

Visions for a Healthier Community

Linden Food Planning Group, Summer 2015
Report prepared by Local Matters



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PROJECT SUMMARY

Through a partnership led by the City of Columbus, Franklin County Commissioners and Local Matters, (a Columbus nonprofit organization committed to improving healthy food access and education) two meetings were held in Linden with community organizations, stakeholders and residents to explore neighborhood-specific solutions and define potential next steps for improving access to healthy food and nutrition education in the area.

Linden is a neighborhood in the northeastern part of Columbus, Ohio. It extends south to north from Eighth Avenue to E. Cooke and Ferris roads and west to east from the Conrail tracks to Joyce Avenue/Westerville Road. The neighborhood is officially bounded on the south, west and east by Conrail-operated railroads. Hudson Street divides the neighborhood into North and South Linden. The Linden neighborhood has experienced an exodus of small businesses and population changes over the years. Shifts in racial groups within Linden play a key role in explaining the persistent population loss and general disinvestment of the community. Declining property values and increasing rates of crime pose a threat to the neighborhood's revitalization and prosperity. However, partnerships between local community organizations and the dedication of long-time residents suggest promise for the area's future. Investments in the neighborhood's food economy may be key to providing opportunities for growth and sustainability for the Linden area.

With that in mind, the primary goals of the two-meeting community engagement process were:

- *To collect, share, gather and organize 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 illustrate gaps and opportunities for improvement based on 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. It will assist participants in the development and implementation of local strategies for improving access that meets the specific needs of the Linden neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio. The information and planning gained in the Linden neighborhood will be combined with that of the West Side, Near East Side, Near South Side, Weinland Park, Clintonville, and Northland reports to help inform a Columbus-Franklin County Local Food Action Plan (expected completion Fall 2016). This plan will outline a comprehensive strategy to:

- *Improve access to nutritious and affordable food, and education about healthy food.*
- *Increase the role of food in economic development.*
- *Prevent food-related waste.*
- *Enhance communication and coordination among existing food resources and agencies.*

OUR PROCESS



Local Matters has facilitated and organized neighborhood food planning processes on the West Side, Near East Side, Near South Side, Weinland Park, Clintonville, and Northland neighborhoods of Columbus, Ohio, and used similar strategies for community engagement and participation in Linden. The first phase of the community engagement process for the *Columbus-Franklin County Local Food Action Plan* project in Linden was to identify participants that represented a cross-section of the community. In addition to organizations and individuals who had previously been engaged in similar food planning efforts, outreach efforts for participation in the meetings were expanded to include residents, business owners, community leaders and community stakeholders. This approach provided a diverse mix of perspectives and ensured that the community’s collective voices were represented during the process.

MEETING 1: MAY 4, 2015 AT GREATER LINDEN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The primary purpose of the first meeting was to engage community leaders, business owners, service providers and residents to identify ideas for improving the local food economy. The secondary purpose of the first meeting was to map food-based assets – food access, food production and food education – including providers and locations outside the neighborhood and to brainstorm ideas for collective vision for improving access in the area.

During Meeting 1, 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 we view food and consider how differing individual opinions could be incorporated to support a collective idea. This activity brought everyone’s perspective into the room and encouraged a robust exchange of stories.

The next step in the community engagement process included participant mapping of food-based assets: food access, food production and food-education providers and locations most frequented or known to meeting participants. Participants then brainstormed ideas for improving healthy food access in their community, focusing on alleviating gaps in food access, education and resources. These ideas and opportunities were further refined in Meeting 2.

