

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 4, 2020



## **\$100K ‘Healthiest Cities’ grant aims to advance health equity in Rochester**

*Local nonprofits and the City of Rochester will collaborate to establish the city’s first food policy council*

ROCHESTER – Common Ground Health, Foodlink and the City of Rochester have been selected to receive a \$100,000 grant as part of the Healthiest Cities & Counties Challenge. Common Ground Health’s Healthi Kids Initiative is working with Foodlink and the City of Rochester to implement the City’s new Comprehensive Plan, Rochester 2034, which has an emphasis on equity and healthy living. The primary focus of the grant is the creation of a food policy council. The announcement was made by Mayor Lovely Warren on August 4 at the City of Rochester Public Market’s Shed D.

The goal of the food policy council is to identify gaps and opportunities to expand equitable access to quality food. The team will heavily engage city residents as leaders to create a long-lasting, sustainable impact on the overall health of the community.

In addition to improving the health of the community, the work of the food policy council will strengthen the local economy, promote social justice, and nurture the beauty and sustainability of our natural environment. The group will focus on resident engagement to inform the council’s structure and initial priorities. Common Ground Health’s Healthi Kids Initiative, Foodlink, and the City of Rochester will be hosting three Zoom meetings in August to provide more information about the food policy council and to gauge the interest from the Rochester community. The links below will take you to a Zoom meeting registration page for each date.

[Thursday, August 20<sup>th</sup>. 5:30-6:30 PM.](#)

[Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup>. 5:30-6:30 PM.](#)

[Thursday, August 27<sup>th</sup>. 5:30-6:30 PM.](#)

The challenge is funded by the Aetna Foundation, together with the American Public Health Association (APHA) and the National Association of Counties (NACo), and supports communities

in reducing disparities in chronic disease outcomes and promoting health equity through improved access to healthy food and health services.

“Access to health care and healthy food, as well as other social determinants of health, can significantly impact rates of chronic disease and other health outcomes, with average life spans varying by up to 20-30 years in communities that are just a few miles apart,” said Eileen Howard Boone, President of the Aetna Foundation. “We are proud to partner with APHA and NACo to support the work done in Rochester to drive change and address these social determinants of health – work that is now more important than ever, given the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Out of more than 100 applicants nationwide, the Rochester project was one of only 20 teams chosen to participate in the Challenge. In addition to the funding, Common Ground Health and their partners will participate in one-on-one technical assistance provided by [APHA/NACo] and a supportive peer-learning network led by Healthy Places by Design over the course of the two years. An expert review panel selected the team following a rigorous review process, which looked at a variety of factors including: level of innovation of their proposed approaches, intended impacts on systems and policy change and alignment of diverse partners around common priorities. [Check out the full list of grantee organizations](#) and their community partners.

**Lovely A. Warren, mayor of the City of Rochester said:**

“I want to congratulate Common Ground Health and Foodlink on their award of this competitive grant and thank them for their partnership on the critical issue of bringing equal access to affordable, healthy food to all of our residents. As we move forward with the vision laid out in the *Rochester 2034*, we must recognize and confront the reality that food disparity is among the systemic causes of inequality that prevent too many of our residents from reaching their full potential and living their best lives. I am grateful for community partnerships that help us create more jobs, safer and more vibrant neighborhoods and better educational opportunities for our residents.”

**Mike Bulger, healthy communities coordinator for Common Ground Health’s Healthi Kids Initiative said:**

“Across all incomes and demographics, diet and nutrition are at the top of the list of health concerns identified by residents in Rochester and throughout the region in a 2018 survey conducted by Common Ground Health. By making changes to local food policies and systems, we can help address the health inequities that exist in our region. As a community, we can come together to ensure our food system empowers people to live healthy and fulfilling lives.”

**Mitch Gruber, chief strategy & partnerships officer at Foodlink and City of Rochester councilmember said:**

“The pandemic has not only resulted in a dramatic spike in food insecurity locally; it has exposed the inequities of our food system — particularly toward communities of color and the deep connection between the food we eat and public health, said Mitch Gruber, Chief Strategy Officer for Foodlink and a member of Rochester City Council. “A resident-driven Food Policy Council will help the city make sound, food-related decisions to improve access and affordability for all.”

**Candace Cabral, resident of the JOSANA neighborhood and grant project team member said:**

“In Rochester, there is most definitely a high need for improved access to healthy foods, vibrant community spaces and gardens, and food retailers who want to live and work in our neighborhoods. As a local resident who is passionate about advocating for community-led change that will have a direct impact on the health of my neighbors, I’m excited to get to work on this project.”

###

### **About Rochester 2034**

*Rochester 2034* is the City of Rochester’s new Comprehensive Plan. Adopted unanimously by City Council in November 2019 with broad community support, *Rochester 2034* articulates a bold and progressive vision for where we want to be when we celebrate our community’s 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2034. The 15-year plan covers a wide variety of topics, each of which identifies specific goals and strategies to help achieve our vision. Core themes carried throughout *Rochester 2034* are positioning Rochester for growth, placemaking, and social and economic equity. For more information, visit [www.cityofrochester.gov/Rochester2034](http://www.cityofrochester.gov/Rochester2034)

### **About Healthi Kids**

[Healthi Kids](#) is a grassroots community coalition and an initiative of Common Ground Health. Since 2008, we have advocated for policies and resources that allow children to live healthier lives in the City of Rochester and across the Finger Lakes region. We embrace kids and families at the center of all decision making and believe in the power of their voice to influence decision makers and transform systems. Together, we work for change that nurtures whole child health through healthy minds, bodies and relationships.

### **About Foodlink**

For more than 40 years, Foodlink has leveraged the power of food to end hunger and build healthier communities in Allegany, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties. Through good stewardship, innovation and

collaboration, Foodlink mobilizes a diverse network of community partners to address both the symptoms and root causes of food insecurity. Learn more about how we are transforming lives and creating healthy futures for every community we serve at [www.FoodlinkNY.org](http://www.FoodlinkNY.org), or follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram at @foodlinkny.

**For more information, contact:**

Portia Nisbeth  
Healthi Kids Communications Specialist  
Common Ground Health  
(585) 633 – 9812  
[portia.nisbeth@commongroundhealth.org](mailto:portia.nisbeth@commongroundhealth.org)

Mark Dwyer  
Communications Manager, Foodlink  
(585) 413-5056  
[mdwyer@foodlinkny.org](mailto:mdwyer@foodlinkny.org)