



Visions for a Healthier Community

*Full Report - Near South Side Food Access Work Group
(Winter 2014 - Columbus, Ohio)*



PARSONS
parsons avenue merchants association

THE FITNESS
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Local Matters

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PARTNERS

Parsons Avenue Merchants Association
Local Matters

SPONSORING PARTNER

The Fitness Loft

FACILITATORS

Noreen Warnock, Co-Founder and Director of Community Outreach - Local Matters
Shandell L. Jamal, Nonprofit and Strategic Business Consultant - Brainstorm Consulting Network LLC

FOOD ACCESS WORK GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Donna Bates, Parsons Avenue Merchants Association
Judy Czarnecki, Centripetal Strategies
Michael Doody, Kossuth Street Commonwealth Garden
Lauren Foster, Luna Burger
Carla Fountaine, Nationwide Children's Hospital
Lori Fry, Folsom and Pine Farm and Produce Market
Kathleen Gmeiner, South Side Health Advisory Committee (SSHAC)
Mike Green, Schumacher Place Civic Association
Minister Aaron K. Hopkins, Family Missionary Baptist Church
Samantha Hudson, South Side Neighborhood Pride Center
Craig King, South Side Community Ministries Food Pantry
Jeanne King, South Side Community Ministries Food Pantry
Bob Leighty, Parsons Avenue Merchants Association
Carl Lowe, Carl Lowe Farms
Gail Lowe, Columbus Public Health
Barbie Luna, Luna Burger

Megan Luna, Luna Burger
Caitlin Marquis, Fresh Foods Here
Mary McCarthy, Women's Small Business Accelerator
Monique McCoy, Local Matters
Cody Miller, Alchemy Juice Bar & Café
Jen Nuss, Luna Burger
Conor O'Leary, Folsom & Pine Farm
Jo Anne St. Clair, South Side Neighborhood Pride Center
Mark D. Stansbery, Barack Recreation Center
Glennon Sweeney, Kirwan Institute – The Ohio State University
Erin Synk, Parsons Avenue Merchants Association
Derrick Thompson, Resident
Stephanie Turner, The Salvation Army
Erin West, Church and Community Development for All People
Brian Williams, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC)
Matt Yannie, United Way of Central Ohio

*Thank you to **Barack Community Recreation Center** for hosting the Near South Side Food Planning Workgroup meetings.*

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Near South Side of Columbus, Ohio has a rich history of cultural diversity and commitment to community. Over the years, economic conditions have resulted in urban blight, poverty and decreased access to key community resources. Through a revitalization effort led by the City of Columbus, Parsons Avenue Merchants Association (PAMA) is working with a number of stakeholders to restore housing and economic opportunities to South Columbus. As a part of that effort, PAMA is working to improve access to healthy food and food education in the community. The geographic boundaries identified by PAMA for the Near South Side are Livingston Avenue on the north, Alum Creek on the east, Scioto River on the west, State Route 104 on the South.

