

**Minutes – Food Council General Assembly Meeting**  
Wednesday, February 11, 2026 – 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.  
Ascend One Building – Heroes A Room

**Present:**

Annika LaFave, Maryland Department of Emergency Management  
Asia Simms, Howard County Health Department  
Benjamin Barnwell, Howard County Department of Community Resource & Services  
Claudet Miranda, Maryland Hunger Solutions  
Erika Strauss Chavarria, Columbia Community Care  
Genesis Caplan, University of Maryland Extension – Howard County  
Irma Iribe, Howard County Office on Aging & Independence  
Jennifer Drell, Howard County Library System  
Kathy Johnson, Howard County Office of Economic Development  
Laura Crovo, Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center  
Lauren Chilton, Howard County Office of Emergency Management  
Lynn Moretz, Howard County Health Department  
Maya Kaidman, Community Member  
Maura Cahill, Howard County Economic Development Authority  
Michael Maggio, Howard County Office of Agriculture  
Noreen Zaidi, Howard County Muslim Community  
Petra Guiland, Howard County Office of Human Rights and Equity  
Tina Laboy, Howard County Office of Emergency Management

**Staff Present:**

Nathan Glenn, University of Maryland, Extension - Howard County  
Reena Rambharat, Howard County Health Department  
Yekatit Bezooyehu, Howard County Food Council

Topic/Agenda	Discussion	Action/Follow-up
<p><b>Welcome and Introductions</b></p>	<p>Ms. Yekatit Bezooyehu, Food Council Administrator, called the meeting to order at 10:08a.m. She provided a welcome to members in attendance and indicated that the minutes will be shared after the meeting and available on the Food Council’s webpage. Yekatit shared the goal for this Food Council meeting was to discuss the mission, vision and guiding principles along with the bylaws.</p>	<p>Howard County Food Council information can be found on the Local Health Improvement Coalition’s (LHIC) website: <a href="https://www.hclhic.org/council">https://www.hclhic.org/council</a></p>

	<p>Members introduced themselves, their organizations and shared announcements.</p> <p>Noreen Zaidi – Howard County Muslim Council – welcomes anyone that would like to volunteer at the Saturday food distributions at the Elridge Library.</p> <p>Annika Lafave, Maryland Office of Emergency Management, Food Systems Resiliency Council announced that the FSRC meetings are held at 1pm open to the public.</p> <p>The Maryland Housing and Community Development</p> <p>Kathy Johnson, Howard County Office of Economic Development mentioned local Agriculture grant availability.</p>	<p>Link to HCMC food distribution flyer - <a href="https://www.facebook.com/hocomuslimcouncil/">https://www.facebook.com/hocomuslimcouncil/</a></p> <p>Link to FSRC website here <a href="https://mdem.maryland.gov/Pages/fsrc-council.aspx">https://mdem.maryland.gov/Pages/fsrc-council.aspx</a></p> <p>NourishMD grant program through the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development: <a href="https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Business/Pages/NourishMD-Grant-Program.aspx">https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Business/Pages/NourishMD-Grant-Program.aspx</a></p> <p>Grant application: <a href="https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2026-01/2026%20EAG%20and%20AGIE%20Combined%20Application_fillable_1.pdf">https://www.howardcountymd.gov/sites/default/files/2026-01/2026%20EAG%20and%20AGIE%20Combined%20Application_fillable_1.pdf</a></p> <p>Grant walk-thru video: <a href="https://youtu.be/rtVjpAggRdU">https://youtu.be/rtVjpAggRdU</a></p>
<b>New Business:</b>	<p>a) Group Discussion – Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles</p> <p>b) Group Discussion – Bylaws</p>	<p>Visit the Howard County Food Connection Map: <a href="https://www.hclhic.org/foodmap">https://www.hclhic.org/foodmap</a>. If updates to the pantry details are required, please email <a href="mailto:LHIC@howardcountymd.gov">LHIC@howardcountymd.gov</a></p>
<b>Agenda Topic – Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles</b>	<p>The group was asked to spend five minutes reviewing the mission, vision and guiding principles document. Members were asked to think about anything that is missing or should be added. Then the floor was open for discussion.</p> <p>Mission:</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive spin to food security; not insecurity = trying to be secure (promote + ensure food security)</li> <li>• Comma after equitable</li> <li>• Add education → pull from vision to mission</li> </ul> <p>Additional thoughts that the purpose of the food council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be the glue, bridge, convener</li> <li>• To fill in the gaps where needed</li> <li>• To provide high level thinking</li> <li>• To be group that is made of diverse organizations – multisector membership</li> </ul> <p>Vision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture love</li> <li>• Add “choice” and autonomy</li> <li>• Facilitating education through partnerships (to achieve mission)</li> </ul> <p>Guiding Principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive: separation between voices of neighbors</li> <li>• Center voices of those individuals and families impacted by food insecurity; community members</li> <li>• But not call out; uplift those impacted</li> <li>• Be part of decision – making process</li> <li>• Include diverse partners (separate out)</li> <li>• Everyone has responsibility</li> <li>• Accountability for access</li> <li>• Add policy</li> <li>• Reflect and improve</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Agenda Topic – Bylaws</b></p>	<p>Article 2:suggestion to add state and other grants</p> <p>Article 4:Goals- softly add in advocacy Put in target population like state and local partners</p> <p>Adjust action plan/strategic plan/roadmap</p>	

	<p>Develop and implement strategic action plan based on data – review plan periodically (state timeline) based on data. Potential to adjust or change every year.</p> <p>Article 5: Membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5.3 Voting – No quorum currently</li> </ul> <p>Article 6: Coalition Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.1: Steering Committee – Add sentence on or description of the duties of the steering committee</li> </ul>	
<b>Parking Lot</b>	<p>The members suggested items for future discussion listed here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coverage in Howard County to see which partners are where to collaborate and intentional in efforts</li> <li>• Regional (Central) Food Council Gathering</li> <li>• Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) Food Insecurity Map which will be comprehensive and offer many helpful layers of information</li> <li>• The Community Business Compass Map is a great tool also sees different listings of organizations</li> <li>• Resource for grant dollars available through the Howard County Agriculture Grants</li> </ul>	
<b>Wrap Up and Adjournment</b>	<p>The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m. Ms. Bezooayehu said that she will follow up the meeting with meeting minutes and additional resources (if any).</p>	

**Future Meeting Dates:**

**Food Council General Assembly (2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday every 3 months) \***

- **Wednesday, April 8, 10:00 – 11:30 am; (Virtual) Zoom Meeting**
- **Wednesday, June 10, 10:00 – 11:30 am; (In-Person) TBD Activity/Volunteering/Day of Service**
- **Wednesday, August 12, 10:00 – 11:30 am; (Virtual) Zoom Meeting**
- **Wednesday, October 14, 10:00 – 11:30 am; (Virtual) Zoom Meeting**
- **Wednesday, December 9, 10:00 – 11:30 am; (Virtual) Zoom Meeting**

***\*In case of inclement weather, in-person meetings will switch to virtual or cancelled if the Howard County Health Department and the University of Maryland, Extension – Howard County are closed.***

Respectfully submitted by,



UNIVERSITY OF  
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EXTENSION

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Ms. Yekatit Bezooayehu  
Food Council Administrator  
Howard County Health Department