



Our Neighbors' Table

*A Path to Food Security*

Strategic Plan 2017 – 2020

## BACKGROUND

### **An Introduction to Our Neighbors' Table**

Established in 1992, Our Neighbors' Table provides food assistance to individuals and families living in Amesbury, Boxford, Byfield, Georgetown, Groveland, Merrimac, Newbury, Newburyport, Rowley, Salisbury, South Hampton and West Newbury. Our Neighbors' Table provides hunger relief to nearly 600 households every week through its local, mobile and home-delivery grocery programs and its Wednesday Meal. To meet the unique seasonal needs of our community, Our Neighbors' Table also offers a summer lunch program, holiday programs and emergency assistance. Our Neighbors' Table is committed to working collaboratively with other providers and community stakeholders to serve the holistic needs of our guests and is actively engaged in a variety of community partnerships to make that possible.

### **The Strategic Planning Process**

Our Neighbors' Table has had tremendous success, providing food to thousands of people who might otherwise not have access to food. Indeed, this strategic plan is a product of that very success. The purpose of this strategic plan is to propel Our Neighbors' Table to even greater success – providing access to food for more people.

In 2016, with the successful completion of a \$1.1 million dollar capital campaign and the opening of the Jardis-Taylor Center, it was time to re-evaluate Our Neighbors' Table's organization and programs and chart a course for the future. The strategic planning process began with the formation of a strategic planning committee and the selection of Tamasin Foote to facilitate the process. The committee was comprised of:

#### Our Neighbors' Table Directors

Anne Bonaventura, Committee Chair  
Frank Childs  
William Foustoukos  
Allen Neale  
Elena Russo

#### Our Neighbors' Table Staff

Lyndsey Haight, Executive Director  
Lori Townsend

The planning process took place between October, 2016 and March, 2017. The strategic planning committee in collaboration with the Board of Directors, Our Neighbors' Table staff, donors, volunteers and selected community stakeholders undertook a variety of activities to help assess the current state of Our Neighbors' Table as well as its future direction. Activities included:

- Facilitated meetings with Board members, staff, and volunteers.
- Surveys of guests, volunteers, donors, community partners, community residents, and ONT staff and Board members
- Interviews of selected stakeholders
- Review of data from sources including: Greater Boston Food Bank, Project Bread, and Feeding America
- Total number of people involved in the strategic planning process exceeded 395

## **Implementation and Monitoring**

The planning process resulted in this strategic plan which has been approved by the Our Neighbors' Table Board of Directors. To implement this plan, the staff and Board have developed a three-year action plan. The Strategic Planning Committee will continue to monitor the progress of work within the action plan and will report regularly to the full Board on the status of implementation and progress toward each of the strategic goals.

### **STRATEGIC ANALYSIS**

#### **Our Neighbors' Table Today**

Using the information collected through interviews, surveys, focus groups, analysis of program data and research, the committee developed a strategic analysis which provided a clear picture of Our Neighbors' Table and the people and communities it serves. The highlights of that analysis are shared below.

#### **The Context**

Our Neighbors' Table is making a significant contribution in addressing the need of food insecurity and is growing rapidly. At the same time, the levels of food insecurity continue to rise.

#### Our Neighbors' Table:

- Increased the amount of food provided to the community by more than 100% since 2012
- Provided 535,000 meals to people in need in 2016
- Moved its operations and programs into the Jardis-Taylor Center in May 2016
- Increased by nearly 30% the number of people who were provided access to food within the first few months of opening the Jardis-Taylor Center
- Was named 2016 Community Partner of the Year by The Greater Boston Food Bank.

#### Food Insecurity

Hunger affects all populations. Locally, food insecurity affects 1 out of every 16 people, 1 out of 8 children and 1 out of 5 seniors. Thirty-one percent of the students in the Amesbury school district are enrolled in the free/reduced lunch program. 24,290 children are food insecure in Essex County.

The trends are all indicating rising levels of food insecurity. The number of people receiving SNAP (food stamps) is rising. Median household income is decreasing. The number of students eligible for free/reduced lunch is increasing. Homelessness is increasing.

At the time of the planning process, government leadership at the federal level was in transition. It is yet to be seen how new federal priorities will affect Our Neighbors' Table and the communities it serves. If federal programs currently providing access to food, such as SNAP, are cut back, this will significantly increase the demand for Our Neighbors' Table's programs.

## State of the Organization

The committee looked at the strengths and areas for growth and improvement for Our Neighbors' Table keeping in mind the unique challenges and opportunities at this stage of organizational development. The highlights of the current statement assessment are shared below in the form of a SWOT analysis.