Lessons learned/Observations

- The neighborhood is segmented into two primary areas – North Linden and South Linden; community organizations have been working to unite the area under the name “Greater Linden”. Participants felt that the term “Greater Linden” is confusing; many residents just know it as ‘Linden’ without any directional modifiers.
- The northern portion contains neighborhoods (specifically Kenmore Park, located north of Weber Road) that are perceived as having made efforts to distance themselves from the broader Linden community due to perceptions of poverty and crime that many feel are synonymous with the neighborhood.
- Cleveland Avenue, the main corridor in the neighborhood and to downtown Columbus, has a lot of activity and traffic due to its proximity to downtown Columbus and the Northern Lights area. However, many participants view the neighborhood as a “pass-through area” that people drive through but do not stop in. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge for the neighborhood’s future.

Significant Successes

Project Success	Factors That Supported Success
Identification of neighborhood-specific issues and challenges	Open dialogue format, discussion of unique community challenges
Identification of how current community resources and assets can be used to build a stronger food community	Working Group Conversation (individuals sharing their roles and experiences), Small group mapping exercise

MEETING 2: JUNE 9, 2015 AT GREATER LINDEN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The second meeting provided participants an opportunity to continue to explore possibilities for improving food access as well as discuss how the group could work together to develop community specific suggestions and solutions. The top five ideas for improving food access, education, resources and opportunities (discussed at length on Page 10) were then further revised and condensed to three actionable goals the group would like to explore for improving healthy food access and education:

- **Goal 1: Increase the number of restaurants in the Linden area**
- **Goal 2: Create a neighborhood food hub**
- **Goal 3: Host workshops at recreation centers, pantries, stores, gardens and other locations to educate people about different foods and cooking styles**

Lessons learned/Observations

- The group was interested in improving the sustainability and viability of community gardens on vacant lots; there have been several community gardens that were established on vacant lots that have been abandoned due to the time and cost of upkeep and maintenance.
- Residents that live south of Weber Road have limited or no access to restaurants in Northern Lights due to transportation challenges (including lack of direct bus transportation).
- Hunger in Linden is particularly prevalent in the middle of the neighborhood, specifically the area between Weber Road and Hudson.
- Property ownership in the area needs to be increased; blighted areas and absentee landlords who neglect their property are a threat to the area’s revitalization and growth.
 - Several barriers to property ownership and upkeep exist, including a lack of capital and investment opportunities for individuals to bring properties up to code on the perceived short timeline mandated by the City.
- Originally, the city was oriented more east/west before the freeway system was built; now that the city is set-up north/south it cuts off areas like East and West Linden which presently

don't have access to many services since there is a lack of a major transportation road.

- Many businesses have been flocking to shopping centers like Northern Lights – this has changed the neighborhood’s geography by creating small pockets of businesses that are not spread out throughout the neighborhood.
- Access to healthy foods is a challenge for residents for several reasons, including:
 - Resident’s proximity to and reliance on food from gas stations
 - Eagle’s and Ray’s Market are considered to have bad food options and are perceived as unsafe by residents
 - Kroger – lower quality of food and more expensive than other Kroger locations
 - New Harvest Café is one of very few options and it has limited hours

Significant Successes

Project Success	Factors That Supported Success
Streamlining of top 5 visions to 3 goals	Open dialogue format, discussion of unique community challenges and best use of existing resources
Identification of how current community resources and assets can be used to build a stronger food community	Working group conversation, small group visioning exercise provided participants with an opportunity to further explore the feasibility of their ideas

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS DURING THE MEETINGS

"People perish from lack of knowledge."

"Better representation will give us a stronger voice to tell what our food needs are".

"Hunger and lack of access to healthy food is a big issue for many residents".

"We need to restore neighborhood pride in Linden".

"Community builds healthy families and healthy people support strong community".

