ACTION OPTIONS TO ADDRESS AND MITIGATE THE FOOD DESERT IN THE SOUTHEAST COMMUNITY OF NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA

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Executive summary of actions options

I. Embrace and address the importance of healthy food.
   i. Establish a food desert task force comprised of community members, business leaders and government representatives. 
      *If interested, our team will help establish this task force and help integrate it into the community.*
   ii. Continue to build community and education through community gardens.  
       *Community gardens build and nurture community capacity -- the sum total of commitment, resources and skills that a community can mobilize and deploy to address the community’s problems and strengthen community assets. They enhance nutrition and physical activity, while promoting the role of public health in improving quality of life.*
   iii. Create programming for community members on nutrition topics, agriculture and gardening, and environmentally sustainable food practices.  
       *Residents of the Southeast Community could benefit greatly from continuing education programs that help spread awareness on issues of food and nutrition and other environmentally sensitive issues.*
   iv. Make connections with nearby farmers to establish a farmers market that utilizes EBT.  
       *Making connections and building relationships with nearby farmers is the first step in bringing a farmers market to the Southeast Community. There exists a great structure meant to house a farmers market yet it stands empty most of the time. Remedying this would open up the opportunity for local farmers and residents alike.*
   v. Incorporate nutrition and agriculture in the public school curriculum.  
       *Establishing a garden program in schools allows students to experience hands-on lessons in biology and ecology, horticulture, wellness and nutrition, recycling, composting, and community building.*

II. Improve access to healthy food.
   i. Bring real food to corner stores though a corner store initiative.  
      *Many low-income families do not have the means to reach a full service grocery store leaving them to fill most of their nutritional needs at convenience stores. Most convenience stores do not stock fresh produce, dairy and/or meats. A corner store initiative works with local store owners to bring in healthy options to their stores.*
   ii. Encourage the development of mobile markets.  
      *Mobile markets bring fresh produce to locations more accessible to residents. They can expand the reach of a local grocer or be used to distribute produce grown in a community garden.*
   iii. Improve transportation to existing grocers.  
      *Improving transportation makes it easier for community members to shop more frequently, healthily and less stressfully.*
   iv. Provide online grocery shopping and home delivery to residents of the Southeast Community.  
      *Right now there are many online grocery shopping opportunities around Virginia. Few service the Southeast Community of Newport News. Exploring new ways to bring this type of service to the Community could help mitigate the problem of food access.*
   v. Establish food hubs.  
      *Offer food hubs as an exciting bridge between food producers and consumers. They are an opportunity for communities to make healthy food sourcing a profitable enterprise for producers, distributors, and retailers, while improving access to local foods.*
   vi. Develop a food cooperative for gathering, processing and distributing food in the Southeast Community.  
      *Develop a food cooperative for gathering, processing and distributing food in the Southeast Community.*
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Introduction

According to the USDA, “food deserts are defined as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.” They are generally census tracts that “meet low-income and low-access thresholds” (USDA, n.d.). Food deserts go hand in hand with food insecurity as leading causes of poor nutrition and health. The Southeast Community, located at the southern tip of Newport News, is a low-income community with low vehicle access. It is an underserved, impoverished urban area that has had little to no access to fresh fruits and vegetables for many years. When the Fresh Pride market closed in 2014, residents lost access to the only grocery store within several miles.

This report describes options that the Greater Southeast Development Corporation (GSDC) and others in the community can and should explore to increase the availability and consumption of fresh produce in the Southeast Community. Success will not come easy. The community and all its stakeholders will have to work together if they want their community to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. They will have to work even harder to solve all the other problems entangled within the community. This document emphasizes these core components of success and outlines potential strategies to use them as a basis to build a stronger, healthier community focusing on the problem of the food desert.
Detailed action options

*This section explores and explains action options for the various stakeholders within Newport News, Virginia.*

**Embrace and address the importance of healthy food.**

i. Establish a *food desert task force* comprised of community members, business leaders and government representatives.

   A task force focused on the issue of food deserts could facilitate communication and discussion about ongoing issues and ways to solve them. The Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Task Force based out of Houston, Texas could serve as a model. This group was organized in 1989 by residents that live in the Fifth Ward community, a community facing many of the same challenges as the Southeast Community.

   The vision for a task force in Newport News is to gather a group of community leaders and connect them to the city in order that their voices may be heard in the redevelopment and revitalization of Newport News, starting with the new shopping center and Jim’s Market. These leaders would be chosen by other community members and may come from the GSDC, city government, corner stores, churches, schools, local businesses, and/or the community at large. Fifth Ward’s board contains professors, pastors, attorneys, business owners, planning directors and more.

   The task force will have formal meetings with the community on a monthly basis beginning immediately after the New Year. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill will initiate the organizational leadership until April of 2016 when responsibilities will be passed onto community leaders within the task force. Again, the purpose of this group would be to open up lines of communication between citizens and the city government so that members of the Southeast Community have a voice in the government and the future of the Southeast Community of Newport News. This would be a win-win for the city and for the Southeast Community because the Southeast Community wants a grocery store with local leadership and the city government is working toward building bridges through community collaboration.