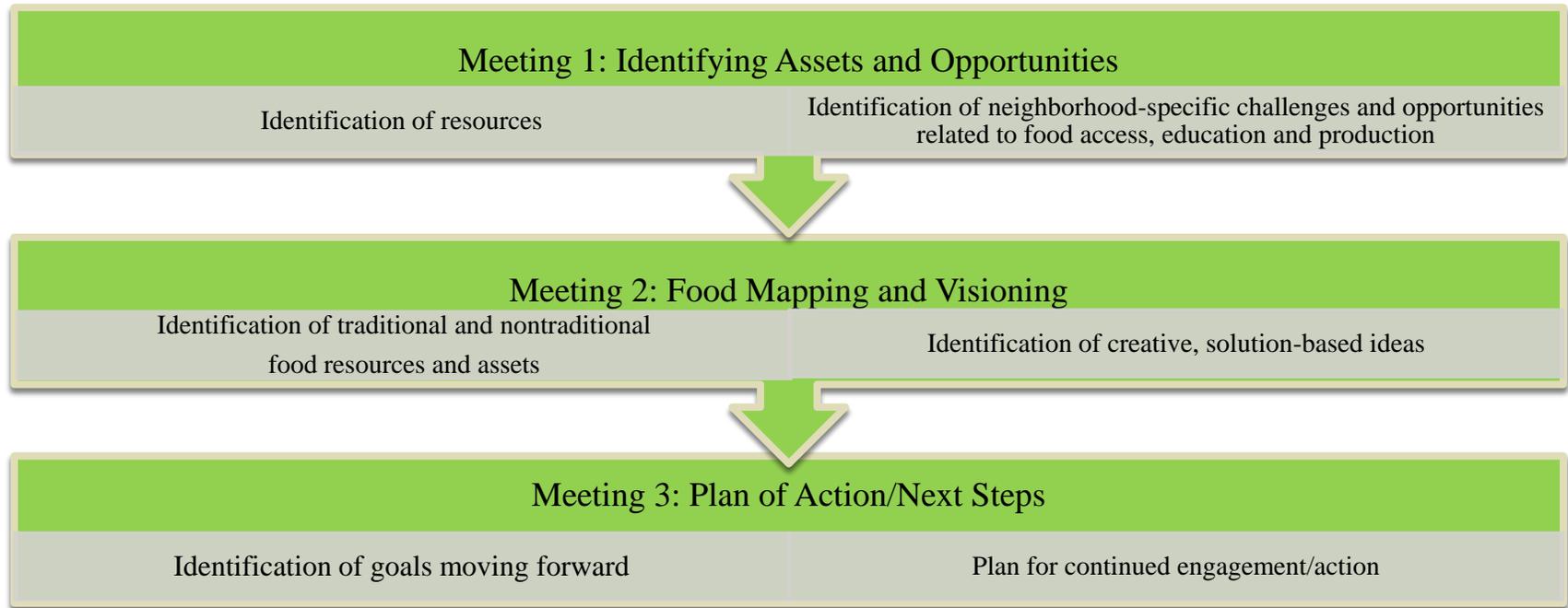
During Winter 2014, PAMA partnered with Local Matters (a Columbus nonprofit organization committed to improving healthy food access, education and community engagement) to assist with the facilitation of a series of small group meetings with community organizations, stakeholders and residents to explore solutions and define potential next steps for improving access to healthy food and nutritional education on the South Side of Columbus. Local Matters has conducted similar meetings on the West and Near East Sides of Columbus, Ohio, with the goal of better understanding community specific needs and community-led solutions to improving food access. The primary goals of the three-meeting community engagement process were:

- *To collect, share and gather information on food-related neighborhood assets - such as food education and food access - identified by participants.*
- *To map points of healthy food access and education that will display gaps in access and opportunities for improvement relative to community need.*
- *To engage individuals in generating visions of what they want and need in their community relative to food access, food production, and food education.*
- *To make recommendations for next steps according to the priorities identified by the neighborhood food planning process participants*

This report provides information on the processes, data, and ideas for exploration shared during the community engagement process. PAMA will use this information for continued engagement of participants in the development and implementation of a Neighborhood Food Plan that represents the community's collective vision for improving food access in the area and meets the specific needs of the Near South Side of Columbus, Ohio.



OUR PROCESS



Local Matters has been integral in the development of neighborhood food plans on the West Side and Near East Side (PACT Geographical area) of Columbus, Ohio, and used similar strategies for community engagement and participation on the Near South Side. The first phase of the community engagement process for the *Visions for Healthier Communities* project was to work with PAMA to identify potential meeting participants that represented key stakeholders and residents who were engaged in the economic development and revitalization of the area. The second phase of the project was to engage meeting participants in a three-meeting planning process to explore the specific needs of the community, map current conditions and develop a cohesive, actionable focus for the improving food access and food education in the area. The final phase of the project includes the release of this report and additional community engagement, planning and action to be led by PAMA.

