

Food Trucks for People and Places: Planning Partnerships Serving Entrepreneurs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

INTRODUCTION 2

 FOOD TRUCK ENTREPRENEURSHIP 2

 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD TRUCKS IN CITIES..... 3

 RESEARCH QUESTIONS 5

 METHODOLOGY 5

STATEWIDE LEVEL 6

 UW-MADISON DIVISION OF EXTENSION FOOD TRUCK WORKSHOPS..... 6

 PLANNING OPPORTUNITY 8

CITY & COUNTY LEVEL 9

 CITY OF MADISON AND DANE COUNTY COLLABORATION 9

 PLANNING OPPORTUNITY 11

COMMUNITY LEVEL 12

 NORTHSIDE PLANNING COUNCIL AND FEED KITCHENS..... 12

 PLANNING OPPORTUNITY 14

PLANNING APPLICATIONS 15

 DISCUSSION 15

 FUTURE DIRECTIONS..... 17

REFERENCES 18

APPENDICES 22

 APPENDIX A. TABLE OF INTERVIEWS 22

 APPENDIX B. FOOD CART PLACEMAKING EXAMPLE 23

 APPENDIX C. NORTHSIDE PLANNING COUNCIL INITIATIVES TIMELINE..... 24

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1. Food truck at South Madison Partnership celebration event.	2
Figure 2. Food truck business operators with their truck.	3
Figure 3. Interior of Food Cart, ca. 1990-ca. 1999.	3
Figure 4. State Street Mall in the spring.	4
Figure 5. Map of Wisconsin identifying recent workshop events.	6
Figure 6. The first food truck workshop in Eau Claire in 2024.	7
Figure 7. Food carts surround performance on Library Mall.	9
Figure 8. Map of Dane County and municipal boundaries within.	9
Figure 9. Art Fair on the Square in 2025.	10
Figure 10. Map of Madison neighborhood associations.	12
Figure 11. FEED Kitchens building in 2025.	13
Figure 12. One of the FEED Kitchens rooms.	14
Figure 13. Striped food cart on Library Mall.	15
Figure 14. Food trucks on State Street Mall in Madison.	16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food trucks are a key and timely opportunity for planners to support community and economic development and food systems in their cities, as food truck entrepreneurs face barriers to success. This project investigates the following questions: what strategies are planners using to support food truck entrepreneurship at different levels within Wisconsin; and how do these partnership strategies show relevant takeaways for community economic development? This project compiles success stories at different scales: the statewide scale in Wisconsin with a new series of food truck workshops offered by the UW-Madison Division of Extension, the city and county scale in Dane County and the City of Madison focusing on the new Dane County Food Action Plan, and the community level exemplified by a partnership between the Northside Planning Council and FEED Kitchens. These case studies inform distilled recommendations and applications for planners interested in supporting food trucks. This project finds that planners can leverage multi-sector partnerships to support aspiring and early-stage food truck entrepreneurs through interventions at various levels.



INTRODUCTION



The industrialized US food system has led to issues with sustainability and public health including greenhouse gas emissions, soil health degradation, and labor crises. Currently, the food system is shifting due to limits on natural resources and customer preferences for health, transparency, and sustainability. Small-scale independent food entrepreneurs offer solutions to this current shift as an alternative to the industrialized food system, but they require support and assistance to succeed (Lynde 2020). Early-stage food truck entrepreneurs offer a promising and exciting direction for the future of American food service and cuisine, and they face structural barriers to running business enterprises. When successful, these ventures contribute to a thriving economy and food system. Leading planning strategies make efforts to overcome these barriers through collaborative, multi-sector partnerships.



Figure 1. Excited food truck business operators at South Madison Partnership celebration event, Bryce Richter (UW-Madison News 2022).

FOOD TRUCK ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Food trucks are a key opportunity for planners to support community economic development. Urban and regional planners at varying levels—statewide, city and county, and community—can leverage strategies to support current and future food truck business owners. Food trucks and food carts are often nonemployer businesses (Hait 2020), draw interest from younger

“Entrepreneurship is a known vehicle for wealth creation—an especially important mechanism in economically disadvantaged communities.” (Conroy et al. 2020)

generations due to the work environment and customer engagement (Vang 2025), and offer varieties of authentic cuisine (FEED Initiative 2023). The food truck industry in the US is now an over 2.7-billion-dollar industry (Carpenter and Sweetland 2025), and food trucks are a growing trend and industry nationwide, with roots in international street food culture across the globe (Graaff and Ha 2015).

The state of food truck entrepreneurship in the US is shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, growing racial and ethnic diversity, and a rise in independent employment. Entrepreneurship rose in Wisconsin during the pandemic: as traditional avenues for income disappeared, entrepreneurial individuals used their talents to create new opportunities (Julian, Callon, and Conroy 2022). In fact, food trucks were an important avenue for customers to access food service during the pandemic due to their flexible nature (Hait 2020, see Figure 2). There is a large and growing presence of BIPOC- and immigrant-owned businesses in Wisconsin; these



Figure 2. Food truck business operators with their truck—some businesses were able to offer service during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hait 2020).

new business owners require financial, human, and social capital development (Hammer 2022)—relevant findings as food trucks are owned and run by a racially and ethnically diverse group of individuals (Cullum Clark 2022). Businesses without any paid employees, which make up 77% of US businesses, are considered a critical “entrepreneurial seedbed for the economy” in metropolitan counties with more racial and ethnic diversity (McDermott and Conroy 2021). Ideally, with independent income, nonemployer businesses can eventually become employers and create jobs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD TRUCKS IN CITIES