   The task force could also partner with outside partners facilitated by prominent contacts both within the community and outside of it. These partnerships could bring additional funding and insight to the grassroots movement.

ii. Continue to build community and education through *community gardens.*

While community gardens by themselves do not produce enough fruits and vegetables to increase the availability of fresh food substantially, they are great for building community engagement and knowledge of food (Guitart et al, 2012). Gardening provides people with a sense of ownership over their food, a deeper appreciation of where fresh food comes from, and hands-on experience with sustainable practices and environmental stewardship (UW Cooperative Extension, 1998). It has been noted that many children and some adults in the Southeast Community have little experience with eating and preparing fresh produce. NC Cooperative Extension encourages the creations of themed garden plots.
Themed plots, such as “salsa plots” with tomatoes, onions, jalapenos and cilantro, connect the garden produce to foods people already enjoy; and “salad plots” with lettuce, spinach, carrots and bell peppers introduce people to food they may not eat as often (NC Cooperative Extension, 2013). Themed plots also show people the monetary value of what they produce, because people know how much salsa or a salad costs at the store.

It is by increasing familiarity with and taste for fresh food that community gardens increase fruit and vegetable intake (Carney et al., 2011). However, initial unfamiliarity with community gardens and gardening may inhibit people from ever stepping foot inside the metaphorical gate. To lower this inhibition, gardens have found that official groundbreaking ceremonies help welcome people into the garden space, and garden potluck parties and fun workday activities help keep them there (Gough & Accordino, 2013). The benefits of community engagement cannot be understated, for it is through the development of human and social capital that gardens have the greatest potential to promote food security (Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014). As the adage goes: in community gardening, ‘community’ comes first. Not only is community building a primary goal of community garden initiatives, but it is community volunteers that operate the gardens, and community support that legitimizes the use of the garden space.

According to a comparative study of community gardens in the US, the most common cause of community garden failure is inability to secure land tenure (Sheldon, 2010). Annual land lease agreements create uncertainty for garden organizers and instability for community members. Therefore, successful gardens should aim to secure leases in 3-5 year periods. Lease agreements with local government or through established non-profits are preferable to agreements with private landowners, and the recognition and facilitation of the garden space by the City helps establish legitimacy of the garden. In Hamilton, Ontario, the Parks Department subsumed community gardens, providing them the same zoning protections as public parks, while heavily soliciting community input during this process (Jerme & Wakefield 2013). The city government of Detroit implemented adopt-a-lot zoning in city ordinances, which lays a pathway toward long-term land security for those who demonstrate an ability to revitalize vacant lots and to “green” urban spaces. This zoning worked especially well in neighborhoods demographically similar to the Southeast Community (Bittman, 2011). Community gardens increase the property value of vacant lots (Krusky et al. 2014), though this benefit serves residents best when it adds value to the community without gentrifying it (Wolch et al. 2014). Community gardens in Denver, meanwhile, are collectively managed under the umbrella of the nonprofit Denver Urban Gardens (DUG). Local church groups sometimes operate smaller community gardens (Sheldon 2010). Moton Community House and the Newport News city government should collaboratively navigate these possibilities to see which would be best for the Southeast Community.

Following land insecurity, failure to obtain funding is the second leading cause of garden failure (Sheldon, 2010). Initial funding and supplies for community gardens are sometimes obtained through tool drives and donations from gardening centers like Home Depot, Lowe’s, Ace Hardware, and Southern States. Long-term funding is best secured through an established nonprofit with 501(c)(3) status or, if feasible, plot fees from garden members. Often, grants ask for concrete, quantitative garden metrics to demonstrate garden efficacy and worth. Types and amount of food grown, number of
garden members, satisfaction surveys, and costs of operation are key pieces of information that strengthen applications and allow for internal assessment and improvement (CoDyre et al. 2014).

iii. Create **programming for community members** on nutrition topics, agriculture and gardening, and environmentally sustainable food practices.

In order for people to improve food accessibility, community members must educate themselves on the topics of sustainable and healthy eating, along with nutritional needs and the importance of sustainable agriculture. It is important for the educational movement to be born from the community members, as the need of the community should be the driving force behind it. In previous studies, the most long-lasting success stories come from programs with full community involvement (Henryks 2011).

Programs or workshops for community members are the best way to get people aware of the issues in Newport News. Workshops help the community gain a sense of pride about their community, and also develop different desirable skills for people looking for work. In addition, involvement of different community members in workshops helps stimulate community empowerment along with family bonding through hands-on learning. A study that investigated community gardens in California found that 69% of kids were working alongside their families. This example of ground up involvement around good nutrition with both children and adults significantly increases vegetable intake and improves diet (Carney 2012). This kind of positive result is something that Newport News would benefit from as it will stimulate community involvement, families spending time together, and overall education on nutrition and improvement of fresh food intake.