Food plays a significant role in community building and can serve as a tool for building collaborations. Therefore, Local Matters provided a healthy meal at the beginning of each meeting, which led to interesting, informal conversations regarding the foods and food combinations served. The conversation helped foster an atmosphere of community and learning prior to each meeting's dialogue and team-building segments.

MEETING 1: OCTOBER 8, 2014 AT BARACK RECREATION CENTER

The purpose of the first meeting was to build relationships among the group and better understand individual roles in the local food system. This meeting provided an opportunity for engage community leaders, business owners, service providers and residents to share existing outlets for healthy food access and food education. Building collaboration and consensus among participants is a necessary and important part of the work to be completed during the three-meeting process, serving as a catalyst for future planning. Participants were encouraged to consider their opinions about the importance of food during a group exercise called “Food Is...”. Participants were split into three randomly assigned groups and asked to consider one of three topics – “food is life”, “food is love” and “food is money.” Groups then shared their perspectives in support of each statement, which allowed participants to explore the many different ways they view food, and how differing individual opinions could be considered and incorporated to support a collective idea.

During the meeting, attendees were asked to reflect and share their current work related to healthy food access, education, and engagement. The information shared by Meeting 1 attendees regarding their roles in the local food system and food related interests has been included as an appendix to this document. Participants also discussed gaps and opportunities in food access, food education and food production so they could begin to explore how the group would work together to develop community-specific suggestions and solutions.

Lessons learned/Observations

- Participants are engaged in a number of similar projects and community efforts that appeared to overlap with the overall meeting goals.
- Participants worked well together on the small-group activity, and were able to establish consensus without interference from the facilitators.
- There was a lack of racial, socioeconomic and professional diversity among participants; however, a wealth of information regarding community resources. Participants were encouraged to consider additional participants who could further aid in the identification of community-specific issues.

Significant Successes

Project Success	Factors That Supported Success
Building rapport among participants	Open dialogue format, small group project
Identification of resources	Working Group Conversation (individuals sharing their roles and experiences) and connections to food access and education
Identification of neighborhood resources and opportunities to leverage resources to better improve food access and education	Participants were engaged with one another and were eager to share their passion for and desire to improve food access, education and production, which revealed some overlap in the projects they are engaged in. The conversation included participants sharing upcoming community events and meetings and considering ways in which existing resources could be combined to achieve the specific goals of this project.
Identification of unique needs of the community	Many participants were involved with the revitalization efforts currently underway and were able to discuss and identify the unique, changing needs of the community. Participants also expressed a desire to make sure long term and current residents retained a voice in the community.

MEETING 2: OCTOBER 22, 2014 AT BARACK COMMUNITY CENTER

The purpose of the second meeting was to engage community leaders, business owners, service providers and residents to map food based assets, providers and locations on the South Side and to brainstorm ideas for developing a collective vision for improving food access, education and production in the area. Participants were asked to consider food-based assets beyond those that could be found on a search engine map, and to also include “hidden gems” such as food gathering places and neighborhood gardens. Discussions during Meeting 2 further explored the community’s comprehensive revitalization effort, and participants expressed that a key objective of the group was ensuring all residents have access to quality food.

Lessons learned/Observations

- Participants were knowledgeable of nontraditional food providers and resources in the area, which resulted in comprehensive maps of the area.
- Some of the participants struggled with the purpose of the small-group mapping exercise. They were concerned about redundancy among the participating small groups and the lack of accuracy. Noting that not all resources would be captured or noted on a Google Map, participants moved forward with the exercise after careful explanation from the facilitators.
- An additional participant from a local African-American church attended the meeting, and increased involvement from community organizations such as this and residents would have enhanced the community engagement process.

Significant Successes

Project Success	Factors That Supported Success
Encouraging creative solution based ideas that can have immediate impact	Given the wealth of resources and decision making and influencing capabilities of participants, the group was able to consider and determine the feasibility of their ideas.
Identification of Resources Beyond Traditional Sources	Working Group Conversation, Mapping and Visioning revealed community solutions such as informal food gathering places and personal gardens.