Food trucks offer varied benefits for cities. Customers view food trucks positively (Shin, Kim, and Severt 2018) and are willing to make sacrifices to access them, such as wait in line (see Figure 3) or not have a seat, and this loyal base can follow food trucks to brick and mortar if they make that transition (Vang 2025). Food truck business owners require strong policies and more business support than they can currently access, due to both the growing industry and existing policies in place which favor brick and mortar restaurants over mobile food vendors (Arroyo and Bahm 2013). Edna Ely-Ledesma, expert on food systems planning and Associate Professor in the Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison described the relationship of a struggling economy leading

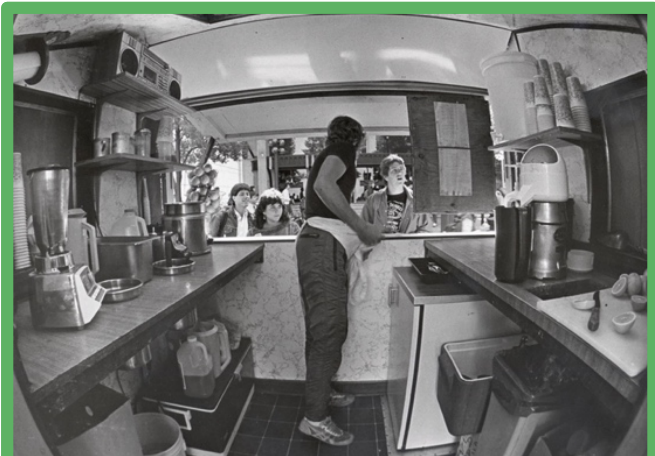


Figure 3. Interior view of food cart, server, and customer line in Madison, WI (UW Digital Collections ca. 1990-ca. 1999).

to an increase in entrepreneurship and highlighted the question of which businesses are allowed access to the public. Her study which focused on the impacts of urban planning on Latino Vendor Markets asserted that “planning must take hold of a central responsibility to plan for all people, to support all economic causes, perhaps particularly microbusinesses” (Ledesma 2021).



Figure 4. State Street Mall between UW-Madison campus and downtown, a space otherwise lacking strong visual interest save for food trucks and customers gathering (Rhodes 2025).

Food trucks create positive externalities in cities including placemaking and providing quality varieties of food. If a space lacks both good form and a good mixture of uses, food trucks are an innovative way to bring people and activity to an otherwise lacking space (see Figure 4, Neumann 2014). A study near the Chicago Loop found that food trucks often served customers without interrupting pedestrian flow due to the street furniture zone, and if it was crowded, pedestrians maneuvered through the lines (Ehrenfeucht 2017). Some have even called food trucks “magical urbanism on four wheels,” a powerful affirmation of ‘pop-up urbanism’ and of cultural placemaking” (Agyeman,

Matthews, and Sobel 2018). Alfonso Morales, Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor in the Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and UW-Madison Division of Extension State Specialist, highlighted that food trucks are a place where “social structures and individual aspirations intersect.” He noted that planning to support food truck entrepreneurs is part of social and economic change, as it is financially easier to start a food truck than to rent or lease a storefront and many food trucks eventually become brick and mortar locations, and that if successful the business owners invest that capital. Food trucks are important for economic opportunity and wealth building, particularly for immigrants and first-time business owners (Cullum Clark 2022).

While regulations on food trucks are important to curb potential issues with trash, parking, or noise, food trucks are known to increase economic activity (Arroyo and Bahm 2013), and the positive externalities of these businesses justifies planning intervention (Klosterman 1985). The outcome of tensions between grocery retailers and farmers markets determined that pop-up businesses bring more customers to an area rather than deter customers from brick and

“...food trucks can contribute to place by attracting people, enlivening an area and stimulating other business activity.” (Neumann 2014)

mortar (Morales 2025). In fact, one study found that the presence of food trucks in a downtown area supported growth of restaurants, rather than reduced them (Carpenter and Sweetland 2023). Food truck businesses ideologically have the support of stakeholders across industries and the political spectrum (Cullum Clark 2022). Research suggests that active planning investment in the public realm, in conjunction with the efforts of food truck business owners to support their needs, can lead to just policies (Wessel 2018).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

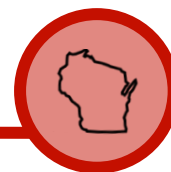
The research questions of this project are: what strategies are planners using to support food truck entrepreneurship at different levels within Wisconsin; and how do these partnership strategies show relevant takeaways for community economic development? These research questions are answered through three successful case studies at different scales to better understand how entrepreneurs interact with these scales. Success at the statewide scale in Wisconsin comes from a new University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) Division of Extension food truck workshop series. Achievement at the city and county level is illustrated by the partnership between the City of Madison and Dane County on a food action plan. At the community level, the Northside Planning Council supports a key shared-use kitchen used by many food truck owners. Within these levels of intervention, planning experts leverage multi-sector collaboration to successfully support these drivers of economic opportunity. This report concludes with recommendations for planners based on these successes.

