakeholders (n=16). Food system stakeholders included local food producers, retailers and distributors, and other government and community interest group representatives. Planners were employed by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo or one of the local planning departments, and ranged in position from key senior-level authorities or senior management to professional planning staff. Informants were recruited through phone and email using contact information obtained from regional and community websites. A

Project Advisory Committee (PAC), consisting of academic and professional planning and public health experts, was established to guide early stages of recruitment and research.

Two interview guides were used and adapted from earlier policy work in the region (Campbell et al. 2005). Questions explored participants' perspectives on the initiation and development of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo's food policies and local level planning considerations but allowed for unanticipated ideas and issues to arise during the interviews. With the exception of one decision maker, all informants who were contacted agreed to participate and provided signed consent. Interviews were carried out by one researcher (JW), audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim and grounded theory methods were used to code and identify emerging themes from the data. Triangulation of sources, peer debriefing, and member checks helped ensure credibility and enhanced the trustworthiness of the analysis.

FINDINGS

Although the region was described by decision makers as "fertile ground" for food system activity, a number of local planning challenges concerning site development, licensing, and zoning were identified as barriers to food access, food system innovation and farmer viability. Two key themes emerged and included perceived gaps in: (1) regional *food system planning and policy coordination*, and (2) *food system planning regulation and provincial legislation*.

1. GAPS IN REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PLANNING AND POLICY COORDINATION

Perceived gaps in regional food system planning and policy coordination emerged as a threat to the realization of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo's vision for a healthy and sustainable food system. Specifically, differences in zoning accommodation, supportive policies, and professional practice considerations were described as challenges that could hinder collaborative, and coordinated food system activity among the region's seven area municipalities.

Zoning and Policy Challenges

Participants identified differences in the level of zoning accommodation, or 'flexibility', among area municipalities and discussed variations in planners' willingness to amend current bylaws to support emerging food system activity. In rural areas, practices differed most in the level of accommodation for on-farm processing and retail activity on agriculturally-zoned land. According to participants, some planners recognized the value of *farm-related uses* and *secondary uses*² to the economic viability of local farms and were more flexible in their interpretation of the 'agricultural' zoning designation. Others were less accommodating of any commercial activity and maintained strict zoning codes. This was noted to stifle innovation in

rural areas by: limiting the development and expansion of rural markets/on-farm stores; hindering collaborative activity among farmers (i.e., the ability to retail a neighbour's produce or goods); and restricting on-farm processing and retail. In urban areas, similar differences in zoning accommodation across area municipalities were identified from the Region of Waterloo Public Health Department's work in establishing small, neighbourhood markets within walking distance from residential areas. Critical insight into zoning challenges is captured from a public health planner as follows:

It took way longer than expected and with each municipality, there is a different story. So some [municipalities] are able to flex their rules, and others are a bit more procedural.

A lack of supportive policies was also discussed as a food system policy concern. Participants identified absent or prohibitive policies for several non-conventional forms of food production and retail (e.g., community gardens, farm stores, farmers' markets, and produce stands) as well as emerging types of food outlets (e.g., residential/neighbourhood buying clubs, expanded country markets, a wholesale produce auction). As noted by the following perspective, planners did not always understand the prohibitive reasoning for existing policies and practices:

What we [planners] find in a lot of cases is you get the odd person walking in and saying 'I want to do this' and the zoning bylaws don't allow them, and [they ask] 'Why don't you allow them?' and [we say] 'Well, we don't really know....'

Practice Constraints

Participants' perspectives on practice constraints also pointed to gaps in regional food system planning coordination. Practice constraints stemmed from perceived differences in local planners' considerations of: (i) priorities (i.e., food system policy relevance); (ii) the appropriateness of regional direction; (iii) planning control; and (iv) legitimate action.

i. Prioritizing food system planning

Planners had different views on the significance of local planning decisions to the broader vision for the regional food system. Despite these differences, area municipal planners identified similar challenges to prioritizing food system activity in general, and engaging local governments in advancing a *regional* direction in particular. With respect to the implementation of regional food policies, both urban and rural planners agreed:

It's going to come down to how much time they have and how much of a priority it is.

It's easy to put in a policy that says 'the City encourages community gardens and rooftop gardens where appropriate. City Council wouldn't have a problem with that...Where the challenge comes in is if we want to ensure that happens, so that we're going to play a role to make it happen. And that's where it's always a question of 'Is this the thing we want to prioritize and invest our resources in to make it happen?'