MEETING 3: DECEMBER 10, 2014 AT BARACK COMMUNITY CENTER

The purpose of the third meeting was to review the neighborhood map, develop creative solutions to primary problems raised in the previous meetings, and streamline the final approach moving forward. The group narrowed the list of 40 ideas to 3 actionable items they would like to explore for improving healthy food access and education in the Near South Side neighborhood:

Goal 1: Increase Community Education through Workshops

Members of the working group have come up with community-led solutions to increasing community education and awareness that include free workshops and cooking demonstrations at recreation centers, pantries, stores, community gardens and other locations throughout the community that residents typically visit. The goal is to provide education that is relevant, accessible and encourages residents to increase the number of healthy foods they

purchase and prepare for themselves and their families.

Goal 2: Establish a community garden network to increase the number of community gardens and to provide gardening and composting education

Members of the working group expressed a desire to develop a network of community gardens that may include a seed library for residents to access free or low cost seeds and educational workshops and resources on gardening and composting. The goal is to consolidate and leverage resources to maximize residents’ knowledge and participate in community gardening and beautification.

Goal 3: Improve Access to Quality of Food

Noting the area’s changing demographics and the lack of grocery retailers that offer healthy food options, participants considered a variety of solutions to improving healthy food access. These potential solutions included improving the variety and types of foods available at corner stores and using community influence to improve food offerings. The group is hopeful that by demonstrating the desire and need for healthier food, retailers will realize the profitability of improving food quality and diversity, while also ensuring healthy foods are affordable for all residents.

Lessons learned/Observations

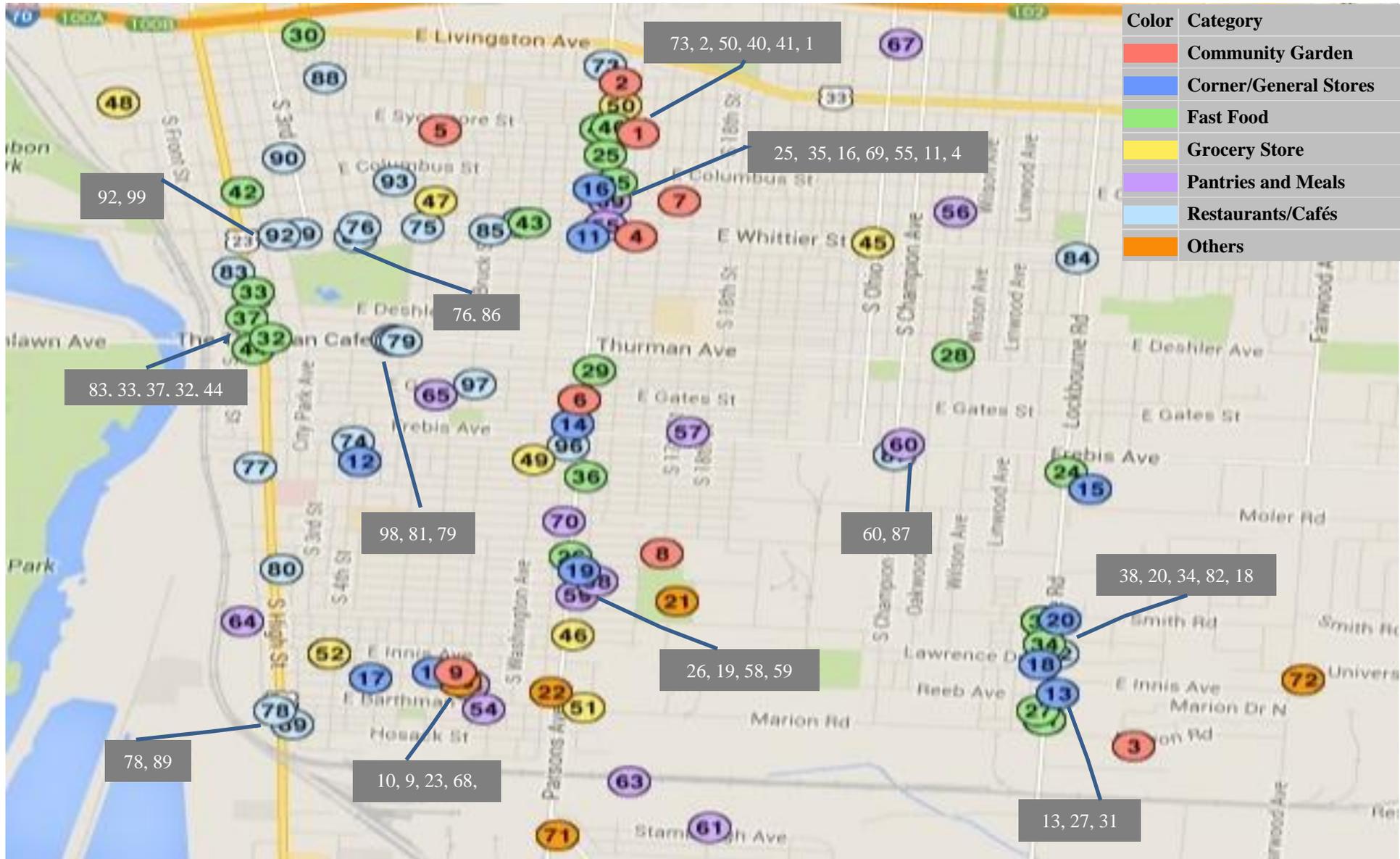
- Participants were particularly interested in exploring how industrial areas impact the proximity of locations for food access and education and how they may impede or advance continued economic food development. Participants discussed possibly re-purposing these areas as green/food hubs in the future.
- Participants were able to identify ways in which the findings of the *Visions for Healthier Communities* project could be used to build upon existing plans, resources and possibilities for the area’s development and revitalization.