METHODOLOGY

The mixed qualitative methodology of this project provides both an academic understanding of planning for food trucks and firsthand accounts of community-based planning efforts. Methods include informal conversational interviews, food truck workshop observation and analysis, literature review, anecdotal research, stakeholder analysis, photography, and archival research. The interviews include five original conversational interviews with expert food systems planners and UW-Madison Division of Extension employees (see Appendix A for full list). The literature review consisted of academic data sources focusing on food trucks, urban planning, and economic development. The literature extended into anecdotal research including gray sources and sources like a webinar from the Food Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development (FEED) Initiative through the UW-Madison Division of Extension and a virtual tour of the FEED Kitchens. Conducting a stakeholder analysis supported the organization of this project. I took original photographs of food trucks in Madison, Wisconsin in 2025 in various locations to support non-visual findings. Archival research was conducted using the UW-Madison Digital Archive Collection and the UW News site. I used qualitative descriptive analysis to summarize and interpret the data. Limitations included the time available to complete the interviews and other research and the case study focus which has the potential to limit applicability.



STATEWIDE LEVEL



The UW-Madison Division of Extension's mission is connection, and the Community Food Systems team within the Community Development Institute runs outreach and education programming for food truck entrepreneurs. My 2.5 years working with this team showed me the importance of the Extension model and connecting early-stage food truck owners with business resources across the state. I primarily work with the FEED Initiative on an annual webinar series and conference to support aspiring and early-stage food and farming entrepreneurs, including food truck owners. In Wisconsin, "cities are trying to understand how to support food trucks," whether there is an established scene or a few new trucks (Vang 2025). One study shows that in order to reach nonemployer businesses like food truck owners, which "offer an important path for owning and growing a business for entrepreneurs of color in Wisconsin," small business support programs should be tailored to nonemployer business owners; partner with diverse business chambers and community development financial institutions (CDFIs); and expand technical assistance and loan programs (McDermott and Conroy 2021).

UW-MADISON DIVISION OF EXTENSION FOOD TRUCK WORKSHOPS

Addison Vang, urban planner and Hmong Community Food Systems Outreach Specialist at the UW-Madison Division of Extension, shared insight into the success to date and upcoming future of recent statewide food truck workshops. These workshops were offered in five cities across Wisconsin in 2024 and 2025 (see Figure 5). Vang initiated these workshops after identifying a need in the Hmong community for food business support after the COVID-19 pandemic, and he learned that most business interest was about food trucks. These workshops are one way in which interested municipalities can partner with the

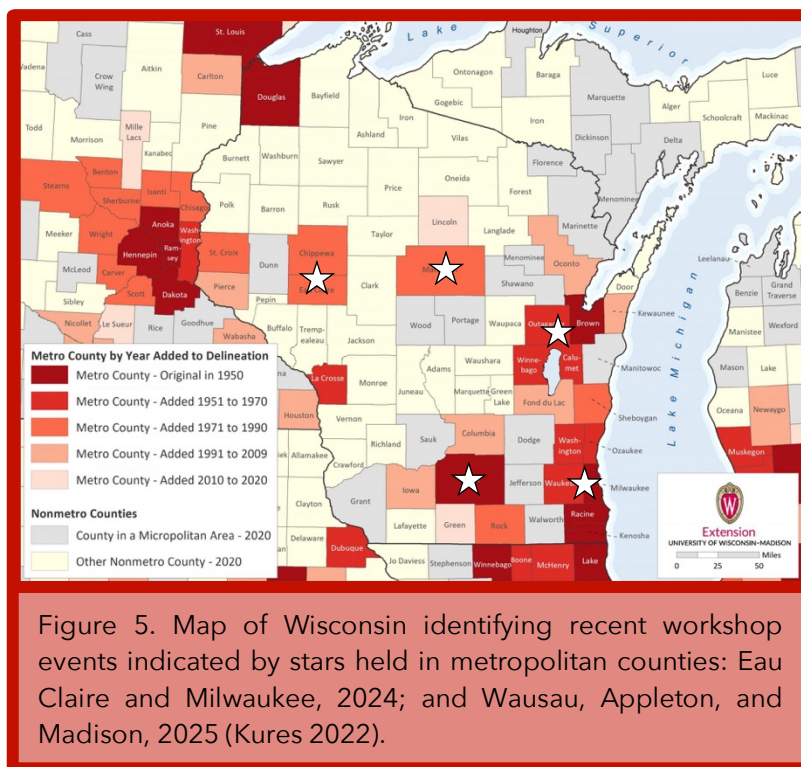


Figure 5. Map of Wisconsin identifying recent workshop events indicated by stars held in metropolitan counties: Eau Claire and Milwaukee, 2024; and Wausau, Appleton, and Madison, 2025 (Kures 2022).

UW-Madison Division of Extension Community Food Systems team to support food truck entrepreneurship in their areas (see Figure 6). The workshops are designed to connect entrepreneurs through a no-cost event where they can meet experts, regulators, and agencies supporting small businesses (Spring 2025). Vang sees the workshops as opportunities for initial relationship-building with relevant city personnel. Attendees often



Figure 6. Photo of the first food truck workshop in Eau Claire in 2024, courtesy of UW-Madison Division of Extension.

hope to start a food truck or are trying to support their existing business and they all share a passion for making food and sharing that with the public.

Jessica Jane Spring, Food Entrepreneurship Specialist at the UW-Madison Division of Extension, envisions that entrepreneurs are more effective when they understand the complex and sometimes-contradictory nature of the multi-level governance that they must navigate. Spring sees the workshops as supporting entrepreneur connections and helping them feel confident reaching out to their respective

municipalities. One goal of the food truck workshops is supporting profitability strategies, both by having relevant health department representatives share information on food licensing and including labor hours in finance plans for sustainability and scalability. Spring identifies the UW-Madison Division of Extension Community Food Systems work as filling a need which would otherwise be supported by community members and organizations, to “help lessen the burden on the community, and on successful entrepreneurs to coach other entrepreneurs.”