The GSDC could promote different kinds of workshops, each having a different target audience that works with the garden in different ways. Other styles of workshops with kids also have great potential. Incorporating a youth leadership workshop also will help elevate the community to a higher standard of awareness of important local issues. Afterschool programs allow kids to have a structured schedule and still learn about important issues that affect or will affect them. Programs that give this kind of structure to a child have long-term effects of better mental health and performance in school lasting into young adulthood (Frazier 2007). A successful leadership program run by Cricket Lane of Chapel Hill, North Carolina is known as the Carolina Creed Program. It is a program for student athletes at UNC Chapel Hill that embodies leadership skills based on Tim Elmore’s book *Habitudes* (Elmore 2004). Creed works with college athletes and young athletes in workshops that encourage positive leadership skills that impact the community in positive ways. Creed has also had great success with day workshops in middle schools throughout North Carolina (Lane 2015). A program targeting young athletes about leadership and nutrition helps spread awareness and encourage kids’ involvement. The Creed program sets forth strong moral guidelines for students to follow that they can later carry throughout their day-to-day experiences. A day leadership workshop with students, paired with learning in the gardens, could help empower young students and encourage them to become more involved with sustainable living.
The GSDC has already conducted successful community outreach workshops that have been facilitated through the Moton Community Center. For example, the Go Green Expo through GSDC held in the fall of 2015 helped bring education to the community (A. Jeng 2015). Jim’s Local Market is also considering education as a priority. The supermarket intends to design a community room that will be used for health classes. Jim’s also plans to create a consumer panel and sponsor financial literacy training. In order to continue this upward trend in education, GSDC needs to continue the work it has been doing with community members and continue to expand the audience base, in addition to working with Jim’s local market and places like it to establish a structured and permanent education program. Educational materials are hard to come by, however many already exist within the Edible Schoolyard Database. These educational materials, while meant for school children, also give good ground rules for gardening and nutrition for adults.

iv. Make connections with nearby farmer’s to establish a farmers market that utilizes EBT.

Farmer’s markets offer the unique opportunity to bring farmers and community members together. Carolyn Dimitri, an associate professor of food studies at New York University and lead author of the study in the journal Food Policy said, “In terms of healthy food options, farmers market incentives may be able to bring a low-income person onto the same playing field as those with greater means” (Harrison, 2014). It is evident that economically disadvantaged families tend to consume diets low in fruits and vegetables, partially due to poor access to healthy food and their inability to pay for it. Farmers markets may help fill in gaps in the Southeast Community of Newport News where there is a lack of access to fresh, healthy food.

The Southeast Community could be to create a farmers market in partnership with organizations such as the National Black Farmers Association (NBFA). While this specific organization does not have a background in farmers markets nor food deserts, their group fights against hunger and attempts to secure food sovereignty. In order to achieve effectiveness, partnerships with local farmers will be imperative. Working with groups, such as the NBFA, with missions that align to promote food security are groups that could potentially provide additional expertise in future projects. Having this organization as an ally when reaching out to local farmers for support with a farmers market could be extremely helpful.

In addition, the use of EBT within the farmers market is a way to improve general access to healthy options. One in four farmers market in the US accepts SNAP benefits (Harrison, 2014). While food assistance programs can fail to address nutritional quality - where SNAP benefits can be used to buy ice cream and soda – farmers market incentives can only be used on fresh produce, increasing their potential to improve consumers’ diets. Farmers markets provide the consumer with a variety of food choices that are nothing but healthy. A study from the University of California at Berkely found that the Richmond Certified Farmers’ Market was successful in providing access to healthy foods to a local population that was limited or without access to healthy foods (Boos, 2012). In order to create an equitable food environment where people have equal access to the same healthy
food options, food support programs were available. Accepting EBT eliminates a cost barrier for many low-income people, and is a crucial means of improving food accessibility (Kantor, 2011).

v. Incorporate nutrition and agriculture in the public school curriculum.

Incorporating gardens and food into a school system is essential for education of the population and future generations to come. School garden programs provide students the opportunity to learn outside of a school setting while still furthering their education through hands-on and practical knowledge. The formative years of a child’s life – 2nd through 4th grades – help determine their eating habits to come. That is why it is important to reach out to children at young ages, so they have access and willingness to eat healthfully (Sturm and Datar 2005). Small changes, like what kids eat in their school systems, have a lasting impact on kid’s health choices later in life.

Learning in a school garden setting is an approach that allows many students to get a new perspective on difficult subjects, especially kids with learning disabilities. The Edible Schoolyard Project, which was founded in Berkeley, California, is one that creates a hybridization of education in the classroom with gardening outdoors (Laird 2013). Students are encouraged to grow their own food and understand their nutrition. Kids are able to connect gardening into their classrooms, and this kind of forward thinking education also encourages more sustainable and “green” thinking in schools overall.

Kids are more willing to eat healthfully and be conscious of what they are eating when they grow the food themselves. Including a school garden into school curriculum allows kids to see the process of growing food and become more interested in their personal vegetable intake and nutrition (Liesel, 2009). While this part of the food movement takes place in the school, involving family and community members is key to success. There must be a commitment to nutritional education and school gardens at every level in order for success. For example, some successful school garden programs include school workers like bus drivers or cooks in the cafeteria (Block 2012). The greater participation of the school and community members will result in greater success of the overall program.