Food system planning considerations received different levels of attention and priority across area municipalities. For example, in prime food production areas, a greater level of planning support and political will were shown relative to rural areas with fewer food- and agriculture-related resources. As well, participants recognized a stronger planning push for mixed use zoning in densely populated urban areas with limited food access.

ii. Weighing policy 'appropriateness'

Differences in the perceived 'appropriateness' of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo's food policy directives were noted as a similar practice concern. While rural planners regarded the policies as "narrowly-defined" and not always "appropriate", urban planners questioned the Regional Municipality's legal authority to define the size and location of food stores as part of their broader concept of mixed use development in early drafts of the ROP. Two key issues arose: first, despite a shared interest in reducing automotive dependency with the establishment of complete communities (including smaller, centrally-located food destinations to which residents can walk), planners agreed that the ability to change consumer demand and retailer preferences for large Superstores in suburban areas was outside regional and municipal control. From an urban planning perspective, '*policy appropriateness*' was weighed against local planning realities as follows:

How can you make Loblaws³ build only a 30,000 sq ft store when they want to build the 80,000 sq ft one just down the road? They're not going to do it...How do you develop that sort of system within an already urbanized area that is already, in many ways, developed and is not going to change? Well, that's the struggle.

The appropriateness of community gardens in urban areas also emerged as a planning concern. Despite their recognized value for local food production, some planners felt that the Regional Municipality of Waterloo's direction on the provision of land for gardens ran counter to the Province's urban intensification goals.

iii. Maintaining control over food- and agriculture-related decisions

Both urban and rural planners demonstrated a clear preference for maintaining an independent planning approach and control over actions to support the regional food system. The majority felt that decisions should be based on individual community considerations, as noted by the following rural planning perspective:

The general push from the municipalities was ‘We appreciate the policy direction, however, each of our four townships is unique and has slightly different ways of looking at all of that on-farm activity, secondary businesses’. And so we wanted to reserve the right to still have our own zoning to deal with specific types of uses - whether permissive or restrictive policies...

iv. Considering ‘legitimacy’ in new planning actions

There were strong concerns about the ‘legitimacy’ of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo’s food system planning direction among planners and decision makers. Public sector support for community gardens and local farmers’ markets (where appropriate) was well accepted as a way to promote local economic development and improve food access in urban areas. However, there was less agreement on how to *legitimately* influence private sector activity to align with the Region’s vision for smaller retail food destinations as part of a walkable, ‘complete’ community. With respect to food store access, a key identified challenge was planners’ inability to discriminate between ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ forms of food retail. As one planner remarked, “*We can regulate uses but we cannot regulate users.*” Planners agreed they should promote health by “steering” the private sector and by “gaining minor concessions” but there was clear uncertainty regarding the scope of legitimate food system planning. A critical concern was that any inappropriate action could result in a lengthy appeal process that could “cripple” a planning department and result in “exorbitant costs” to the municipality.

Overall, differences in zoning accommodation, policies, and practice constraints among the Regional Municipality of Waterloo’s area municipalities were explored as potential challenges to regionally-driven efforts to promote a healthy, and sustainable local food system. Identified barriers were indicative of critical gaps in food system planning and policy coordination (i.e., with respect to perceived relevance, appropriateness, authority, and legitimate planning action between area municipalities) and recognized as a potential threat to the realization of the Regional Municipality’s food system vision. These barriers are summarized in Table 1.

2. GAPS IN PLANNING REGULATION AND PROVINCIAL LEGISLATION

A second key overarching theme concerned gaps in planning regulation and provincial legislation. Specifically, a number of legacy, industry and governance barriers

were identified and pointed to a critical concern with the lack of provincial food system planning direction and outdated policies at the local level.

TABLE 1: Summary of Barriers Associated with Perceived Gaps in Regional Food System Planning and Policy Coordination

GAPS IN REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PLANNING AND POLICY COORDINATION	
Local Level Barriers	Examples
Zoning Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in municipal planning accommodation and zoning flexibility
Policy Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of supportive food system planning policies
Professional Practice Constraints (for local planners)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prioritizing food system planning (perceived policy relevance relative to other planning priorities) ○ Weighing policy appropriateness relative to local-level realities ○ Maintaining control, preferring an independent planning approach ○ Considering responsibility and legitimacy in new planning actions

Legacy barriers: Stuck in an Old System

A number of examples of legacy barriers were described. Among these were planners’ tendency to act and make decisions “the way planning has always been done”; “legalistic” interpretation of existing policies; narrowly defined policy language; and strict adherence to current codes and practices. Participants suggested that municipal bylaws and provincial legislation should be updated to accommodate emerging food system activities. For example, developments in production, distribution and retail were seen as interpretative challenges for planners due to narrow definitions of acceptable and unacceptable uses in current planning legislation. As a result, food system innovations were hindered by long delays in approval, licensing and zoning as noted by the following perspective:

We have had a terrible habit of listing things in legislation....And suddenly we have people producing alligator meat, or something like that. Well we’d have to have language and legislation to account for that...Greenhouses are another one. Farmers missed two growing seasons because the Township was sitting on their hands waiting to come up with a bylaw around greenhouses. It took nearly eighteen months to come up with something.

