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Better Schools. Safer Streets. Stronger Neighborhoods.

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Baltimore City Food Policy Task Force Makes Citywide Recommendations for a Healthier Baltimore

BALTIMORE, MD. (May 11, 2010) – Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake today joined members of the Baltimore City Food Policy Task Force in announcing 10 key recommendations to increase demand for and access to healthy food options in the City. Food insecurity – defined as lack of access to enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle – afflicts nearly 14% of low-income Baltimore families.

Poor diet and obesity are associated with numerous chronic health problems, including cardiovascular disease and stroke, two of the leading causes of mortality in Baltimore City. The mortality rate of heart disease is 30% higher for Baltimore City than among all Maryland residents over the past seven years. The lack of neighborhood markets that sell fresh produce has created large “food deserts” in Baltimore City where residents must travel a mile or more to get fresh groceries.

“With this report, we have a strategy that government agencies, businesses, educators, healthcare providers, and non-profit organizations can use to give all City residents improved access to healthy fruits and vegetables,” said Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. “Implementing these recommendations will go a long way toward improving the health and quality of life of City residents.”

Recommendations include promoting and expanding farmers’ markets, community gardens and urban agriculture. The City will also seek to encourage street vending of healthy foods and expand the Health Department’s Virtual Supermarket Project, which helps residents living in food deserts order groceries online at their local library branch. Studies show that a healthy diet significantly reduces the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

While the U.S. boasts one of the most abundant food supplies in the world, disparities in access, affordability and quality have garnered attention by a wide variety of stakeholders in the food system. The formation of the task force came about because of wide support across sectors and interest in creating new opportunities to improve the current food situation.

“Heart disease is Baltimore’s number one killer, and has been for a long time,” explained Interim Health Commissioner Olivia D. Farrow. “Making healthy food accessible in every low-income community is the first step toward lowering the number of deaths in Baltimore from diet-related health problems.”

The Department of Planning announced that Ms. Holly Freishtat will serve as Baltimore City’s new Food Policy Director. Freishtat will be responsible for implementing the recommendations of the Food Policy Task Force. Her position is funded by the Sustainability Food Fund, which was created by the Baltimore Community Foundation through generous donations from the Abell Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

“Having someone with Holly’s experience in food policy is a unique and major asset for the City of Baltimore,” said Seema Iyer, Chief of Research and Strategic Planning for the Department of Planning. “We don’t have a ‘Department of Food’, so she will help to institutionalize close collaboration between the Departments of Health and Planning and the Office of Sustainability and really all the stakeholders involved in ensuring access to healthy food for all Baltimoreans.”

The Food Policy Task Force convened in 2009, and is comprised of representatives from a cross-section of city agencies, organizations, businesses, and stakeholders in Baltimore’s food production, distribution, and consumption system.

The full list of Recommendations by the Food Policy Task Force:

1. Promote and expand farmers’ markets
2. Promote and expand Community Supported Agriculture
3. Support continued research on food deserts and collaboration with policymakers
4. Support a central kitchen model for the Baltimore City Public School System
5. Support community gardens and urban agriculture
6. Expand supermarket home delivery system
7. Improve the food environment around schools and recreation centers
8. Encourage street vending of healthy foods
9. Create healthy food zoning requirements or incentives
10. Develop a targeted marketing campaign to encourage healthy eating among all Baltimoreans

To view the full task force report, visit www.baltimorecity.gov, keyword “Food Policy”.

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