Within Newport News, The New Moton Community House can easily include schools through field trips and other hands-on day workshops with students. The GSDC can continue this legacy by acting as a resource of knowledge for schools that hope to utilize a hands-on learning approach to school gardens. Resources for educational materials can easily be found on the Edible Schoolyard Website in PDF form (Laird 2013).

**Improve access to healthy food**

i. Bring real food to corner stores though a corner store initiative.

In many communities that do not have a full service grocer, residents use corner stores for the majority of their food purchases. Studies have shown that youth who live in urban areas with low food access rely on corner stores for a majority of their calories.
(USDA, 2009). The majority of these calories come from chips, sodas and non-nutritious foods, because that is all most corner stores offer.

The idea of putting healthy options in corner stores is a relatively new one. In the past ten years there have been many different programs that work with corner stores in urban areas to expand their product selection and include healthier options. Healthier options not only mean the possibility of better health for the consumers but also the opportunity for greater profits for the corner stores (The Food Trust, 2014a). In Chicago, Walgreens started selling expanded selections of healthy foods in places identified as food deserts. Customers responded quite positively and many people have been asking Walgreens if other stores of theirs will expand (Walker, 2010). The Healthy Corner Store Initiative in Philadelphia started by The Food Trust supports corner stores in their transition to becoming healthy options for the community. Their program includes increasing store capacity through marketing, infrastructure and partners. They also partner with local schools and the community to increase education and awareness (The Food Trust, 2012). Offshoots of this project can be found throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey as a part of The Healthy Corner Store Network.

Among different options to mitigate food desert effects, a corner store initiative makes a relatively large impact. It is easy to set up as it uses existing businesses, and it gives back to the community with economic as well as nutritional improvements for the residents. If a corner store initiative is to be started in a new area, The Food Trust has resources ranging from steps to getting started to recipe cards to give out to customers (The Food Trust, 2014b). Partnering with local food providers from community gardens to larger grocers are all possibilities (Tricycle Gardens). There is significant funding for corner stores who wish to expand their product selection in food desert communities (See Appendix B).

ii. Encourage the development of mobile markets.

Mobile markets allow direct distributions of fresh produce to the local community. Successful mobile markets sometimes opt to open a temporary market at locations such as community centers, churches, health clinics, schools and public/senior housing. Mobile markets can even drive around neighborhoods making it even easier for individuals and families to purchase fresh food.

Local businesses, food pantries, food banks and religious organizations all have the capacity to run a mobile market. Creating a mobile market for the Southeast Community could be instrumental in getting fresh produce to families on a much needed regular basis. Since the market would be in the form of a vehicle (most likely a truck), the market would be able to access locations like senior homes, government housing areas, and low-income communities where families cannot easily travel to the grocery.

Mobile markets also offer the unique opportunity to provide nutritional education, explain how to cook varied fruits and vegetables, give out jump ropes to children, and provide “prescription produce” matching what doctors recommend for individuals suffering from ailments such as diabetes or heart disease (Staton, 2015). Nutritional information is helpful to people of all ages and can further facilitate understanding of the
long terms effects of eating unhealthy on a frequent basis. It would also be important for the Southeast Community mobile markets to accept cash, credit cards, and SNAP/EBT (Indiana University Health, 2013).

In order to establish a mobile market in Southeast Newport News, it is necessary to find providers/sources, hire a director, and build community trust. Providers give or sell the produce to the mobile market, but the produce for mobile markets is often collected as donations. A program called “Plant A Row” (PAR) encourages individuals to grow extra vegetables in their garden and donate them to the mobile market. The director operates and manages the food truck and also collects the produce from the providers. Lastly, there must be considerable community buy-in. Built upon a dependable customer base, a regular route for the truck is established, and over time, people learn that they can rely on the market and the locations the market serves.

There are many successful examples of mobile markets across the country. The Interfaith Food Shuttle, in the North Carolina Triangle region, delivers healthy, hot meals to members of the community, especially to children during out of school hours. This shuttle promotes physical exercise by giving out jump ropes, providing nutritional education, and giving fresh produce to families. The shuttle receives fresh produce from local farms the day before distribution and keeps the produce fresh in a refrigerated truck (Staton, 2015). Another successful mobile market, “Peaches and Greens,” is located in Detroit, Michigan. Founded when a local grocery store purchased a low cost, used truck, “Peaches and Greens” sells produce at a decent price and functions like a small produce market. The drivers and owners make a large effort to connect with the community and investigate what the community needs using fliers and personal conversation. Similar to an ice cream truck, “Peaches and Greens” drives through local neighborhoods, and over time, people learn to come out and greet the truck. “Peaches and Greens” also allows families and individuals to place orders for delivery to ensure the truck has what the customers desire. “Peaches and Greens” even expands their routes over the winter (Detroit Community Markets, 2015). Mobile markets such as “Peaches and Greens” have helped alleviate the food desert in their region and also increased accessibility to healthy food without increasing trips to the grocery store.