Some municipalities were described as being stuck in an old planning system, with planners abiding by “the letter of the law”. Most rural planners want to ensure that land zoned as ‘agricultural’ (taxed at 25% of the residential rate) is being used for agricultural-related purposes. However, following a request to build a wholesale produce auction on agricultural land, current bylaws were recognized as a barrier to collaborative community efforts to promote wider regional food distribution:

...the Township planning staff looked at the Provincial Policy Statement...and said ‘You can’t take farmland out of agricultural production to put up a commercial building...we need to protect agriculture by not allowing this’... But in this case, [allowing] it helps, not hurts [local farmers].

In response, members from the local food and agricultural community organized an advisory committee to address gaps in the township’s bylaws. The Committee presented recommendations to the Township Council and rural planners on how bylaws could be revised to be more supportive of local food system innovation, including production, processing, distribution and retail activity on agricultural land. This is captured by a key stakeholder as follows,

They [the Advisory Committee] went a little bit farther than that to not only [request that the Township] allow a wholesale produce auction but that they make legal what already exists. Which are on-farm sales facilities or what you call ‘produce stands’...

Similarly, both urban and rural planners continued to have a narrow view of ‘agricultural activity’. For example, concerned local food entrepreneurs in urban areas were adamant that their municipality’s “complaint-based system” is “archaic” and a constraint to small-scale, neighbourhood food system activity (e.g., backyard eggs, honey and produce sales). While the separation of food-related activity from residential areas was recognized by participants for its public health and food safety advantages in the last century, current policies and practices were not seen to be keeping pace with the growing consumer demand for fresh, local food. Key food system stakeholders and planners shared similar concerns about outdated policies and practices, as captured by the following perspectives:

I just think they’re stuck with archaic zoning laws that they have to work with, even if they think what I’m doing is a good idea
They [provincial planning authorities] should repeal everything they’ve done and start from scratch because it is kind of archaic. They keep adding things to legislation and revising things but ultimately they need to change the base to reflect current [food system] planning principles and policies.

Industry barriers: Inability to Affect Change

Restrictive covenants were discussed as the most significant industry barrier to healthy, retail access at the local level and an important factor contributing to perceived gaps in current planning regulation and provincial legislation. Senior planning experts described the planning challenges posed by restrictive covenants when used by large food retail chains to restrict competition after a store closure or relocation. Specifically, the existence of food deserts was a recognized public policy concern for which planners were ill-equipped to address with current planning legislation:

So here's a place where probably six or seven thousand people could have walked to and carried home groceries quite conveniently. There's not one [food store] there anymore. So you look at that and go 'Here's a problem'. But how do you influence that? How can you stop it? From a planning perspective, we can't stop the establishment of restrictive covenants by a private owner. We can't do that!

Participants discussed the role of discount stores and pharmacies, in filling the gaps left by restrictive covenants through their offering of an assortment of perishable and non-perishable foods in neighbourhoods with limited food access.

Governance barriers: Addressing Financial and Relational Costs

Lastly, perceived financial and relational “costs” were identified as an important governance barrier affecting local food system planning considerations. Financial concerns stemmed from the feared costs of overstepping traditional jurisdictional boundaries defined by current legislative frameworks and a reluctance to interfere with private-sector food interests. It was clear that there was an apparent conflict between what planners felt they should do (in terms of being conservative and reducing the likelihood of an appeal) and what they felt was needed to support regional food system activity. As a result, participants agreed that, while supportive of the Regional Municipality’s food system direction, local government decisions needed to be weighed carefully in terms of economic realities. This is noted by the following urban planning perspective:

To be fair, with senior management, they support those [food] ideas as people, and they support us as planners. I mean the Commissioner of Planning supports it [the Regional Municipality’s food policy direction]. But our mandate is ‘It can’t cost us anything!’