The workshop in Madison in 2025 began with a financial management intensive from Peter Robertson, Brand Expert in Residence at Food Finance Institute and founder of RP’s Pasta Company. He emphasized the importance of business and financial modeling as a necessary process to ground the creative entrepreneurial mission, setting businesses up for a better shot at long-term success. This was followed by a brief overview of funding options and opportunities by Zia Yang, Program Manager at the Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of

“It’s important to work with other resource providers, because this is not about building any one organization’s capacity to be the one resource, but helping strengthen the network of support, and do it in a way that helps them all work together in the future.” (Spring 2025)

Commerce (HWCC). Attendees learned about types of loans and grants besides traditional bank loans, some of which come from CDFIs like the HWCC or the Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation. The final presentation was from Megan Blake-Horst, Street Vending Coordinator at the Department of Planning and Community and Economic Development in the City of Madison. She shared detailed information about required licenses and permits, describing different vending options and areas within the city, and particular regulations which aspirational business owners may not know ahead of time. For example, the side of the truck which has the service window determines which side of the street they can park on. Her position at the city is a vital and unique position—an example of planning beyond the office, as she strives to be accessible to aspiring and existing food truck business owners.

PLANNING OPPORTUNITY

The community-based origin story of this food truck workshop series illustrates how the UW-Madison Division of Extension community food systems work is collaborative with community interest. The team found an area of need and aimed to support these ventures which can in turn have economic benefits down the road. The presence of key city and resource personnel at the Madison food truck workshop allowed connections to be made between themselves and the current and future food truck business owners, and it also increased the credibility of these efforts. This empirically based education series is an example of using educational best practices for real-world impact. Partnering with existing CDFIs which may operate locally or statewide seems like a particular avenue for planners to approach when trying to assist future small food businesses.



CITY & COUNTY LEVEL



Planners have the opportunity at the city and county level to create powerful interventions to support food trucks. Existing literature identifies best practices for municipal control over when and where food trucks can operate, the concentration of units, and licenses and permits required, as well as other considerations relevant to food trucks including parking and circulation, signage, lighting, trash, and site amenities (Arroyo and Bahm 2013). In terms of starting food trucks, zoning is crucial to governance of the right-of-way, and entrepreneurs are required to secure business and food safety licenses

in addition to other licenses and permits (Food Truck Workshop 2025). For existing businesses, food trucks' ability to operate in varied municipalities relies on local and regional policies, as well as potential language barriers (Vang 2025).



Figure 7. Food carts surround performance on State Street Mall (Lenburg, ca. 1970-ca. 1980).

CITY OF MADISON AND DANE COUNTY COLLABORATION

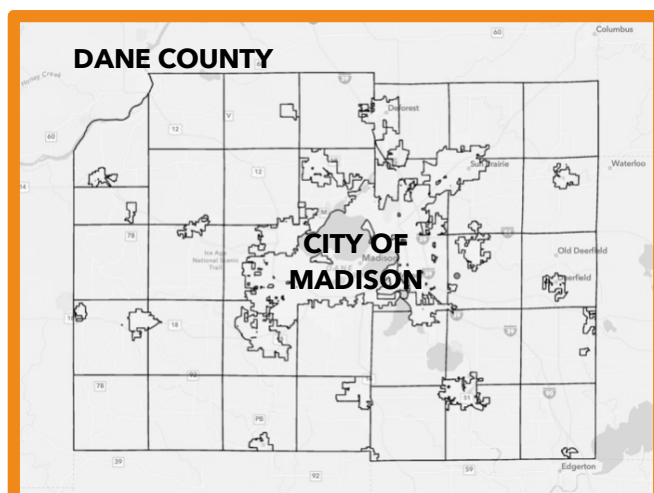


Figure 8. Map of Dane County and municipal boundaries within, including the City of Madison. (Dane County 2025).

For a small city, Madison is known for its strong history of food trucks, from their consistent presence on State Street Mall (see Figure 7) to references today in discussion on urban walkability and pedestrian access (Hoff 2023). The downtown area of Madison has distinct street vending areas (see Appendix B), the most highly regulated of which is in the Mall/Concourse Vending Area, extending from the Capitol building area to the UW-Madison campus (Food Truck Workshop 2025). The City of Madison is in the center of Dane County (see Figure 8), where the time and investment in the first ever collaborative Dane County Food Action Plan and interest in including food trucks in

the plan demonstrates the importance of planning voices in this conversation. The new plan is a collaborative effort between nonprofits, food councils, businesses, the city, and the county. Part of informing the plan includes ongoing community input (Waheed 2025).



Figure 9. Art Fair on the Square in July 2025 was an example of an event opportunity in Madison for food trucks to serve many customers in the Mall/Concourse Vending Area (Rhodes 2025).

Noah Bloedorn, Director of the Dane County Food Collective, Food Plan Manager at REAP Food Group, and urban planner, shared insights into the exciting new plan and what it could mean for food truck businesses. He noted that while Madison is a great city for food trucks and there are many opportunities like events and festivals for them to serve customers (see Figure 9), limits include enough space in commercial kitchens and restrictions on zoning and permitting. Bloedorn saw assisting with first-time business ventures navigating regulation as vital, similarly to statewide perspectives. He

identified key barriers to business expansion from food truck to brick and mortar as access to capital, lack of kitchen space, and lack of retail space. He noted the importance of access to wealth building and as a space for immigrants to create businesses in Madison, and an opportunity for cultural sharing.