There are many benefits to establishing mobile markets in the Southeast Community. Mobile markets bring fresh food directly to the area and often provide educational information about nutrition. A mobile market could play a significant role in diminishing the food desert and getting healthy, nutritious meals into the hands of people who need them.

iii. Improve transportation to existing grocers.

Considering the travel time, the time it takes to purchase groceries, and the difficulties in carrying bags of groceries on and off the bus, shopping for groceries is a challenge for residents of the Southeast Community. There are several options to help improve transportation to existing grocery stores, including scheduling more Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) buses to commute through this area and setting up a private transportation system whose primary function is to take people to and from the grocery store.
Bus routes are established by request from businesses, communities, and the city commissioners. HRT employees conduct surveys each year to locate possible places to establish new routes or expand already established routes. In order for a new route to become a reality, the route suggestions must be approved by the commissioners. HRT’s governing body is the Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads (TDCHR). It consists of the chairman of the Commonwealth Transportation Board and 12 representatives. There are 2 representatives from each of the following cities: Newport News, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Hampton, Portsmouth, and Norfolk. One representative is an elected official and the second is a citizen representative from the city. The two current Newport News commissioners are Commissioner Tanner and Commissioner Woodberry (or Dr. Woodberry). These commissioners meet once a month to discuss the needs and wants of the citizens of their respective city (Hampton Roads Transit: Governing Board, 2015). In order for a new route to be established, the commissioners must vote for the installation of the route and deem it necessary and appropriate. The city commissioners have the final say on the routes and services within Newport News, because the city will be paying for the service. Often times routes are revised and services are added on a yearly budget.

In order to improve public transportation to existing grocers, the Southeast Community needs someone who is willing to speak for the region and acknowledge the needs of the community. A thorough assessment of the routes which would improve food accessibility in the Community should be conducted. After completing this assessment, a representative from the community needs to contact the Newport News city commissioners, outline the route(s) to be established, and articulate why the changes are necessary to the community. This will take strong support and backing of the community and appropriate contact with the commissioners. Providing the commissioners with clear reasons why these transportation routes should be established and how these new, improved routes could strengthen the Southeast community by both increasing food access, community communication, and the overall mobility of the Southeast Community is essential (M. Stemple, personal communication, 2015).

Jim Scanlon, the owner of the upcoming grocery store “Jim’s Local Market,” is developing strategies to facilitate the commute to and from his store. Some of his ideas include providing vouchers to residents to take public transportation to his store free of charge and even the possibility of providing a private shuttle for community members. Jim’s ideas address financial constraints imposed by bus fares that could prevent residents from visiting the grocery store whenever needed (J. Scanlon, personal communication, 2015). These ideas should be expanded upon and brought to the community for additional feedback if they are to be of the most impact.

Increasing public transportation in the Southeast Community would have several benefits. It would increase food access by allowing individuals to travel more easily to Jim’s grocery store in the Southeast and also to grocery stores further north. Better public transportation can also make it easier for individuals to commute to and from work, increasing job access to individuals in the community. Having better access to jobs and food, especially fresh produce, can enhance the health and prosperity of the Southeast Community.
iv. Provide **online grocery shopping** and home delivery to residents of the Southeast Community.

With the advent of the Internet, many grocers now offer home delivery services. Some grocers are entirely based online and some online shopping businesses have expanded into selling food products. The popular grocery store Safeway offers grocery delivery straight to people’s door in various locations throughout the country. The service is unfortunately not available in the Southeast Community (Safeway, 2015). Walmart and Amazon offer delivery of non-perishable items through their normal product delivery shipping services (Amazon, 2015; Walmart, 2015). Most of these products are sold in bulk at prices even more discounted than in-store prices. Amazon has recently started a service for its Prime members that delivers household staples at low prices in regular quantities.

These developments can be a great option for people living in food deserts. Peapod, the largest online grocer, is used widely by residents living in Chicago food deserts (Lang, 2014). However, the residents who use it may not be those most in need, and an online grocery option limits accessibility by requiring an Internet connection. The Virtual Supermarket in Baltimore realized this and used part of its grant money to increase computer and internet access for potential users. Computers were made available in senior living, low income housing and public libraries (Babcock, 2014). This program has users order their groceries online, and then they are delivered to set locations. Locations are designed to be convenient for those who have limited access to transportation. It strives to be flexible and accepts cash, credit, debit or EBT/SNAP with no additional delivery charge (Baltimarket, 2015).

The only full delivery service available in the Southeast Community is Fresh Direct. The downside to this program is that it is expensive compared to traditional grocers and does not accept SNAP/EBT. The company has shown promise to improve access with a pilot program now operating in the Bronx. The pilot program allows residents in the Bronx to order groceries from Fresh Direct to be delivered to their door. Customers can use SNAP/EBT benefits to pay for their groceries and also have their groceries delivered at no extra cost (Fresh Direct, 2015).

