



CHICAGO GROCERY ACCESS TASK FORCE Declarations and Recommendations

February 6, 2006

BACKGROUND

The Chicago Grocery Access Task Force, convened by Alderman Margaret Laurino (39th Ward) and Alderman Manuel Flores (1st Ward), and co-chaired by Mari Gallagher, Principal of Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group, and Peter Skosey, Vice President of External Relations for the Metropolitan Planning Council, is a diverse group of civic and private sector experts committed to increased access to quality grocery stores in underserved areas. Members of the Task Force recognize that food insecurity directly impacts a community's overall economic vitality and commercial climate as well as the quality of life and health outcomes of community residents. The Task Force was formed in response to a recent study¹ that showed that many low-income, minority communities cluster to form a "food desert." For example, the study showed that there are 11 contiguous communities on Chicago's South side with approximately 360,000 residents and no "major player"² grocer. These same communities nonetheless have very high concentrations of fast food restaurants and liquor stores. The Task Force considers this an extremely serious problem that requires immediate fresh thinking, resources, and intervention strategies that accelerate access to quality and affordable food in low access areas.

Food insecurity is "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable food in socially acceptable ways."³ Substitution occurs when a wide-range of mainstream, affordable, nutritious, fresh, and balanced food is not readily available, such as wide varieties of dairy, fruit, vegetables, meat, grains, and diet-restricted alternatives. Individuals suffering from high blood pressure, hypertension, obesity, and other serious and chronic health conditions have specific dietary needs that require low and no-fat products, no and low-salt products, lactose-free products, and so on. These food options are typically not available at substitute locations. Food substitutes available at non-mainstream, fringe locations such as corner stores, liquor stores, gas stations, and fast food restaurants, typically include a narrow range of packaged and canned foods high in fat and salt content and low in protein and nutritional balance. Examples of substitutes include high-salt canned soup, highly-processed white bread, limited dairy options, soda, candy,

¹ **Chain Reaction: Income, Race, and Access to Chicago's Major Player Grocers** was authored by Mari Gallagher, formerly senior researcher and consultant, MCIC. The study was funded by The Partnership for New Communities.

² Major Player Grocer was identified in the study as Jewel Foods, Dominick's, Aldi, and Cub Foods.

³ Hamilton, et. al., **Household food security in the United States: 1995-1998.**, USDA, 1997. Cited in Daniel Block and Joanne Kouba, **A comparison of the availability and affordability of a market basket in two communities in the Chicago Area.** Public Health Nutrition, 2006, in press.

chips, etc. As the recent study pointed out, it is often cheaper, more filling, and easier – though certainly less nutritious – to buy dinner at a fast food restaurant every night than to purchase and cook a healthy dinner. We are troubled by this finding.

The Task Force convened on Friday, January 13th and Monday, January 23rd and its members deliberated informally between sessions to develop these declarations and recommendations.

DECLARATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Task Force acknowledges and thanks City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development Commissioner Lori Healy for the City's proactive and quick response to the study's findings, namely the development of the Chicago Grocer Expo, to be held on February 14th, 2006. We enthusiastically support the Expo and are hopeful that it will be an effective step toward increased grocery store access specifically in low-access areas. The Task Force also acknowledges and thanks Fran Spencer, Deputy Director overseeing Retail Chicago, for being a helpful resource to Task Force deliberations. We recommend that the City track and evaluate the success of the Expo, and consider holding future Expos and other proactive forums and programs that ease the development of quality grocers specifically in low-access areas. We recommend that the City review its business development and retention incentives, again, with the key focus on 1) quality grocers and 2) low-access areas. We invite the Department of Planning to report back on the Expo at a future committee meeting to be held in April on a date to be determined to learn more about its success with these new, innovative programs, and we applaud it again for its efforts.
2. The Task Force recognizes that the feasibility of grocery store development depends on many factors, some unique to each community, such as the cost and availability of land, for example. Therefore, it is important to identify a range of quality grocery stores that differ in size, scale, design, target population, and so on. We recommend that this range include big box as well as mid-size and independent grocers that provide quality, affordable, nutritious food options. We encourage City staff to seek out new best practices and ideas and work with task force members and community leaders to inventory, support and facilitate these best practices.
3. The Task Force deliberations presented an opportunity for civic, academic, and private sector collaboration and insight into increased grocery store access challenges and opportunities. With the closure of the Task Force, we recommend that a representative of Retail Chicago, or which ever representative of the department the commissioner deems appropriate, meet with the Urban Development Committee of the Metropolitan Planning Council, to be a mutual resource to one another, to devise a strategy for better land-use planning surrounding the attraction of grocery stores in low-access areas and elsewhere. The Task Force declares that identification of adequately sized parcels, as well as the creative application of new urban designed

grocery stores, is key to increasing the availability of buildable sites in every neighborhood in the city.