Food systems is a sector which is sometimes rolled into other sections within a comprehensive plan (City of Madison 2024), and this is an exciting example of food-specific planning in action. An article on the in-progress Dane County Food Action Plan shows that this initiative is an example of multi-sector collaboration, similarly to the food truck workshops at the statewide level. Abha Thakkar, owner of Mosaic LLC and lead on consumer engagement for the plan, described this planning process as “breaking down silos in the food system, helping people meet each other across the different sectors” (Buta 2025). Food trucks can be an important element of the plan, as the ongoing multi-sector collaboration is ready to

“[The Dane County Food Action Plan] mission is to create a collaborative, inclusive process that ensures the voices of all stakeholders—farmers, food producers, retailers, buyers, agencies, organizations, and everyday eaters—are heard and integrated.” (Extension Dane County 2025)

support food trucks, and there is an opportunity here for planners to drive positive economic development and food systems change.

PLANNING OPPORTUNITY

From Madison's well-known food truck scene to the City of Madison Street Vending Coordinator's presence at the 2025 food truck workshop to the new Dane County Food Action Plan, this area is an example of how planners can support food truck entrepreneurship. The food action plan is a prime example of multi-sector collaboration, illuminating a throughline of partnerships which can be leveraged to support community economic development.

The specific food action plan indicates an area of opportunity for food systems planning. Food truck entrepreneurship is tied to some key research questions from the plan. Municipalities and the county should make an effort to support food trucks, in order to develop a food system that supports a group of small-scale entrepreneurs who are invested in a variety of cuisines and local sourcing. Supporting food trucks in Madison and Dane County can increase access to culturally relevant food, providing a diverse group of business owners opportunities to share their cultural cuisine. The city and county also have an opportunity to reach historically marginalized food entrepreneurs by supporting food truck businesses and promote economic viability for them.



COMMUNITY LEVEL



Food trucks often require access to commercial kitchens when home kitchens are not zoned for commercial food preparation. If commercial kitchens are difficult to find, business owners get creative about where they operate. Ideally, an entrepreneur can find a shared-use kitchen with enough space, but “the reality is that they’re hustling to find kitchens,” according to Addison Vang. They may befriend a restaurant owner and use their space in off hours, connect with school kitchens, or churches that have kitchens. When searching for a shared-use kitchen, food truck operators always require potable water, parking, gray water disposal, and connection services (FEED Initiative 2023). In the Midwest, shared commercial kitchens are a rising trend along with food trucks. For example, one unique but successful approach is The Coop in Appleton, Wisconsin, which is a shared kitchen space created by and for food truck owners, with prep space, an event space, and an area for cooking demonstrations (Vang 2025). The connection between mobile food businesses and shared-use kitchens can be supported by urban planners to overcome the barrier of access to commercial kitchen space.

NORTHSIDE PLANNING COUNCIL AND FEED KITCHENS

One successful partnership at the local level on the North Side of the City of Madison is FEED (Food Enterprise and Economic Development) Kitchens, established by the Northside Planning Council in 2013 (see Figure 10). FEED Kitchens is a nonprofit shared-use kitchen and business incubator for food entrepreneurs, including 63 individual enterprises (Northside Planning Council 2025) and many food trucks and carts (Northside Planning Council 2017). They have five kitchens, fridge and freezer space, and many standard and specialized appliances (Intertribal Agriculture Council 2020).

The Northside Planning Council was established in 1993 to “build civic capacity on the Northside” of Madison. They accomplish this by building relationships, supporting community-based economic development, and driving civic engagement—particularly in the

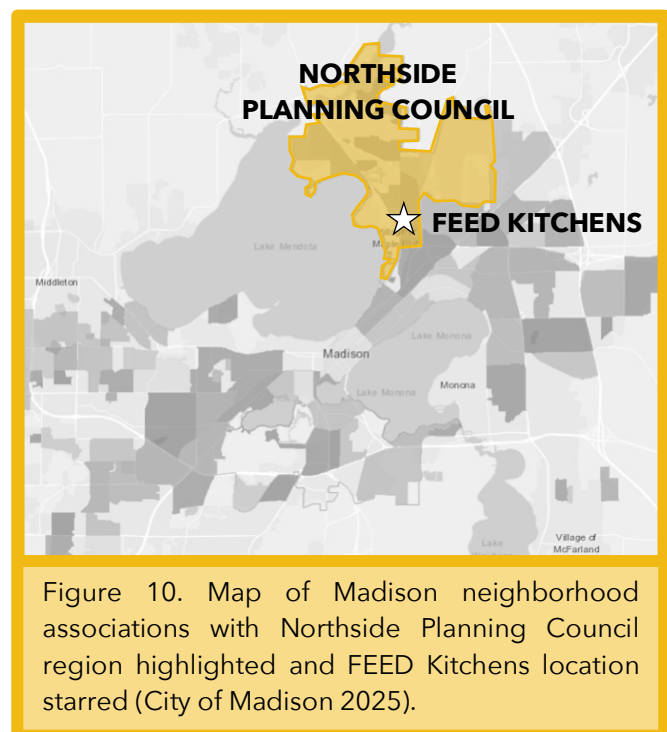


Figure 10. Map of Madison neighborhood associations with Northside Planning Council region highlighted and FEED Kitchens location starred (City of Madison 2025).