The possibility for programs such as this suggest that online grocers can have a significant impact on food deserts. In addition, a recent NIH study showed that people shopping online tend to spend more of their grocery money on fresh fruits and vegetables. Healthier choices as well as budgeting are facilitated by online shopping (Appelhans et al., 2013), leading to not only greater food access but also more affordable, quality foods.

v. Establish **food hubs**.

Food hubs are rising in popularity nationwide, specifically in areas with consumers interested in alternative food systems. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food hub as “a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy
wholesale, retail, and institutional demand (Matson & Thayer, 2013).” A simpler way to define food hubs is communal initiatives that work to bring local food producers and buyers as close together as possible (Stroink & Nelson, 2013). Since 2013 there have been over 220 food hubs in the nation (Matson & Thayer, 2013) including hubs in California (Cleveland et al., 2014), North Carolina, and some in Ontario, Canada (Stroink & Nelson, 2013). The USDA has programs to encourage the development of food hubs such as the “Know your farmer, know your food” initiative (Matson & Thayer, 2013) and the Regional Hub Subcommittee that conducts research and creates policies on food hubs (Cleveland et al., 2014).

Food hubs strive to meet several consumer demand-related goals that include sourcing food locally and sustainably, as well as addressing the current large-scale, mainstream food system and related health and social justice issues (Matson & Thayer, 2013). Often the development of a food hub involves starting with a central facility with a business structure and potential processing and distribution power. Food hubs typically start large scale and move toward a smaller scale when the organization’s goals are predominantly economic, but food hubs can begin small scale and ramp up when the goals are more geared towards social-justice issues (Cleveland et al., 2014). Food hubs generally require strong partnerships and funding from grants and foundations (Matson & Thayer, 2013). Despite the increasing popularity of food-hubs as an alternative food system, they are poorly researched and studied (Cleveland et al., 2014), especially as a means of increasing availability in low-access communities.

There are challenges worth considering, mostly regarding cost and development. In terms of gathering producers, the costs for farmers to acquire food safety certifications, and sometimes insurance, can be high (Matson & Thayer, 2013). Also, when an organization is founded on the grounds of a “locavore movement”, expansion can lead to compromising some food values maintained by consumers. However, the broadest, and possibly largest challenge is if the community experiences “a lack of economic, organizational, and physical structures of the appropriate scale for moving locally grown food to local eaters.” (Cleveland et al., 2014) Seemingly, the strongest way for the Greater Southeast Development Corps to overcome this challenge is by building a stronger foundation with the local government of Newport News and the surrounding community. This community includes a wide variety of nonprofit organizations available in Virginia and near Newport News, the media, numerous universities in Virginia working on food deserts, and the local food producers.

The implementation of a food hub in the city of Newport News would require a significant amount of communication between the Southeast Community and local government as well as other organizations in the area and farmers. Jim’s Market can play a facilitator role in the creation and development of a food hub, and it could serve as a key distributor. The food hub would require large amounts of resources, collaboration, manpower, and, depending on the level of support, time. However, with sufficient funds and a team of focused community members, a food hub could potentially be a long-term solution to food inaccessibility in the Southeast Community of Newport News.
vi. Develop a food cooperative for gathering, processing and distributing food in the Southeast Community.

A food cooperative, or co-op, is a grocery store owned and operated by local investors. The store not only serves as a grocery store, but it can also serve as a venue for community events. One of the main draws of a cooperative is that it helps to keep money circulating in the local economy. This is made possible by the way food cooperatives operate. Many cooperatives often hire employees from the local area. This increases the income of local employees and thus, they are able to buy more local goods and services (Feenstra, 1997). This can generate a ripple effect in the local economy as more money is circulated and invested in Newport News.

Cooperatives may also provide better quality control over the produce it offers. This is because cooperatives have the opportunity to buy produce and meat from local farmers. Since cooperative members are much closer to the source, they may have a greater chance of observing growing practices and selecting what products go on their shelves and what doesn’t (Katchova & Woods, 2011).

The critical pillars for a food co-op to be successful are community involvement and buy-in. Brand Fortner, one of the Durham Co-op market’s Board of Directors, stressed the importance of the community’s investment in the cooperative’s establishment. It had taken them over seven years of canvassing to gather enough funds and local investors to buy into the cooperative (B. Fortner, personal communication, 2015). Most of the investors were people of middle to high income levels. This differs greatly from the Southeast Community where people mostly come from low-income households.

Fortner also mentioned that co-ops serve as competitors to chains like Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods. What this means is that food prices will not necessarily be cheaper. In fact, most of the time, it is the opposite. Since co-ops generally serve clients with more disposable income, they tend to charge higher prices for better quality items (B. Fortner, personal communication, 2015). Cooperatives may be able to discuss discounts with local suppliers, but they often do not benefit from economies of scale since most cooperatives are small businesses (Chung, 1999). This factor may increase the price of fresh foods the Southeast Community would have to pay. This is a crucial issue, because a large proportion of the Southeast Community’s residents receive SNAP benefits and, therefore, work with a smaller food budget. If they cannot afford to buy fresh foods at the prices set by the cooperative, then the establishment of a food co-op will not address food insecurity the Southeast Community faces.