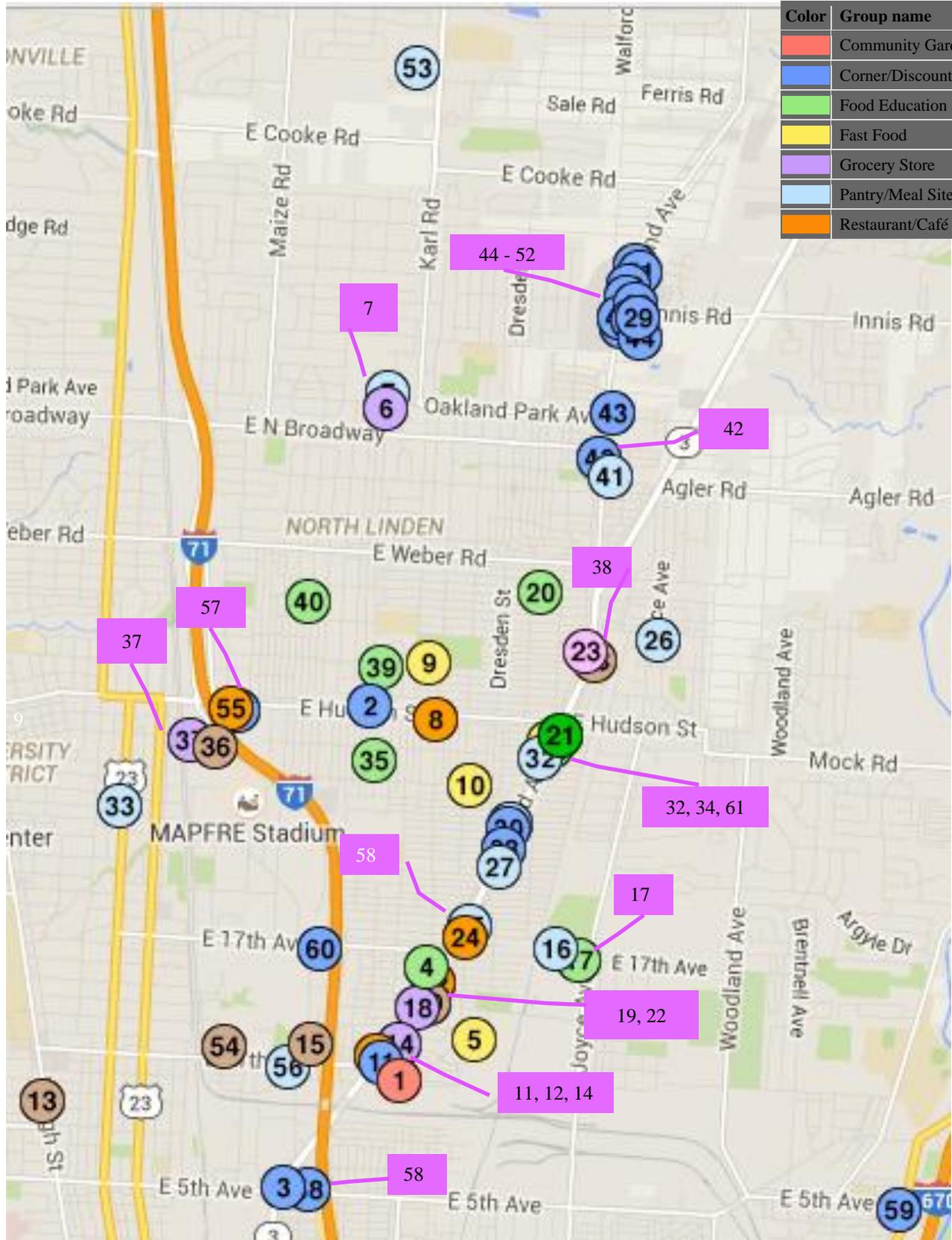
"I remember growing up and a veggie truck would deliver food, we need something like that again".

"We need a better communication network between government, businesses, and the community".

"Housing and food go together, where there is good housing there is good food".

"Food is community and community is food".