Significant Successes

Project Success	Factors That Supported Success
Identification of feasible short-term goals	The final workgroup activity and discussion resulted in the group narrowing its future focus to feasible goals



NEAR SOUTH SIDE FOOD MAP



The geographic boundaries identified by PAMA for the Near South Side are Livingston Avenue on the north, Alum Creek on the east, Scioto River on the west, State Route 104 on the South. The Near South Side Food Map reflects locations identified by meeting participants, and is not a comprehensive representation of all of the community's food based businesses. Rather, it is a reflection of participants' perspective on the food landscape of the neighborhood, please also note that bars which serve food were also excluded from the map. During Meeting 2, participants also reflected on the unique topography of the Near South Side, which has a number of industrial areas which could possibly be redeveloped as green/food hubs.

COMMUNITY GARDENS

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. CD4AP Mike Dyle Community Garden | 4. Ganther's Place Vegetable Garden | 7. Kossuth Garden |
| 2. Community Garden at Aetna | 5. German Village Go Green Garden | 8. Lincoln Park Garden |
| 3. Community Garden and Food/Farm Stand | 6. Hal and Al's Community Garden | 9. SSLDC Secret Garden |

CORNER/GENERAL STORES

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| 10. Al's Market | 14. Family Dollar | 18. George's Food Market |
| 11. BP | 15. Family Dollar | 19. Parsons Market |
| 12. Buckeye Food Market | 16. Family Dollar | 20. Stop 'n Shop |
| 13. Dollar General | 17. G & W Carryout | |

OTHERS - FOOD EDUCATION PROVIDERS

- | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 21. Barack Recreation Center | 22. Maloney Health Center/ Moms 2 Be | 23. SSLDC Community Center |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|

FAST FOOD/RESTAURANTS

- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 24. China Bear | 31. Hunan King | 38. Subway |
| 25. Crazy Chicken | 32. Long John Silver's | 39. Subway |
| 26. Dairy Corner | 33. McDonald's | 40. Subway |
| 27. Dawg House Pizza | 34. Papa Joe's Pizza | 41. Sunshine Pizza |
| 28. Donatos | 35. Papa John's Pizza | 42. Taco Bell |
| 29. Grandma's Pizza | 36. Rally's | 43. Village Coney |
| 30. Harvest Pizzeria | 37. Subway | 44. White Castle |