The relational “cost” of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo’s two tier structure was also discussed. Specifically, while recognized as a key facilitator of strategic long-range planning, the two tier structure created a “sensitive relationship” be-

tween regional and local planners. A frequently discussed example was the attempt by regional policy planners to influence the size and location of food stores at the neighbourhood-level as part of their broader vision of mixed use development. This resulted in early jurisdictional tensions which threatened the Regional Planning Department's *relational* balance with area municipalities. Importantly, tensions were attributed to the *newness* of these types of planning decisions and to a lack of food system direction in the Province's legislative framework. From a governance perspective, the decision to include a vision in the ROP to guide rather than to control area municipalities through "heavy-handed policies" points to the recognized relational importance of ensuring area municipal buy-in, as captured by the following:

In terms of the kinds of policies that 'encourage this' and 'encourage that', they're all good but you can't necessarily make them happen unless, you know, you get the co-operation of the area municipalities who in many cases are responsible for zoning and development.

In light of identified legacy, industry and governance barriers (Table 2), perceived gaps in current planning regulation and provincial legislation emerged as a second overarching theme and an added threat to collaborative, and coordinated food system planning efforts. Key issues of legislative concern included a system defined by outdated planning policies; a lack of control over industry-led changes in food access; and financial and relational threats to advances in food system planning at the local level.

T A B L E 2 : Summary of Barriers Associated with Perceived Gaps in Current Planning Regulation and Provincial Legislation

GAPS IN LEGISLATIVE PLANNING SUPPORT	
Local Level Barriers	Examples
Legacy Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legalistic interpretation • Narrowly-defined planning language • Strict adherence to traditional practices
Industry Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictive covenants
Governance Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial and relational 'costs'

CONCLUSIONS

Principles of a healthy, sustainable food system reflect health, sustainability, resilience, diversity, fairness, transparency and economic balance (APA 2010). The Regional Municipality of Waterloo's regional official plan advances these principles with a progressive vision and policies that aim to: facilitate healthy food access; improve the vitality and economic strength of rural communities; and reduce the demand on transportation infrastructure and the growth in vehicle emissions (Region of Water-

loo 2009). Yet, rich, multi-sectoral perspectives revealed discrepancies between the Regional Municipality's vision and area municipal realities by capturing a snapshot of current policy and planning barriers affecting healthy food retail, food system innovation, and farmer viability across area municipalities within the region. Gaps in regional food system planning and policy coordination, and barriers in planning regulation and provincial legislation emerged and offer important insight into the types of investments that may be needed to shift from 'vision' to a new, supportive food system planning 'reality' at the local level.

The findings from this study are transferable and have potential application for broad, system-wide food policy considerations in other jurisdictions. As shown in Waterloo Region, the official planning process is an opportune time to engage regional and local governments, planners, and food system stakeholders in policies and plans to achieve a healthier and more sustainable food system. The APA's food system policy guide has been described as the "most significant indication of acceptance" of food system planning into the planning field (Kaufman 2009) and provides a vision and a way to engage planners in food system-related activities. Although adopted with less policy significance internationally, an innovative and widely disseminated regional official plan can likewise serve as a model for municipal food planning decisions while also informing provincial-level considerations.

Opportunities to generate food system change through regional planning are consistent with the emerging interests of planners. Compared with the previous decade, when only 38% of planners considered the importance of food-related planning (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000), a recent nationwide survey of APA members in the US found that now over 70% of respondents believed that policy development and the inclusion of food considerations in official plans is an area where planners should be significantly involved (Raja, Born, and Kozlowski Russell 2008). However, based on Canadian planners' food policy concerns, there is a need for political will and greater investment in provincial legislative changes to improve planners' understanding of: the interconnectedness in food- and agriculture components (to support policy relevance across urban and rural areas); jurisdictional boundaries within an upper-tier/lower-tier planning context (to ensure policy appropriateness); and the scope of legitimate public sector planning action (to increase legitimacy). Traditionally, the Province sets general guidelines around planning issues that lag behind the actions and initiatives of regional governments (e.g., farmland preservation). Yet, forward-thinking direction and leadership from the Province could not only elevate the profile of food systems planning but could also support revisions to outdated policies and zoning, reduce financial and relational "cost" concerns and offer solutions to industry-led food access barriers.

An important public-private tension was identified in this study concerning 'legitimate' food system planning and the challenges posed by restrictive covenants with respect to food accessibility. Cameron et al. (2010) examined the use of restrictive covenants in Edmonton (Alberta, Canada) and noted that the Province's role

in registering covenants may offer future opportunities to control their use through legislative changes at the provincial level. Specifically, the regulation of expiry dates on anti-competitive supermarket covenants, on the basis of food access considerations, was recommended among next steps to combating identified industry barriers. In contrast to the market-based model of public administration, Box et al. (2001) point to the value of shared knowledge and decision making within a collaborative relationship between citizens and public administrators. Planners' efforts to engage citizens in public discussions about potential alternatives, particularly with respect to large food retail development, demonstrates citizen-centeredness and gives local residents the opportunity, if they choose, to participate in the process of food system change.