"The Mission of the Northside Planning Council is to improve the quality of life and foster equity on the Northside through community organizing and economic development." (Northside Planning Council 2025)

context of working with community leaders—through a modern equivalent of advocacy planning, or uplifting voices of those that would otherwise be excluded (Davidoff 1965). While the Northside Planning Council supports many sectors relevant to community development, they focus on local food systems. Besides establishing FEED Kitchens (see Figure 11), they started the FEED Bakery & Training Program, created Healthy Food for All which is a food recovery and distribution program, and support a grant and

development program for the new Madison Public Market (see Appendix C).

When considering working with or starting a shared-use kitchen, it is important to consider social networking and resources, the barriers and benefits of sharing space, and the seasonal market for food truck business owners. A 2023 Food Entrepreneurship Ecosystems Development webinar from the UW-Madison Division of Extension featured a discussion with Chris Brockel, Director of Food Systems at FEED Kitchens and Chef Thony Clarke, owner and operator of Café Costa Rica food truck and Mango Man Sauces. Brockel highlighted the importance of commercial kitchens for the success of food carts: shared spaces have benefits like less overhead to get access to specialized equipment and prep space, while business owners are also required to share space and avoid cross-contamination. He also emphasized the importance of cooperation, social networking, and a positive attitude, both when sharing space and for business success.

Clarke highlighted the importance of information and support for new business owners and described finding essential connections at FEED Kitchens: "I have support of the management, they are always open to help out and teach and inform us about everything that's going on, even opportunities for business." Brockel highlighted how Clarke now reaches out to new FEED Kitchens members to help them succeed. Clarke outlined the benefits of running a food truck, including testing products and getting immediate feedback; resources like CDFIs, FEED Kitchens, and the UW-Madison Division of Extension; and sharing his unique cultural cuisine which he calls "Latin Soul food," with influences passed down from his grandmother and mother. He also shared difficulties beyond the initial startup process,



Figure 11. FEED Kitchens building in 2025 including many of the food trucks parked onsite (Rhodes 2025).

including working seven days a week in the summer months and managing the entire business. Brockel also emphasized food trucks' seasonal nature in the Midwest due to the harsh winter weather: "you need traffic on the street to be able to sell."



Figure 12. One of the FEED Kitchens rooms showing prep spaces and appliances (The Kitchen Door 2025).

To achieve long-term success, Brockel recommends that shared-use kitchens connect to economic development planners in the relevant municipality, region, and state, making the case for the kitchen as a local food supporter and economic driver. He recommends securing these connections, understanding the business cash flow, and clarifying operations before opening. After years directing FEED Kitchens, Brockel highlighted spaces (see Figure 12) which could benefit a new shared-use kitchen: an office, storage space, a conference room, a classroom, and a retail section with options for a pop-up restaurant (Intertribal Agriculture Council 2020).

PLANNING OPPORTUNITY

The Northside Planning Council is a successful example of urban planners working in collaboration with existing community structures and creatively supporting food business ventures. In addition to better understanding the day-to-day experience of food truck entrepreneurs, planners can be open to these economic development connections when they arise and understand the extended economic benefits of a shared-use kitchen to a municipality. Clarke highlighted resources at the state and local level which tie in together. The FEED Initiative from the UW-Madison Division of Extension hosted this interview as a webinar to share information from the local scale to the statewide scale. Continued connections between key individuals working on shared-use kitchen efforts, urban planners, university representatives, and business owners seem to have benefits to food truck owners.



PLANNING APPLICATIONS



This project focused on case studies to identify strategies planners use to support food truck entrepreneurship at different levels of intervention in Wisconsin and highlighted ties between food truck businesses and economic strength. At the statewide level in Wisconsin, the UW-Madison Division of Extension recently kicked off a series of food truck workshops in cities across the state to support successful food truck business ventures. Underpinning the City of Madison's historic success as a

known food truck city (see Figure 13), the City of Madison and Dane County are collaborating on an innovative new food action plan with emphasis on entrepreneurship. Within Madison, the Northside Planning Council has shown effective planning engagement through the establishment and success of FEED Kitchens, a shared-use commercial kitchen helping food truck entrepreneurs to thrive. These interconnected case studies provide insight into relevant planning interventions relating to food truck businesses. The throughline between these case studies is collaboration. By centering food systems in planning initiatives and including food trucks in these plans, there is a pivotal opportunity to drive economic activity.



Figure 13. Striped food truck on UW-Madison campus (Lenburg 1977).

"FEED Kitchens offers a supportive environment with members here from all around the world coming together to share their food and culture in the hopes of pursuing the American dream - operating their own business!" (FEED Kitchens 2025)

DISCUSSION

This project finds that collaborative, multi-sector partnerships are important to recent initiatives to support food truck businesses. The success of the UW-Madison Division of Extension food truck workshops illustrates how a statewide program can have cascading impacts to local areas. There is a key opportunity for statewide resources, whether from the UW-Madison Division of Extension or CDFIs or other agencies, to reach municipalities and have local impacts. The local impacts of more successful food truck businesses in turn strengthen the local and statewide economies. The area of opportunity is where

interconnecting services exist but are not connected to the aspiring or current food truck business owners, which both the food truck workshops and the FEED Initiative strive to do. Direct education efforts are crucial to connecting people with the information that they need. Including individuals from different relevant sectors in the conversation is important to the success of these workshops. This was also highlighted by the Dane County Food Action Plan which emphasizes multi-sector collaboration and emphasizes entrepreneurship. Initiatives at the local level driving positive food systems change have an opportunity to support and leverage the success of small food businesses like food trucks. These business owners require information and resources, including commercial kitchen space, represented by the FEED Kitchens case study. By supporting shared-use kitchens, planners have an opportunity to



Figure 14. Colorful food trucks on State Street Mall in Madison, Jeff Miller (Hoff 2023).

support each business owner who operates there, and their respective impacts on the local and regional economies. Urban planning can be judged by how well it promotes community interest, considers externalities, improves the information base for decision-making, and supports marginalized community members (Klosterman 1985). This project considers these case studies to be examples of collaborative and successful planning based on their work towards these social and economic functions.

