



Date: March 10, 2026

To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Julie Wormser, Chief Climate Officer; Matt Nelson, Director of Administration and Operations

Re: Response to Awaiting Report 26-11.

We are writing in response to AR 26-11: *That the City Manager is requested to work with relevant City departments regarding incorporating plant-based solutions into the Sustainable Cambridge initiative, incorporating plant-based purchasing practices in City-operated events, and using municipal communications channels to promote sustainable and affordable food and drink practices throughout the City.*

Background

On January 26, 2026, the City Council voted to endorse the Plant Based Treaty, an international effort to "promote a shift towards a just, plant-based food system that would enable us to live safely within our planetary boundaries and reforest the Earth."

The Plant Based Treaty cites as a model the UN COP21 Paris Agreement and its emphasis on shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Signatories to the Plant Based Treaty commit to improving food policy and purchasing at the local level to emphasize plant based, sustainable options. This vote made Cambridge the 66th municipality across six continents to have signed this commitment.

This Policy Order encourages the Cambridge state legislators and federal delegation to support the Plant Based Treaty as well as promote state and federal policies to reduce food-based emissions and prioritize plant food purchasing as a centerpiece of greenhouse gas emissions policies. It also requests relevant City departments to:

- Incorporate plant-based solutions into the Sustainable Cambridge initiative including promotion of the personal and community benefits of plant-based food choices, and adding future calculations of consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions;
- Incorporate plant-based purchasing practices in City-operated events and work with the School Department to incorporate plant-based purchasing practices in School-related events; and
- Use municipal communications channels to promote sustainable and affordable food and drink practices throughout the City, including details of the climate and health benefits of plant-based food and drinks and educating people on the best

ways to achieve a balanced plant-based diet, while also appropriately highlighting the crisis of ever-increasing food poverty and the support available to respond to it.

City Responses

Sustainable Cambridge

Sustainable Cambridge includes the range of efforts across City departments made on sustainability and climate. Since the Council voted on this policy order, Sustainable Cambridge highlighted the Plant Based Treaty in February's Sustainable Cambridge newsletter with a [video](#) and an [article](#). Sustainable Cambridge will continue to amplify City efforts around plant-based food options, such as are being led by the City's Healthy Eating Active Living program in the Department of Public Health (see below).

However, we do not foresee measuring consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions. We follow the current standard practices of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy in our greenhouse gas inventories. They recommend doing "operations" inventories, which measure everything that happens within Cambridge's municipal boundaries.

"Consumption" inventories measure everything consumed within our city boundaries, including how everything was created, transported, used, and disposed of. Because consumption-based inventories rely on significant estimates and extrapolations from national data, they include significant uncertainty and few communities pursue them.

Incorporate plant-based purchases at City-operated events

We are fully committed to implementing this requirement. City events, both internal and external, have been offering vegetarian meals for years but we are now going further. For example, at a recent lunch honoring Black History Month, vegetarian and vegan options were the majority of what was served, and most events are now planned with a request for food restrictions ahead of time in order to include as many diets as possible.

Promote sustainable food through the City's communications channels

Healthy Eating, Active Living in the Cambridge Public Health Department is the program most focused on plant based, affordable food as part of their nutrition education. The Office of Sustainability and Public Health Department are continuing to discuss ways to expand and promote educational materials from this program.

We are proud of the work to this point, and excited to continue working towards being a model city, leading in the areas of promoting plant-based eating and reducing food-based emissions.