LINDEN FOOD MAP



Color	Group name
Red	Community Garden
Blue	Corner/Discount Store
Green	Food Education Site
Yellow	Fast Food
Purple	Grocery Store
Light Blue	Pantry/Meal Site
Orange	Restaurant/Café

MAP LEGEND

COMMUNITY GARDENS

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. Urban Concern/Harambee Christian School | 35. Community Garden |
| 4. Community Garden | 39. Community Garden |
| 17. Community Garden | 40. Community Garden |
| 20. Community Garden | 61. Community Garden |

FAST FOOD

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 2. Shark's Chicken, Fish & Shrimp | 47. McDonald's |
| 3. Church's Chicken | 48. Wendy's |
| 11. Subway | 49. Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen |
| 28. Pizza Hut | 50. Tim Horton's |
| 29. Captain D's | 51. Golden House Chinese Restaurant |
| 30. Cleveland Avenue/Philly Boys Pizza | 52. Long John Silver's/A&W |
| 42. Little Caesar's | 57. Wendy's |
| 43. KFC | 58. KFC |
| 44. Ko Sheng Chinese Restaurant | 59. Wendy's |
| 45. Burger King | 60. McDonald's |
| 46. Taco Bell | |

SFSP (SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM) MEALS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 5. Windsor STEM Academy School | 10. Linden McKinley High School |
| 9. Linden Head Start | 34. Linden Library |

GROCERY STORE

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------|
| 6. Cook's Oakland Park IGA | 37. Aldi |
| 14. Eagle Supermarket | |

PANTRIES AND MEALS

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 7. Linden Lutheran Church | 33. St. Gregory of Nyassa Orthodox Church |
| 16. St. Stephen's Community House | 41. New Salem Baptist Church |
| 25. Heart of Christ Community Church | 53. Christian Assembly |
| 26. Church of Christ | 54. Martin Janis Senior Citizens Center |
| 27. C.R.A.C.K.H.O.U.S.E. Ministries | 56. Near Northside Emergency Material Assistance Program (NNEMAP) |
| 31. Bethel AME Church | |
| 32. Elevation Church | |

CORNER/DISCOUNT STORE

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 8. Maverick Carryout | 22. Moses One Stop Shop |
| 12. Family Dollar | 24. Don's Quick Stop |
| 18. Ray's Market | 55. Family Dollar |

RESTAURANTS/CAFÉS

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 13. The Corner Cookout | 23. New Harvest Café |
| 15. Auddino's Italian Bakery | 36. Frisch's Big Boy |
| 19. Island Vibes Restaurant | 38. Ena's Caribbean Kitchen |

FOOD TRUCK

- | |
|-----------------|
| 21. Red Snapper |
|-----------------|

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS ON MAPPING

- The term “Greater Linden” is confusing for many residents; those that live in Linden just know it as ‘Linden’ without any directional modifiers.
- There is a wealth of Somali restaurants scattered throughout the Northern Lights area that have not been included in the map, due to the sheer number and because many meeting participants were not familiar with them. It is important they be noted as a food resource.
- “Pantries & Meals” locations appear to be in areas of less need and on a major road

PLACES RESIDENTS ACCESS FOOD OUTSIDE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

**Distance calculated from the meeting location – Greater Linden Development Corporation (1410 Cleveland Avenue Columbus, Ohio 43211)*

GROCERY STORES

Kroger 1.6 miles 1350 N. High Street Columbus, Ohio 43201

Lucky’s Market 3.1 miles 2770 N. High Street Columbus, Ohio 43202

Kroger (Clintonville) 4.1 miles 3417 N. High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43214

Turkey Hill Mini Market 4.3 miles 1880 E. Broad Street Columbus, Ohio 43203

Aldi 5.2 miles 2296 Morse Road Columbus, Ohio 43229

Turkey Hill 5.6 miles 1425 N. Cassady Avenue Columbus, Ohio 43219

Walmart 6.5 miles 3900 Morse Road Columbus, Ohio 43219

VISIONS FOR A HEALTHIER FOOD COMMUNITY

Meetings 1 and 2 provided participants an opportunity to share ideas and develop a collective vision for improving food access, availability and education in their community. In Meeting 1, participants began the visioning process by individually preparing a list of ideas, which were then shared with the group. Of the ideas presented, several topics overlapped and revealed the key goals of the overall group. In Meeting 2, participants worked together to narrow their ideas down to three actionable goals for the future. The numbers in parentheses after each idea indicate the number of participants who shared related ideas during the group session. Sub-topics, which are featured below, represent specific, yet unique, supporting visions raised by participants. Visions appearing **in bold text** reflect the top 6 ideas based on participant responses.