More research and policy action is needed to establish mechanisms for sharing regional food system policy innovations and alternatives with policymakers and planners at the provincial level in Canada. This may help to generate the provincial changes necessary for advancing shared principles of a healthy and sustainable food system between and among levels of government, ministries and sectors. Canadian examples of efforts to shift from regional vision to local level reality are illustrative of important strides alongside American counterparts and offer potential for shared insight into current developments in food system policy and practice.

RELEVANCE TO PRACTICE

Whether for policy or practice, or in urban or rural settings, planners have an important role to play in advancing food system principles through planning. From a *systems* perspective, there is a need for coordinated action to promote local food production, processing, distribution, retail, and waste removal as inter-connected parts of a whole *system*. Therefore, in regional jurisdictions with diverse urban and rural areas, planners need to work collaboratively to coordinate planning decisions in a way that promotes the overall functioning of the entire food system. Coordinated action may be difficult to achieve if planning decisions are made at the expense, or without broader consideration, of their impact on the overall functioning of the system. For example, if planners restrict production or wholesale activity (or stifle other forms of local food system innovation) on agricultural land in rural areas, opportunities to retail and consume healthy, local food in urban areas may ultimately be affected. This type of "systems thinking" (Best 2007) has been emphasized as a way to address complex food system concerns and may be an important way to increase coordinated action in a diverse regional food system.

Collaboration within and across the planning profession is also needed to advance shared food system principles. In the US, food policy councils (FPC) exist at the local, regional and state level and often serve more than one jurisdictional level (Schiff 2008; APA 2011). Recently, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute released a Call to Action to engage all planners, citizens and stakeholders in mak-

ing “planning for healthy food systems a priority” (OPPI 2011). Despite a growing number of well-recognized local FPCs in Canada, planners may be disadvantaged by the absence of a single food governing body, or FPC at the provincial level. However, with strategic investment and long-range planning consideration, the establishment of a provincial food policy group (or provincial *roundtable*) could serve as a forum for system-level discussions on food planning and policymaking and offer an avenue for all planners to become engaged, understand the relationship between food system actors, and explore policy alignment and decision making between departments, ministries and sectors. Seasons (2002, 2003) identifies the importance of indicators in the monitoring and evaluation of municipal urban planning. Provincial, regional and local food policy councils could support an early assessment of the performance of current plans and policies and serve as a forum to identify and informally monitor food system indicators of greatest interest to the stakeholder community.

Further, opportunities for planners to collaborate across local, regional and provincial levels could help to secure buy-in, coordination and supportive legislative action for advancing plans for a healthy and sustainable food system. Planners might develop Agricultural Advisory Committees as a means to support ongoing dialogue with local food producers and processors. Similarly, educating council members on the importance of food and agriculture in the community could positively shape decision makers’ values and allow food to become a higher planning priority. The establishment of partnerships between local planning and public health departments could also help planners access existing community networks, groups and coalitions (Wegener, Raine, and Hanning 2012; Wegener, Hanning, and Raine 2012) and improve their understanding of the food-related needs of vulnerable and healthy communities. Planners work with a large, diverse group of stakeholders and through their role in engaging multi-sectoral actors in food system policy considerations, there is potential to achieve coordinated and collaborative food system action at all levels. There is considerable potential for the application of a collaborative decision-making process in this multi-stakeholder, complex decision-making environment (Healey 2003).

Education and training would be required to facilitate this change in approach. Planning schools could help to equip planners for participation in food system change by supporting an early understanding of food-related concerns between all levels of planning. Soma and Wakefield (2011) showed evidence of planners’ support for a greater emphasis on food systems in planning education and based on a small, expert sample, recommended: a specified food systems branch or division within national planning associations (i.e., CIP in Canada and the APA in the US); a professional development certificate in food system planning; and further opportunities for the *integration* and *specialization* of food systems within traditional planning degree programs. The integration of food-related considerations into early core courses could help to sensitize all future planners to the impact of planning decisions on food production, distribution, and access at regional and local levels.

NOTES

¹ The official name for this area is the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. Common usages include Region of Waterloo or Waterloo Region

² Secondary uses – “uses secondary to the principal use of the property, including but not limited to home occupations, bed and breakfasts, home industries, agri-tourism activities and uses that provide value-added agricultural products from the farm operation on the property” (Region of Waterloo Council-Adopted Regional Official Plan, 2009, Glossary, G-18)

³ Loblaws is a national supermarket chain

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