This summary of recommendations from this project can be used as relevant to inform future programming to support food truck entrepreneurship. At the statewide level, planners can take a systems approach to serving BIPOC and immigrant entrepreneurs, focus nonemployer business support, centralize business resources, and tailor workshops or other direct education to individual municipalities. At the city and county level, planners can learn from other cities' successes and challenges, support access to financing information, support shared-use kitchens in their area, identify opportunities which already exist and leverage partnerships to support business owners, and conduct targeted outreach. At the community level, planners can support or establish shared-use kitchen enterprises, support resource and information sharing, understand and work with the seasonal nature of food trucks depending on the climate, and work with and strengthen existing communities through partnerships.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There is opportunity for further investigation into planning for food trucks to drive economic activity. I recommend that future research investigate the regional scale, occurring somewhere between statewide and city/county, where stakeholders have opportunities to support collaborations between cities. Additional research could focus specifically on existing plans, including reviewing comprehensive city or county plans for inclusion of food systems, determining what specific food plans exist and what they look like, and finding out if food trucks are included in any of these plans. Comparing specific zoning codes between cities in Wisconsin or any other state could prove useful. Further research could also investigate the viability of permanent food truck parks and determine the best environments for these structures.

This project focuses specifically on aspiring and early-stage food truck entrepreneurs, for whom certain topics are perhaps not yet relevant. However, the absence of discussion on food waste in food planning and economic development is concerning and could merit further scrutiny. I am additionally interested in the possibilities for a more circular system which integrates strategies like commercial composting from the beginning of the food business development process. Finally, though the target audience for this project are often nonemployer business owners, food trucks are sometimes viewed as stepping stones to a scaled-up business venture like a restaurant, so corraling information about employee management strategies and best practices as part of scalability could be another useful future direction.

Ideally, this document will be useful for the UW-Madison Division of Extension Community Food Systems team to support future programs and workshops, to inform the food trucks section of the Dane County Food Action Plan, and perhaps to planners beyond Wisconsin interested in including food trucks in their work.



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. TABLE OF INTERVIEWS

Name	Title	Date
Bloedorn, Noah	Director, Dane County Food Collective	February 2025
Ely-Ledesma, Edna	Associate Professor, Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture, University of Wisconsin-Madison	April 2025
Morales, Alfonso	Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor, Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture, University of Wisconsin-Madison	April 2025
Spring, Jessica Jane	Food Entrepreneurship Specialist, Community Food Systems Program, Community Development Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension	June 2025
Vang, Addison	Hmong Community Food Systems Outreach Specialist, Community Food Systems Program, Community Development Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension	April 2025