There is some hope for opening a food cooperative in a food desert like Newport News. There is a local initiative in Greensboro, NC called the “Renaissance Community Co-op.” Defying the odds, they have managed to generate enough investment for a food cooperative in a food desert. While it is unclear as to whether they will succeed upon opening, their ability to generate enough startup funds indicates that a food cooperative may be possible with strong demand and support from the community.

A food cooperative is probably not a plausible solution to the food desert issue in Newport News. Food cooperatives require intensive community engagement and buy-in, characteristics that the Southeast community lacks due to mistrust in the government.
Better communication and deeper community trust and engagement are required in order to make a cooperative a long-lasting success.
How to take action

There are many specific things that must be considered in order for ideas to become actions. First there are general considerations for the specific actions. These generalizations then must be fit to the individual community if they are to be successful.

**ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP**
- Who are the community leaders?
- What will the leadership structure be?
- What rules will be created?
- Who will be responsible for the various tasks and responsibilities?
- How will they be held accountable?

**RESOURCES**
- What resources are needed?
- Where will the resources come from?

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**
- Who will participate?
- How will the community be involved?
- How will the local community share their input with the organizing body?
- What will drive participation?
- What partnerships will be created?

**FUNDING**
- What are the funding opportunities available?
- What type of organization is seeking the funding opportunities?
Keep solutions sustainable

For any of these actions to truly impact the scope of the food access and affordability issues, the community must incorporate sustainability planning (United States Department of Labor: Employment and Training Administration, 2011). Sustainability is, in the words of the EPA, “to create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015).” In the context of community development, this means activities that the environment can handle for decades and that citizens both want and can afford for the foreseeable future. These activities may be significantly different from community to community. Sustainability is not a fixed thing, but rather continually adjusts to meet the social and economic needs of residents while preserving the environment’s ability to support it.

In order to monitor the sustainability of your projects, it is critical to constantly evaluate your progress towards your goals. It’s tricky to stay on top of progress and stick to goals. Project goals help set priorities and achievable milestones. Even if progress is small, if it works towards the larger goal it is progress. In order to measure progress, the following tools will need to be developed: 1) metrics and 2) timeline. A metric is any type of measurement used to gauge some quantifiable component of performance. It specifies a set of parameters that will be measured, a procedure to measure them, and a way to interpret the measurements. The success of a project is dependent on whether there is a metrics program in place as well as a timeline. A planned timeline is an important tool to coordinate all aspects of a project. This tool is essential to the various stakeholders who are involved in every aspect of a project. Without the details included in a timeline, it would be extremely hard to keep a project on track. Having a timeline established helps the people involved work cohesively. In addition, having a deadline helps motivate people to make progress. Deadlines should be reasonable yet firm.

Maintaining various projects takes time, planning and cultivation. For sustainable organization to take place on the scale necessary for the suggested actions, it is also important to consider knowledge transfer and transparency. If a single person possesses all the history, all the contacts and all the plans for the project, the project is not sustainable. Knowledge should be readily accessible and shared with all those involved so new leaders can step up and fill the shoes of previous leaders if need be.
Other considerations for success

Respect
Many in the community feel a lack of respect from local government and businesses. Apprehension from the developers and new businesses towards residents is also present. From the point of view of the community, putting in the new police precinct before the grocery store is a sign of disrespect. Creating an environment of mutual respect between all members of the community, including local governments and businesses, must be a part of the plan to address food access and insecurity.

Representation
At one point in time the Southeast Community was a thriving community of Newport News. As the historic downtown, the mayor and many of the city representatives had offices in the community. The community had leaders on city council and numerous people fighting for what the Southeast Community wanted. Today, many of these things have been lost in the Southeast Community, because they have lost representation in the government. Community members feel like their requests have been ignored and their dignity destroyed. Having someone to bring their complaints and concerns back to the government is a crucial step in changing the community back into a vibrant part of the greater community that it once was. The community and the government need to work together to take an active role in the future of their community rather than being purely reactive to problems as they arise.

Communication
Nothing can be accomplished without clear, patient and intentional communication. Communication between local organizations, community members and governmental entities all need to improve. Transparency of what expectations and goals are for all parties should be made apparent at the beginning and emphasized throughout. The Southeast Community needs various outlets of communication to be available for incoming and outgoing information.
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Appendix A: Mapping the food deserts of Newport News, Virginia

A food desert is defined by both a lack of income and a lack of access. The Southeast Community of Newport News is an urban food desert that has been without a grocery store for the past year. In February, Jim’s Local Market is scheduled to open hoping to make a dent in the problem of food access.

Areas highlighted orange on these maps indicate that the area is further than 1 mile from a grocery store and have a median household income less than 80% of the Virginia median household income. These standards define a food desert by the USDA.
Appendix B: Funding opportunities

Finding the resources that meet your needs in the complex web of agencies can be an overwhelming task. For this reason, this guide was created to serve as a starting point to provide information from relevant organizations, companies and federal agencies about what resources are available.