GROCERY STORES

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------|
| 45. Firehouse Foods | 49. Kroger (Parsons Avenue) | Market |
| 46. Food Max | 50. Little Village's IGA | 53. Save-A-Lot |
| 47. Giant Eagle (German Village) | 51. Mae's Produce Stand | |
| 48. Kroger (Brewery District) | 52. Native American Indian Center Produce | |

FOOD PANTRIES & MEALS

- 54. Clair United Methodist Church
- 55. Community Development for All People (CD4AP)
- 56. Family Missionary Baptist Church Food Pantry
- 57. Gospel Light House Ministries
- 58. Hazel's House of Hope

- 59. Loaves & Fishes Hot Lunch
- 60. Lutheran Social Services Food Pantry
- 61. Mt. Carmel Baptist Food Pantry
- 62. Native American Indian Center of Central Ohio
- 63. Power of Prayer Food Pantry
- 64. Salvation Army

- 65. South Side Food Pantry
- 66. SSCM Food Pantry
- 67. St. John Learning Center
- 68. St. Lad's Food Pantry
- 69. Stowe Mission of Central Ohio
- 70. Wings of Hope

OTHER LOCATIONS

FOOD PRODUCTION and EQUIPMENT LOCATIONS

- 71. Columbus Castings
- 72. Ezzo Sausage

RESTAURANTS/CAFES

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 73. Alchemy Juice Bar and Café 74. Bake Me Happy Bakery 75. Barcelona 76. Brown Bag Deli 77. Buckeye Donuts 78. Dan's Drive In Diner 79. Easy Street Café 80. Explorers Club 81. German Village Coffee Shop | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 82. Golden Donuts & Diner 83. Gresso's 84. H. Johnson's Restaurant and Dairy Bar 85. Hey Hey Bar & Grill 86. Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams 87. Lady Nay's Caribbean Soul 88. Lindey's 89. Lois Mann's Family Restaurant 90. Max & Erma's | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 91. Planks 92. Roosters 93. Schmidt's German Village Restaurant 94. Skillet 95. Tato Heads 96. Tee Jaye's 97. The Red Brick Tap & Grill 98. Thurman Café 99. Winans Chocolates and Coffee |
|---|---|---|

PLACES RESIDENTS ACCESS FOOD OUTSIDE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

**Distance calculated from The Fitness Loft (625 Parsons Avenue Columbus, Ohio 43206)*

GROCERY STORES

Hills Market (Downtown) 1.3 miles 95 N. Grant Avenue Columbus, OH 43215

Giant Eagle Market District (Grandview) 5.0 miles 1270 Edgehill Road Columbus, Ohio 43212

Kroger Great Southern 5.2 miles 3637 S. High Street Groveport, OH 43207

Aldi (Great Southern) 5.4 miles 3600 S. High Street Columbus, OH 43207

Lucky's Market (Clintonville) 6.2 miles 2770 N. High Street Columbus, OH 43202

Giant Eagle (Easton) 10 miles 160 Easton Town Center Columbus, OH 43219

Trader Joe's (Easton) 11.0 miles 3888 Townsfair Way Columbus, OH 43219

Hills Market (Worthington) 15.0 miles 7860 Olentangy River Rd Columbus, OH 43235

Trader Joe's (Sawmill) 15.0 miles 6355 Sawmill Road Dublin, OH 43017

SUPER STORES

Wal-Mart (Great Southern) 5.3 miles 3579 S. High Street Columbus, OH 432074

Costco (Easton) 11.0 miles 3888 Stelzer Road Columbus, OH 43219

Sam's Club (Morse Road) 11.0 miles 3950 Morse Road Columbus, OH 43219

Costco (Polaris) 15.0 miles 1500 Gemini Place Columbus, OH 43240

Meijer 16.0 miles 6175 Sawmill Road Dublin, OH 43017

OTHER STORES/MARKETS

Near East Side Cooperative Market 1.5 miles 1117 Oak Street Columbus, Ohio 43205

North Market 2.4 miles 59 Spruce Street Columbus, OH 43215

Bexley Natural Market 5.3 miles 508 N Cassady Avenue Columbus, OH 43209

Clintonville Community Market 6.5 miles 200 Crestview Road Columbus, OH 43202

CAM International Market 11.0 miles 889 Bethel Road Columbus, OH 43214

La Michoacan Mexican Market 14.0 miles 5445 Bethel Sawmill Center Columbus, OH 43235