APPENDIX B. FOOD CART PLACEMAKING EXAMPLE

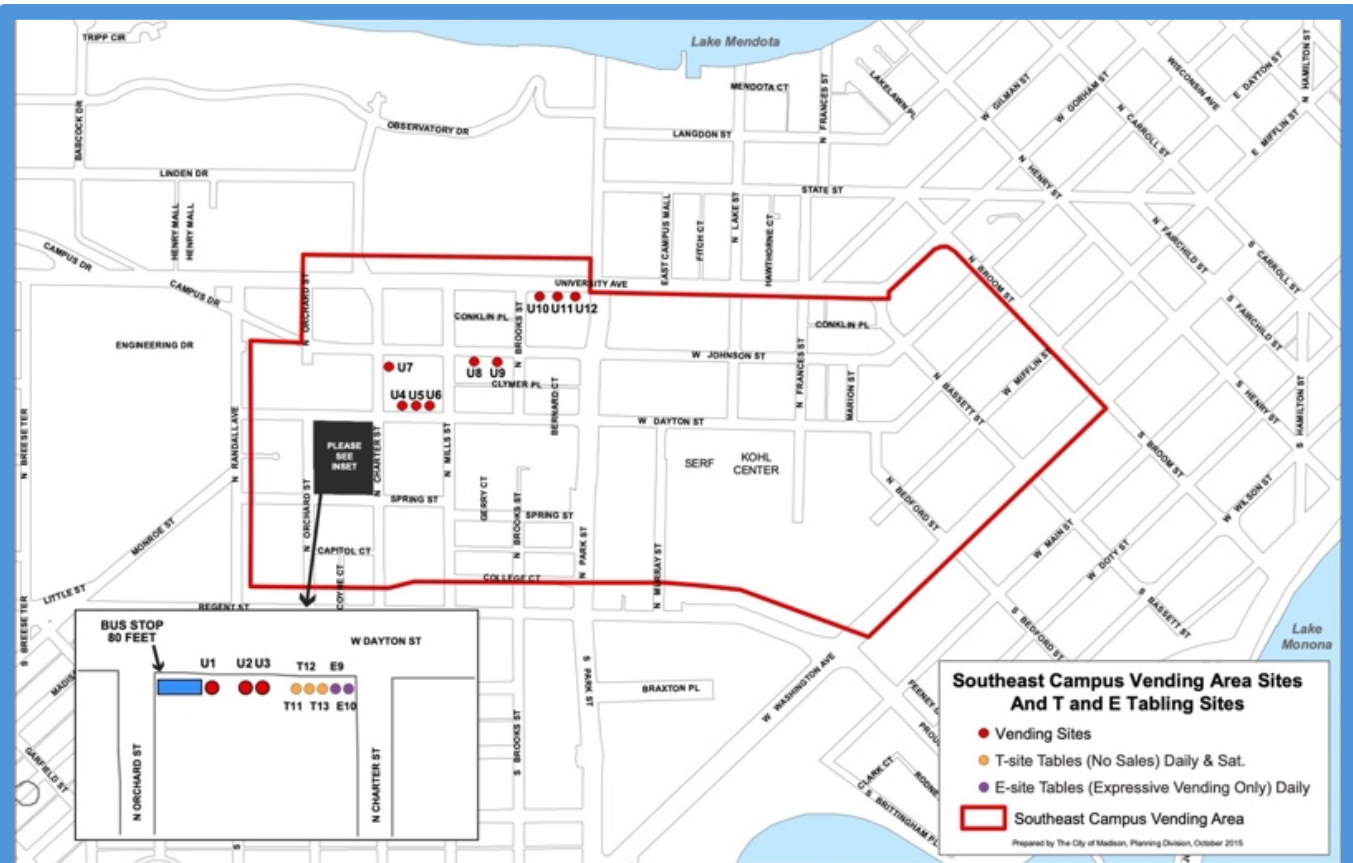


Figure B1. Southeast Campus Vending Area Sites (City of Madison 2025).



Figure B2. Saigon Sandwich food cart with customers and stools (Rhodes 2025).

In the City of Madison, while the State Street Mall and Mall/Concourse Vending Areas are famous for their volume of food trucks, I am partial to a small food cart which stands alone in the Southeast Campus Vending Area called Saigon Sandwich. They are consistent and serve a great tofu banh mí sandwich for a reasonable price. They are also the only truck on their corner (see Figure B1, U7) and contribute to placemaking in an otherwise lifeless concrete area by creating a space for people to congregate and setting up stools for customers (see Figure B2).

APPENDIX C. NORTHSIDE PLANNING COUNCIL INITIATIVES TIMELINE

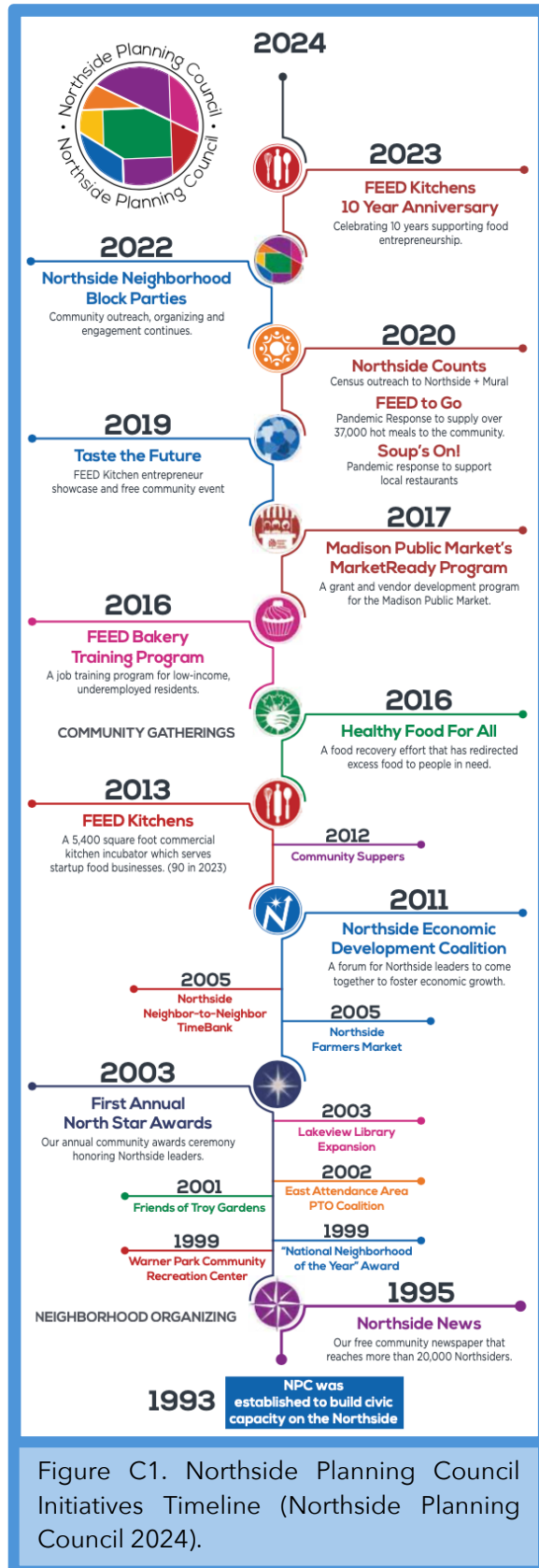


Figure C1. Northside Planning Council Initiatives Timeline (Northside Planning Council 2024).