**Key funding opportunity for the Southeast Community of Newport News**
Kresge Foundation Grant for Fresh, Local & Equitable: Food as a Creative Platform for Neighborhood Revitalization
The focus of this funding opportunity is toward neighborhood-scale initiatives that use food as a strategy for creative community revitalization. Kresge is welcoming proposals from non-profit organizations and local government agencies that are contributing to multi-sector, mission-driven food enterprises. Organizations and collaborations leading mission-driven food initiatives in economically distressed urban neighborhoods are invited to apply. Applications can range from community development corporations to food hubs. Local economic development departments, community action agencies, arts groups and others. Kresge is planning to award up to 20 planning grants of up to $75,000 each in the first quarter of 2016.

**Alternative funding opportunities for community garden projects**

Hampton Roads Community Foundation Community Grants
http://www.hamptonroadscf.org/nonprofits/communityGrantsDetails.html
Deadline: January

Newport News Community Support Agency Grant Program
http://www.nngov.com/213/Community-Support-Agency-Grant-Program
Deadline: January

Food Lion Charitable Grants
Deadline: January

Muhammad Ali Center Peace Garden Grant
http://grants.kidsgardening.org/2014-muhammad-ali-center-peace-garden-grant-0
Deadline: January

Project Orange Thumb Garden Grant
http://www2.fiskars.com/Community/Project-Orange-Thumb
Deadline: January

Walmart Foundation Community Grant Program
http://foundation.walmart.com/apply-for-grants/local-giving
Deadline: February

Mantis Tiller Award
http://grants.kidsgardening.org/2015-mantis-tiller-award
Deadline: March

Local Food Promotion Program
http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/lfpp
Deadline: May

Norfolk Southern Foundation Grants
Grant requests accepted: July - September

Annie’s Grants for Gardens
http://www.annies.com/giving-back/school-gardens/grants-for-gardens
Application opens: October

The Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Grant Program
http://www.wildones.org/seedmony.html
Deadline: October

The Sow it Forward Garden Grants Program
http://kgi.org/grants
Deadline: currently unavailable because revamping program - check back in October

SARE Partnership Grants/Sustainable Community Grants
http://www.nesare.org/Grants/Get-a-Grant/Partnership-Grant
Deadline: October-November

Home Depot Community Impact Grant
http://homedepotfoundation.org/page/applying-for-a-grant
Deadline: November

Katie’s Krops Growing Family Grant
http://www.katieskrops.com/apply-for-a-grant.html
Deadline: December

Youth Garden Grant
http://grants.kidsgardening.org/2015-youth-garden-grant-1
Deadline: December

The Awesome Foundation
http://www.awesomefoundation.org/en
Deadline: Rolling
Dollar Tree Corporate Giving
https://www.dollartree.com/custserv/custserv.jsp?pageName=Corporate_Giving&parentName=About
Deadline: Rolling

Fiskars Donation Request
http://www2.fiskars.com/Community/Donations
Deadline: Minimum of six weeks prior to “need by” date

Food Lion Donation Request
Deadline: Rolling

Herman’s Garden Seed Donation Program
http://www.seedsavers.org/Education/Seed-Donation-Program/
Deadline: Rolling

New England Grassroots Environmental Fund Grow Grants
http://grassrootsfund.org/dollars/grow-grants
Deadline: Rolling

New England Grassroots Environmental Fund Seed Grants
http://grassrootsfund.org/dollars/seed-grants
Deadline: Rolling

The Virginia Foundation Grants
http://www.virginiafoundation.com/grants
Deadline: Rolling

Funding Opportunities through Newport News Government
Contact Person: Tricia Wilson

Funding opportunities for corner store initiatives and Jim’s Grocery Store

USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program
http://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/community-food-projects-cfp-competitive-grants-program
Deadline: November
The primary goals of the Community Food Projects (CFP) are to: meet the food needs of low-income individuals through food distribution, community outreach to assist in participation in Federally assisted nutrition programs, or improving access to food as part of a comprehensive service; increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for the food needs of the communities; promote comprehensive responses to local food access, farm, and nutrition issues; and meet specific state, local or neighborhood food and agriculture needs. Those eligible to apply are public food program service providers,
tribal organizations, or private nonprofit entities. Community Food Projects are intended to bring together stakeholders from the distinct parts of the food system and to foster understanding of national food security trends and how they might improve local food systems.

Culture of Health Prize
Deadline: November
The Culture of Health Prize honors and elevates communities that are making strides in their efforts toward better health. Winning communities will receive a $25,000 cash prize and have their success stories celebrated and shared across the nation. Eligible communities must be based in the United States and fall into one of the following categories: town, village, borough and other local incorporated places; city; county or parish; federally recognized tribes; or region.

Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program
http://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/food-insecurity-nutrition-incentive-fini-grant-program
Deadline: December
The FINI Grant Program supports projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers participating in the SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase. The program aims to test strategies that could contribute to an understanding of how to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by SNAP participants.