

Executive Summary

Guiding the decisions of food retailers- and providing support for them- in order to ensure equitable access to food and promote livable, walkable neighborhoods is a difficult task faced by non-profit organizations and local governments in cities across the nation. Since all people require food on a daily basis and shop for it frequently, food retailers should be recognized as far more than simply another retail establishment. However, even as many municipal governments realize this, there are limited ways for cities to intervene in support for grocery stores when particular parcels of land are owned and controlled in the private realm. Market forces and consumer behavior all too often work against the success and proliferation of small grocery stores distributed equitably across the City.

We currently enjoy a diversity of food choices across our city, though some are far less accessible to citizens without vehicles, or those living in neighborhoods without grocery stores. Recent closures across the city have sparked significant concern and interest among citizens and City leaders. Ensuring *equitable access to food*, promoting *livable and walkable neighborhoods*, and cultivating *entrepreneurial opportunities* are important long-term objectives for the City of Madison to consider in the context of preserving and supporting grocery stores across the city.

For the benefit of the Madison Neighborhood Grocery Store Advisory Group convened by the Mayor in Summer 2003, this report has been prepared to provide a starting point from which the City of Madison can work to preserve and encourage grocery stores as important components of healthy neighborhoods across the city. After reviewing past city interventions with grocery stores and providing updates on recently closed sites, the general goals, high-priority policies, and a more detailed suggested in this report are as follows:

General Goals

- 1) Retain a diversity of food buying options and preserve maximum access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food choices for all Madison residents.**

- 2) Encourage the development of small and medium sized grocery stores in developing and re-developing neighborhoods to provide food-purchasing options within proximity to residents in neighborhoods across the City of Madison.**

- 3) Encourage food related entrepreneurial & employment opportunities that support one or both of the above goals.**

- 4) Support Madison-owned grocery stores to the extent possible.**

High-Priority Policies

- 1) **Redevelopment Strategy:** Where severe need for a grocery store is shown outside of existing redevelopment districts, assessments of blight in the area may be undertaken to determine whether or not the creation of a Redevelopment District is an appropriate way to initiate City involvement.
- 2) **Financial Assistance:** As food retailers operate on an extremely tight margin, the City should pursue ways to support food retail within the Capital Revolving Loan Program, Tax Increment Financing, and other grants and loans.
- 3) **Food Distribution:** As small and independent grocers often face difficulties accessing economical food distribution networks, the City should examine ways to support food distribution networks that prioritize area food producers and local food retailers simultaneously.

Policy Framework

(Please see pp. 27-30 in the report for more detailed discussion about the following suggestions)

Comprehensive Plan Process

- *Where possible, specific language should be included in the Comprehensive Plan to identify grocery stores as important considerations for developing and redeveloping neighborhoods.*

Land Use Regulation

- *During the review and negotiation process for Planned Unit Developments and mixed-use development proposals within commercial zones, possibilities for including food retail should be considered and analyzed (see page 4 for examples).*
- *When possible, planning staff and property owners should initiate Shared Parking negotiations between potential grocers and nearby businesses in order to minimize the need for new surface parking.*

Financial Assistance

- *While essentially operating in the same way, CDBG and the Capital Revolving Loan Program could set-aside a percentage of their funds each year for food retail businesses, to ensure that among all small businesses, applicants from food retail businesses providing entrepreneurial and employment opportunities are identified and supported in Madison neighborhoods.*
- *Within the Capital Revolving Loan Program, funds could be dedicated for equipment upgrades and facade improvements for existing grocery stores.*

- *When proposed TIF districts are reviewed, considerations should be made regarding grocery store access and the need in and surrounding the proposed district.*
- *Within existing TIF districts, where a grocery store would be appropriate, recruitment of and financial assistance for grocery stores should be a priority.*
- *Within existing TIF districts, where a grocery store (alone or within a mixed-use development) would be appropriate, but lack of adequate parking prevents a major barrier, the financial feasibility of providing support for parking infrastructure with Tax Increment should be assessed.*
- *Through Neighborhood Planning Grant programs, neighborhood associations should be able to gain financial support for administering market surveys to aide in recruitment of grocery stores appropriate to serve neighborhood needs.*
- *Further, City staff could perform outreach to encourage neighborhood groups to apply for grants for this purpose.*

Real Estate Strategy

- *Within existing Redevelopment Districts, City staff may assess the need for neighborhood grocery stores and the suitability of blighted parcels. If both inadequate food retail access and suitable sites are discovered, discussions could be initiated with landowners and developers to determine the feasibility of locating a grocer in the district.*
- *Depending on the level of need for a grocery, and the suitability of parcels, municipal bonds and or condemnation should be considered as methods by which the City can support improvements on the blighted sites to attract grocery stores.*
- *Where severe need for a grocery store is shown outside of existing redevelopment districts, assessments of blight in the area may be undertaken to determine whether or not the creation of a Redevelopment District is an appropriate way to initiate City involvement.*

Market Analysis

- *The Department of Planning and Development should assess the need for upgrades of market analysis software to more efficiently and accurately capture neighborhood food needs.*
- *As market analyses for food retail are completed, procedures and findings can be shared and utilized as educational tools for citizens*

Other Options and Related Opportunities

- *Pursue funding for the creation of a Food Policy Council, possibly as a partnership with Dane County*
- *Support a focused campaign to inform citizens of existing Metro transit options to and from grocery stores*
- *Evaluate the transportation needs of senior citizens in Madison, and expand public transportation options to grocery stores or support food delivery programs accordingly*

- *Evaluate transportation needs in areas with a high concentration of residents without vehicles, and provide more frequent and/or more direct public transportation routes to and from grocery stores*
- *Explore opportunities to work with and subsidize taxi companies to provide free or reduced rates to full-service grocery stores for those that meet a particular set of criteria, such as participants in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program or food stamp recipients*
- *The City's Energy Task Force, MG&E, and the Neighborhood Grocery Store Advisory Group could initiate a joint research effort to document current energy use in Madison's grocery stores, compile information on state and federal support programs supporting energy efficiency, and distribute this information to business owners*
- *Provide support for the Centralized Agriculture and Food Facility (CAFF) project as a means to support area farmers and scale up the distribution of fresh and local foods to grocery stores of all sizes, foodservice institutions, and restaurants*