Andersons 15.0 miles 7000 Bent Tree Boulevard Columbus, OH 43235

VISIONS FOR A HEALTHIER FOOD COMMUNITY

Teach residents the importance of growing their own food

for a healthier community, which includes gardening and composting education.

Host neighborhood workshops

"Iron Chef"-themed, at community gathering places - churches, schools and community centers. to share food, recipes and build community.

Organize community food tours

to showcase community gardens and awareness of different restaurants, carryouts and markets that offer healthy food choices.

Provide quality food in the neighborhood

- fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, etc.

Organize and host food demos and education events

at reach families that normally wouldn't have access to them.

The items above indicate a few of the many ideas for improving food access, education and production. Additional ideas shared during Meeting 2 allowed participants to share ideas and discover similarities amongst the group regarding a vision for improving food access, availability and education in their community. Of the 40 ideas presented, several topics overlapped and revealed the key goals of the overall group. Participants began a visioning process by individually preparing a list of ideas, which were then shared with the group.

The numbers in parentheses after each idea indicate the number of participants who also shared related ideas during the group session. Sub-topics, which are featured below, represent specific, yet unique, supporting visions also raised by participants.

Visions for Education

1. **Host workshops at rec centers, pantries, stores, gardens and other locations to educate people about different foods and cooking styles (13)**
 - a. Establish test/prep kitchens in the community for residents to host a meal with a local chef (5)
 - b. Provide canning, preserving and seed-saving information (3)
 - c. Establish a "food bank restaurant" with an instructional kitchen and trained chef that offers free meals (each night a new group of people prepare the food and work together to educate each other and patrons on how to prepare and cook healthy meals)
 - d. Invite celebrity chefs to events
2. **Provide nutrition and food preparation education in schools and community centers (5)**
3. **Host cooking classes at grocery stores that focus on healthy/whole foods (2)**

4. Expand food education at John Maloney Center
5. Conduct South Side food tours where local vendors prepare food and share information with residents
6. Increase outreach among trusted community organizations and centers to develop and promoted messaging about health and nutrition education

Visions for Increased Access to Healthy Food

- 1. Host community meals, cooking events and competitions where people of various ages can cook and share different foods and recipes (6)**
 - a. “Iron Chef” style competitions could be held in schools and other community locations
 - b. Host late night dinners
2. Provide bulk cooking classes (frozen skillet meals for families)
3. Establish a Southside Farmer’s Market or CSA (4)
 - a. With year-round vs. seasonal produce
4. Attract and establish more mainstream grocers in the area (2)
5. Locate more churches to provide fresh produce giveaways
6. Identify food insecure members of the community and provide access to food and resources
7. Identify safe routes and establish walkable spaces with labeled paths leading to healthy food access points

Visions for Production/Gardening

- 1. Establish a community garden network with gardening and composting education (7)**
 - a. Provide information on different types of produce
 - b. Consolidate produce and limit waste
- 2. Increase the number of community gardens (7)**
 - a. Increase the number of backyard gardens (2)
 - b. Increase the prevalence of gardens per block (at least 1 per block) (2)
 - c. Provide in-yard garden support for households (supplies, soil testing, seeds, etc.)
 - d. Utilize vacant lots as community gardens
3. Establish seed libraries in gardens (4)
 - a. Provide opportunities for seed swaps (2)
4. Encourage residents to buy-in to community gardens to prevent endemic theft
5. Establish an edible forest (4)
 - a. On a large lot, possibly managed by OSU Extension Center or Franklin Park Conservatory
 - b. Supported and facilitated by partnerships with Local Matters, United Way, county and city government, funders, etc.
6. Build a community greenhouse (3)
 - a. Include aquaponics and hydroponics
7. Plant more fruit trees and berry bushes in existing green spaces
8. Establish an orchard for fruit, berries and nuts