### Strengths

- Unwavering commitment to mission
- Provides food to thousands of people in need
- Welcoming environment
- Availability of fresh food & variety of food options
- Stellar reputation
- Community commitment
- Caring & committed staff & volunteers
- Partnerships with other organizations
- New expanded facility

### Weaknesses

- Limited presence across target geographic area
- Barriers to accessibility such as transportation
- Lack of metrics for success
- Insufficient public awareness & understanding of Our Neighbors' Table
- Need to improve leadership, training and policies required to manage a large, more complex and rapidly growing organization
- Need more resources to ensure sustainability

### Opportunities

- Provide more access to food to more people across a wider geographic area
- Expand partnerships
- Raise public awareness and understanding of food insecurity and Our Neighbors' Table

### Threats

- Rising levels of food insecurity
- Unpredictability of government (federal and state) policies and support for social programs
- Lack of public awareness and understanding of food insecurity
- Lack of public awareness and understanding of Our Neighbors' Table

## ENVISIONING THE FUTURE & SETTING DIRECTION

### Mission Statement

Hunger comes in many forms. Our Neighbors' Table is committed to establishing a community that provides for the whole person with nourishing food, kindness and dignity.

### Goals and Objectives

These goals were selected as being the highest priority at this time for Our Neighbors' Table to achieve its mission. The first goal increases access to food. The second goal raises awareness of the issue of food insecurity and builds support for addressing this issue. The third goal, investing in the organization, is fundamental to sustained success. Developing and supporting Our Neighbors' Table's people and putting in place policies and procedures is what will propel Our Neighbors' Table to creating access to food consistently over time.

### **Goal 1: Increase the incidence of food security in Our Neighbors' Table's service region by expanding access to food across northeastern Essex County.**

In three years,

- Our Neighbors' Table will have an in-depth understanding of need across its service region, including who is affected by food insecurity, barriers to services, existing resources, and potential partners to reach full food security.
- Our Neighbors' Table will have clearly defined metrics to measure Our Neighbors' Table's impact on food insecurity in the region.
- Significantly more individuals and families across Our Neighbors' Table's service region will access food assistance programs.
- All residents of Amesbury, Salisbury, Newburyport, and Merrimac will have effective access to quality food assistance programs to gain food security status.

Objectives:

- Develop a method of assessing the status of food insecurity in the communities within Our Neighbors' Table's service region
- Conduct outreach to all of the communities in Our Neighbors' Table's service region to assess the status of food insecurity
- Identify short- and long-term goals and objectives for alleviating food insecurity among high-risk populations and across the region at-large and establish a method for measuring progress toward those goals.
- Develop partnerships with agencies, community groups, and residents of Salisbury, Merrimac, and Newburyport to facilitate expanded food access in those communities.
- Expand food assistance programming in Amesbury, Salisbury, Newburyport and Merrimac to increase access to food in those communities.

### **Goal 2: Build awareness of food insecurity as an issue in northeastern Essex County and build support for addressing this issue.**

In three years,

- Community leaders and local residents will understand meaning of “food insecurity” and level of need in the region.
- Our Neighbors' Table will be recognized as the regional leader related to food insecurity and a partner for communities to utilize to increase food security for their residents
- The issue of food insecurity, Our Neighbors' Table’s work, and the community’s role in addressing food insecurity will be highly visible and well-recognized across the region.

Objectives:

- Create and work from clear messaging guidelines that articulate local food insecurity needs, Our Neighbors' Table’s mission and activities to address food insecurity, and the community’s role in achieving regional food security
- Conduct outreach activities across Our Neighbors' Table’s service region to educate civic and community leaders and the community at-large about the issue of food insecurity
- Establish and follow a robust annual calendar of activities that encompasses in-person, mail, and online communications with Our Neighbors' Table supporters and the community at-large

**Goal 3: Strengthen Our Neighbors' Table’s organizational systems and infrastructure to support current and future growth.**

In three years,

- Our Neighbors' Table’s vision, mission and goals will be directly reflected in the work of Board, Staff & Volunteers.
- Our Neighbors' Table will have policies and procedures that foster recruitment and retention of qualified staff and provide for succession planning at the Board, staff and volunteer levels
- Our Neighbors' Table will have clear goals for annual program growth that allow for accurate budget and revenue forecasting
- Our Neighbors' Table will have a year-round revenue stream that supports programming

Objectives:

- Develop a policy and procedures manual to guide Board and staff practice; job functions; staff development and compensation; and communication protocols across the Board, staff and volunteers
- Establish and implement methods of communication that supports partnerships between the Board, staff and volunteers
- Carry out activities to foster interaction between Board, staff, and volunteers and the creation of shared vision and goals to guide Our Neighbors' Table’s work
- Create a succession plan for Our Neighbors' Table leadership to address ongoing recruitment of qualified Board members, election of strong Board officers, and turnover of staff at all levels

- Establish a plan for communications and activities to steward existing Our Neighbors' Table supporters and cultivate new donors and community members
- Establish and implement a year-round calendar of fundraising activities to engage a broad spectrum of Our Neighbors' Table current and prospective donors and meet annual revenue goals

With these goals, Our Neighbors' Table is moving boldly to achieve its mission.