Visions for Education

1. An agriculturally based vocational education and entrepreneurial program to equip residents with marketable job skills and help them make steps toward self-sufficiency and sustainable foods
2. Healthy food cooking classes
3. Cooking classes - most people in this area do not know how to cook vegetables
4. **Gardening education (3)**
 - a. Educational programs for residents to learn how to grow backyard/tire/vertical gardens
 - b. Teach people to garden
 - c. Take it to the people – to homes and teach them to grow

Visions for Increased Access to Healthy Food

1. To provide access to fresh produce
2. **Farmers market (4)**
 - a. Farmers market with display area for local artists, photographers, craftsman and local music; a community destination like the North Market in Short North
 - b. Farmers market where all the community gardens can come together to sell produce (or food co-op)

- c. Farmers market that is very affordable
- d. Farmers market or outlet for the community gardens to sell/give away the food they grow
- 3. Grocery store around/in 4 Corners area with fresh produce
- 4. Neighborhood food delivery (3)**
 - a. Take some produce into neighborhoods and tell them where they can come and help. Most people do not know how and I believe if they are taught, they can do. “People perish from lack of knowledge”.
 - b. Take food to the people
 - c. Take it to the people – to homes and teach them to grow
- 5. More options for healthy foods at affordable prices

Visions for Production/Gardening

- 1. More agriculture/urban gardening for economic development e.g. using vacant lots for locations to grow herbs, mushrooms, beehives (like Cleveland does)
- 2. Garden map (2)
 - a. Let people know that there are community gardens and where they are located
- 3. Have churches create small gardens, even if only in containers

Visions for Communication

- 1. Community communication plan (4)**
 - a. Better communication – weekly newsletter
 - b. Program connection of all groups
 - c. Community billboards that run constantly from 7 am – 11 pm
 - d. Better communication between government, nonprofits, business, and the community. Educating people and making them more knowledgeable about their resources will hopefully help create greater participation and pride. The City has its Neighborhood Liaisons and Pride Centers, but do they know about the programs out there? Education is key.

Visions for Community Partnerships/Business Development

- 1. Develop a market run by students and residents to teach every aspect of the business while providing the community with access to produce and other goods
- 2. More restaurants (5)**
 - a. Attract small businesses and restaurants
 - b. Actual sit down family restaurant on Cleveland Avenue
 - c. More restaurants, especially sit down restaurants
 - d. Healthy food take-out restaurant (other than Subway)
 - e. In Linden Café – a salad bar restaurant
- 3. Also, would it make sense to put the area between Hudson and Weber in the South Linden Area Commission? This area associates more with their neighbors to the south than north, and don’t feel properly represented. Better representation will give them a stronger voice to tell what their food needs are.

Visions for Transportation

- 1. Food shopping passes on COTA for seniors or children
- 2. Transportation

Miscellaneous

- 1. Better community liaison who stores information
- 2. Neighborhood revitalization especially down Cleveland Avenue