Visions for Existing Corner and Grocery Stores

1. Decrease the number of corner stores/carryouts (and other “nutrient poor access points”) (2)
2. Improve the quality of food and store cleanliness at Parsons Avenue Kroger

3. Decrease the number of huge produce distributors to encourage the community to support smaller entities

Visions for Communication

1. Utilize the high school marching band to announce garden and food events in neighborhoods
2. Establish community information hubs for information about food education and events
 - a. Partner with carry-outs to disseminate information
 - b. Design easy-to-read, colorful information cards
3. Establish a food pantry communication network that helps connect social services

Visions for Community Partnerships/Business Development

1. Establish sit-down dining restaurants with local, healthy food options (3)
 - a. locations that offer smoked or rotisserie style meats
 - b. locations with inexpensive food choices
2. Establish a food research hub with food scientists and packaging experts
3. Establish a nice coffee shop on Parsons (N. of SR 104)
4. Establish a fresh produce food truck that delivers food to residents
5. Attract and open a store that features a variety of local products, including value-added food products
6. Establish a business incubator for food entrepreneurs that also provides space for food storage, processing, distribution and packaging
7. Establish a drive-thru produce store
8. Establish a pop-up vegan market

Miscellaneous

1. Empower people to organize, vote and become more involved in legislative processes (4)
 - a. Host food events that also address community concerns such as human trafficking and domestic violence
2. Educate the community about South Side history through resident testimonials and placing markers and literature throughout the community to instill pride in the community
3. Utilize food as an economic development tool through workforce and entrepreneurship training (3)
 - a. A facility for training and actual employment that includes training and job opportunities related to food preservation, consolidation and distribution (with Luna Burger Production serving as an anchor) (2)
4. Host a food truck festival
5. Decrease reliance on food pantries by encouraging people to overcome the need to use the pantry
6. Host outreach events to identify gaps in food access and find new community leaders
7. Provide wellness programs and chronic disease management, prevention and treatment in community centers
8. Host a food & garden festival

TOP 3 IDEAS/FINAL GOALS FOR A HEALTHIER FOOD COMMUNITY

During Meeting 3, participants refined the list of the top 5 ideas to 2 ideas. Noting the absence of a final goal directly related to the primary purpose for the meeting (improving food access) from the participants' list of top ideas, participants chose to clearly define an actionable goal that addressed improving access and the quality of food in the community. The ideas were refined, as illustrated below, to result in 3 actionable goals for the future.



NEXT STEPS

As a result of the small group meetings, the participants expressed their desire to focus on three of the ideas presented. Future exploration of these ideas will be led by PAMA, who will lead the efforts to bring the plans brought forth in the community meetings to fruition with continued engagement of food access planning work group members. Local Matters has recommended that PAMA expand their community engagement process to include a diverse mix of perspectives, socioeconomic statuses that better represent the community's collective voices, prior to moving forward with the development of a neighborhood food plan. Information from the first three meetings has contributed to the planning for the South Columbus Fresh Food Campus, a three-site development that will house food-based businesses, a community market and food education opportunities. Additional information and updates on the project will be provided by PAMA in subsequent reports.

Building on the planning and community engagement initiated over the past year, Local Matters has partnered with Franklin County and the City of Columbus to develop the Columbus—Franklin County Food Action Plan - an effort to create a stronger, more sustainable local food system. The Columbus—Franklin County Food Action Plan will focus on:

- improving access to nutritious, affordable food, and education about healthy food
- increasing the role of food in economic development
- preventing food-related waste
- coordination and communication among existing food resources and agencies

The plan, expected to be released summer 2016, will incorporate the input of local food experts and stakeholder groups to develop recommendations that will make it easier for Columbus residents to access nutritious foods. Additional information and updates will be provided online at www.local-matters.org.