

The Montgomery County Food Council is an independent council formed and led by individual community members and representatives of local businesses, government, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions that broadly represent the food system both substantively and geographically.



We are an active participant in urban and rural policy and process change, leading the way to a more healthful and sustainable community by bringing together a diversity of nonprofit and community based organizations, businesses, government agencies, and residents in a coordinated effort to address the broad range of food system-related issues in our county, state, and region.

Policy Committee Guidelines

Our policy initiatives are led by our Policy Committee, which considers issues and facilitates the decision-making and establishment of policy positions on behalf of the Food Council. This standing committee is entrusted to make decisions that will represent the mission and vision of the Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) on public policy issues that influence the Montgomery County food system. These Guidelines are intended to capture the values and practices we already have in place, as well as provide clarity and consistency for the long-term success of the Food Council.

Statement of Policies and Procedures:

- MCFC may take action and positions on legislative or other public policy issues which:
 - Impact the Montgomery County community and its residents;
 - Align with the MCFC mission to create a robust, sustainable, equitable local food system; and/or
 - Are of community-wide importance.
- Public policy positions shall be consistent with: the mission of MCFC, the policies and initiatives approved by the Board of Directors, and prior positions taken by MCFC.

Committee Structure

- The Committee shall consist of: At least one representative of each working group; one representative of the Board of Directors; the Executive Director as an Ex-Officio/non-voting member.

- The Board Chair has the option to serve as the Board representative to the Policy Committee, but may defer the responsibility to another interested Board member. If not serving as the Board representative, the Board Chair may participate in Policy Committee decision-making as necessary regarding critical policy issues.
- The Policy Committee shall have a formal Chair, appointed by the Food Council Board of Directors.
- Policy Committee members' participation is subject to the general Food Council Conflict of Interest Policy, and members have the right and responsibility to excuse themselves from consideration of an issue as needed.
- The Policy Committee will conduct regular meetings either in-person or via phone or video conference, ideally monthly although potentially more or less frequently depending on the time of year. Policy Committee votes and activity will also occur electronically between scheduled meetings as needed.

Scope of Committee's work

- The Policy Committee may take action on:
 - Testimony and/or letters of support, opposition, or comment related to legislative issues at the municipal, County, State, or Federal level
 - Food Council generated advocacy letters
 - Sign-on Letter Requests from other organizations
 - Invitations to join coalitions
 - Other tasks, such as:
 - Building advocacy capacity of County partners and stakeholders
 - Engaging candidates for elected office directly
 - Convening stakeholders to discuss and strategize around food system policy issues with broad community impacts
 - Creating opportunities for stakeholders to discuss these issues with policymakers
 - Engaging with stakeholders in cross-sector policy initiatives to address broader community issues with implications for the local food system
- Appropriate issues for consideration include:
 - Those at all levels of policy-making (Federal, State, County) that impact Montgomery County residents, stakeholders, and/or partners;
 - Those for which the committee holds adequate expertise and credibility to voice an opinion;
 - Those in which a systems-perspective brings value to inform discourse on an issue. The committee should consider how an issue will affect all levels of the

Montgomery County food system in their deliberation and decision making process.

Accepting and Soliciting requests for Food Council consideration

- Council Members may contact the Policy Committee Chair and/or the Executive Director directly with requests for action by the Policy Committee. A request form will be made available on the Food Council website to allow stakeholders to request Policy Committee action on an issue.
 - Requests for support must provide basic information and background on the issue to inform discussion and decision-making.
- The process for accepting outside requests for Policy Committee action is to be shared publicly on the Food Council website.
 - An issue must be brought before the Policy Committee at least two weeks prior to the deadline for action.
 - Issues presented with less than two weeks notice may still be considered at the discretion of the Policy Committee.
- Unless specific, time-sensitive action is required, issue consideration will be discussed at the next Policy Committee meeting.
- The Executive Director may screen requests and refer to the Policy Committee when and as appropriate.
- As a primarily volunteer-driven small nonprofit, the Food Council may be limited by time or capacity constraints in taking action on policy requests.

Research and Deliberation Process

- In the case that Policy Committee members seek external input in their research process, Policy Committee members may contact:
 - Montgomery County Food Council Members
 - Montgomery County Food Council Working Groups
 - Stakeholders with relevant expertise
- Engaging non- Policy Committee members in the deliberation process serves to promote transparency, engage diverse perspectives, and ensure the most thorough understanding of the issue. In conducting research on an issue, the Policy committee shall:
 - Seek input from external stakeholders in an objective way, i.e.: “The Food Council Policy Committee is currently considering [name of proposed legislation, letter of support, etc.]. Please share any comments or feedback to the Committee by [date].”
 - Gather information on both sides of an issue to the extent possible with a reasonable amount of effort.

- Evaluate information gathered for accuracy, and make reasonable effort to confirm information presented to the Committee for consideration is correct.
- The Policy Committee and staff will create and manage a Policy Tracking document each year to catalog requests for policy consideration, decisions, and actions taken.
- The Food Council Executive Director, staff, and Members (as appointed by the Policy Committee) will represent the Food Council on various County and regional advocacy committees to increase awareness of policy issues and opportunities for action.

Decision-Making Processes

- The Policy Committee's decisions should be aligned with the following core guiding resources:
 - Our mission: to bring together a diverse representation of stakeholders in a public and private partnership to improve the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of Montgomery County, Maryland through the creation of a robust, local, sustainable food system.
 - Our vision: to cultivate a vibrant food system in Montgomery County that consciously produces, distributes, and recycles food, making it accessible to all residents while promoting the health of the local food economy, its consumers, and the environment.
 - Working Group goals and current initiatives
 - Food Council bylaws and internal policies
 - Montgomery County Food Security and Food Action Plans, and other planning and strategic Food Council documents
 - Internal and external relationships with stakeholders should also be taken into consideration when appropriate. However, it must be recognized that the Food Council's policy positions will not always align on all issues with all stakeholders.
- The Policy Committee should seek unanimous consensus on all issues.
 - Non-response from a Policy Committee member by a voting deadline will be considered assent.
- In the case that consensus amongst Policy Committee members is not possible, the issue shall go to the full Council for discussion and a vote.
 - Council voting procedures for policy issues shall follow those outlined in the bylaws.

- Votes can be accepted via email if time does not permit for a full Council meeting. Council Members will be given a deadline to vote/respond.
Non-reply by the deadline will be considered assent.
- Should MCFC decide not to take a position on an issue, it may provide limited legislative monitoring and updates to constituents on the status of the issue.
- In cases where there is not agreement among Food Council Members on a policy position for an important issue affecting the food system, MCFC may choose to share a comment letter including information about both sides of the issue.

Public notification of policy statements

- All policy statements are to be shared with the full Food Council as updates at Internal Meetings.
- Council Members will be provided access to the Policy folder to view final letters of support/opposition/comment and the Policy Tracking document.
- Information will also be provided to Council Members as to what the Policy Committee has declined to comment upon, and updates of issues under consideration.
- Food Council Members will be invited in advance of Internal Meetings to suggest policy discussion items for the agenda.
- Staff will internally record and store all letters and requests.
- Initial requestor of policy action will be notified by staff of the Policy Committee's final action or inaction.