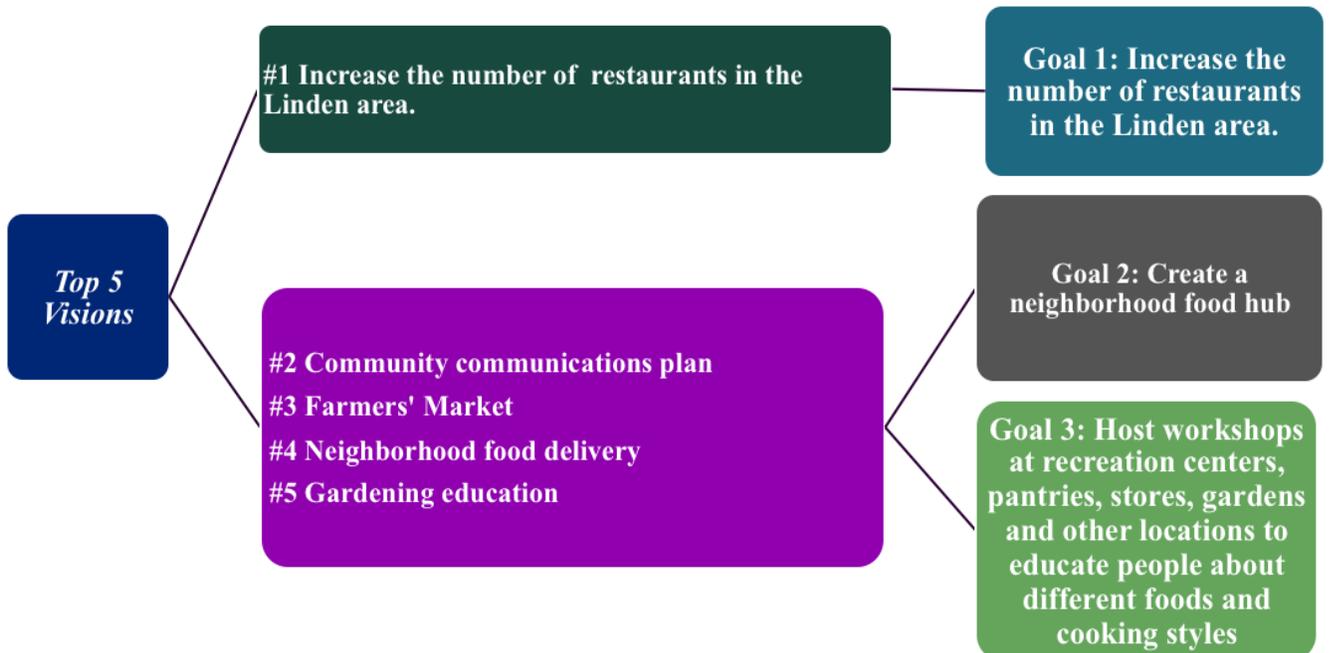
TOP FIVE IDEAS FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY OF CHOICE

During Meeting 1, participants also explored the feasibility, affordability and popularity of the ideas presented. The top five ideas for exploration that emerged from Meeting 1 included:



FINAL PRIORITIES/GOALS FOR A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

During Meeting 2, participants refined the top five visions list to three goals. Noting the similarities, complexities and longer timeline for achieving all five goals, the group chose to concentrate their efforts on shorter term, actionable goals that reflected the top five ideas. The top five ideas were combined as follows:



Goal 1: Increase the number of restaurants in the Linden area

- Business benefits
 - Non-chain restaurants can rely on local produce from a neighborhood farmers' market.
 - The area would benefit from competition since it has better parking and locations than downtown.
 - Lunch time would be a huge opportunity for local businesses given the area's proximity to downtown and would provide an alternative for downtown for businesses and churches in the Linden area.
 - Flexible business hours and more variety would also bring business into the community.
 - Given the area's community focused attitude, "mom and pop" and other small businesses could also be used as meeting locations for community groups and organizations.
- Community Benefits
 - People in the community would have jobs they could walk to
 - Family relationships would improve if residents had more financial stability
 - Image perception and safety ratings of the neighborhood would improve.