4. The Task Force is interested in seeing the development of better data and market sizing strategies, and in stronger bridges and shared knowledge and strategies among built environment actors (city and community planners, commercial brokers, developers, commercial real estate lenders, etc.), health officials and advocates, and community-based groups. Task Force members Mari Gallagher and Daniel Block, who have expertise in these areas, are offering to work together to provide 20 *pro bono* hours of consulting that links with other resources and leadership (such as any City of Chicago departments that address business development, planning, health, family and child welfare, and so on), the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago's Children, the Institute for Community Resource Development, the Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council, Sustain, the Illinois Food Systems Policy Council, and other resources and organizations as time and mutual interest permit. The focus on better data, data systems, and information should include grocery stores of all sizes, community market sizes and characteristics that accurately reflect high transition and/or minority populations, data that accurately reflects immigrant and undocumented immigrant populations, availability of fresh produce, and the relationship between food access points and public transportation – as well as other areas to be identified. Task Force member Dr. Jamilah Jordán identified a helpful and growing list of stakeholder groups that might not already have knowledge of low food access belts. The list should be studied to identify future communication and intervention strategies. The Task Force believes that Chicago's problem of food insecurity is well documented by various groups and studies. The focus concerning communications, deliberations, and potential forums should now shift to win-win solutions and intervention strategies that reflect market dynamics as well as community needs, and the relationship between the built environment and health outcomes. We acknowledge the critical importance of community level stakeholder input. Community based organizations can provide strategic information necessary for informed decision-making, and will continue to be called upon to gather and support the work of industry, institutions, universities, researchers, the city and other stakeholders. Such collaboration has led, and will continue to lead, to significant support from local and national funders, as well as local and state government entities. We feel this is strategic and necessary.
5. The Task Force recognizes the historic importance of the City of Chicago's Plan for Transformation, which concerns the redevelopment of public housing into mixed-income communities. These communities have traditionally been under-invested, low food access areas with high concentrations of exclusively low-income minority populations. Given the rapid change underway in Transformation areas, we recommend that a representative of Retail Chicago meet periodically (perhaps once or twice a year) with a representative of The Partnership for New Communities, which is a grant-making entity focused on Transformation areas, to exchange information and strategies related to retail development and specifically quality grocery store development. The Metropolitan Planning Council has explored the synergy between retail

development and the success of Plan for Transformation neighborhoods in several “roundtable” discussions involving developers from each of the 9 sites as well as the CHA. MPC will continue to provide support in convening stakeholders in this area.

6. Grocer industry representatives on the Task Force were helpful in identifying what they believe are city challenges to developing grocery stores in Chicago. We recommend that a small working group of industry and city representatives meet two to three times over the next two months to review price notification rules, unit price standards, licensing, fines, inspections, permits, and so on, to determine what, if any, policy or practice shifts might be feasible and reasonable. We emphasize the importance of keeping the focus on low-access areas. We also believe that better data and market sizing techniques will help identify and facilitate sustainable grocery store developments in underserved areas, as low-income minority families do indeed buy food, and as they, in fact, spend more of their disposable income on food than other consumer groups.

CONCLUSION

Task Force members collectively thank Aldermen Laurino and Flores for providing the forum from which the previous declarations and recommendations came. Task Force members plan to reconvene one more time in April to review progress of recommendations and possibly shift course if necessary. Clearly, the issue of access to grocery stores in each and every one of Chicago’s neighborhoods is paramount to the health, safety and welfare of each resident. We are pleased to have the opportunity to play a small role in providing that access.

Scroll down for list of Task Force Members.

The Chicago Grocery Access Task Force



Meeting Dates: January 13, 2006 at 10:00 A.M. and
January 23, 2006 at 2:00 P.M. at City Hall,
Room 300A

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