Goal 2: Create a neighborhood food center

- A food center that includes by:
 - Creating job and entrepreneurial opportunities that improve life and social skills of the population
 - Educate people so they not only know how to cook healthier food, but also gain vocational skills for food and agricultural careers
 - Engage the community by providing multiple service locations that address the health, transportation and other challenges
 - Provide opportunities for intergenerational activities and events
 - Transforming vacant or abandoned commercial space into food hub location

Goal 3: Host workshops at recreation centers, pantries, stores, gardens and other locations to educate people about different foods and cooking styles

- Host community events with multicultural foods.
 - Engage Local Matters to host cooking demos with seasonal produce at area food banks.
 - Provide education on food-preservation methods, gardening activities and the health benefits of fresh produce.

NEXT STEPS

As a result of the small group meetings, the participants expressed their desire to focus on one of the ideas presented - local economic empowerment initiatives that improve food access. Future exploration of these ideas will be continued by community members, who will lead the efforts to bring the plans brought forth in the community meetings to fruition with continued engagement of food access working group members and other interested stakeholders.

The City of Columbus, Franklin County Commissioners and Local Matters will use the information contained in this report for continued engagement of participants in the development and implementation of local strategies that represent the meeting participants' collective vision for improving access that also meets the specific needs of the Linden neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio. The information and planning gained in the Linden neighborhood will be combined with that of the Near East Side, Near South Side, West Side, Northland, Clintonville and Linden reports to help inform a Columbus-Franklin County Local Food Action Plan (expected completion Fall 2016). Additional information and updates will be provided online at www.local-matters.org.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION: CASE STUDIES AND TEMPLATES

CASE STUDY: SO FRESH MARKET – LOS ANGELES, CA

In South Los Angeles, the First African Methodist Episcopal Church has arranged for the open-air So Fresh Market to operate in its parking lot. The market welcomes families to participate in free activities and live entertainment, while fresh

and natural foods are sold to promote a healthy lifestyle and patrons are invited to watch as cooks present quick and easy meal demonstrations. Partnering with the market is part of a broader effort by the church to promote healthier eating among African Americans in the community.

CASE STUDY: INSPIRATION CAFÉ & THE LIVING ROOM CAFE – CHICAGO, IL

In an atmosphere of dignity and respect, Inspiration Corporation helps people who are affected by homelessness and poverty to improve their lives and increase self-sufficiency through the provision of social services, employment training and placement, and housing. As part of a program called Inspiration Kitchens, participants help run restaurants and receive case management, supportive services, and housing.

CASE STUDY: THE STOP COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRE – ONTARIO, CANADA

The Stop brings people together around healthy food, providing opportunities to make friends, build skills, combat social isolation, and advocate for change. Its programming includes targeted community kitchens and gardens, daily drop-in breakfasts and lunches and educational programs for school-age children. The Stop has pioneered the Community Food Centre model, which brings integrated programming in the areas of healthy food access, food skills development and education and engagement together under one roof to address intractable problems of hunger, poverty and poor health.

TEMPLATES: PROJECT PLANNING TOOL

Project planning is a discipline for stating how to complete a project within a certain timeframe, usually with defined stages, and with designated resources. One tool for project Planning and management follows:

PROJECT PLANNING TOOL

Example - West Side (Franklinton & Hilltop)

Vision

We are a strongly connected and informed network of residents, organizations, places of worship, and businesses, strengthening access to healthy food and food education in Columbus' Westside Neighborhoods.

1st Project Goal

Create safe and pleasant community gathering spaces around healthy food production, access and education.

Task 1

- **Explore bringing a large-scale community grocer, co-op, or food hub with opportunities for education and business incubation to Franklinton and Hilltop.**

Task 2 - Develop a healthy food communication network for the West Side, which includes information and resources about healthy food access, education, and production.

Planning your Project

-

Planning your Project

Identify the problem: What gap or barrier are you trying to address?

- Problem
- Barriers

List some reasons that you think this problem might exist.

What approach will you take to solving or mitigating this problem?

Project Goal:

Secondary goal:

Project Strategy:

Desired outcome(s):

Key Players:

Projected timeline:

Resources needed:

How will you know if this project has been successful?