

# INCREASING FOOD SECURITY IN WOONSOCKET, RHODE ISLAND

*A Three-Year Action Plan for the Health Equity Zone's Food Access Working Group*



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# INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island Department of Health designated eleven Health Equity Zone (HEZ) communities throughout the state, which are “geographic areas designed to achieve health equity by eliminating health disparities using place-based strategies to promote healthy communities.” Each HEZ designs a work plan that is community based and addresses health inequities and inequalities specific to their community. The eleven grantees receive funding from the Rhode Island Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to carry out their work plans. The Woonsocket HEZ has several focus areas: healthy food access, reducing overdose deaths, addiction prevention, physical activity, teenage pregnancy, and trauma.<sup>1</sup>

Thundermist Health Center is the project lead for the Woonsocket HEZ. The Woonsocket HEZ created working groups for each of its focus areas. The Woonsocket HEZ food access working group is continually growing and currently includes representatives from a variety of community-based organizations, including NeighborWorks (NW), Connecting for Children & Families (CCF), Farm Fresh Rhode Island (FFRI), Head Start, and the Woonsocket Women Infants and Children (WIC) administration office (which is housed at Thundermist).

Karen Karp & Partners (KK&P), a New York City-based food and agriculture consultancy, was retained by Thundermist on behalf of the HEZ food access working group in November 2015 to conduct a needs assessment of food access in Woonsocket, particularly for low-income residents, to use these findings to create a plan for improving food access in the city, and to develop (and support the HEZ partners in implementing) a strategy for disseminating the findings of the plan.

## METHODOLOGY

### Needs Assessment

#### Literature Review

KK&P conducted a literature review of publically available studies and data, as well as internal documents, project narratives and data drafted and collected by various community organizations in Woonsocket, provided by Thundermist. The KK&P research team reviewed additional documents, such as the Woonsocket Comprehensive Plan, the Rhode Island Food Policy Council’s Woonsocket fact sheet, a needs assessments conducted by Woonsocket Head Start and Landmark Medical Center, and the YMCA’s Woonsocket Walks Pedestrian Plan for additional context and insight into the current realities of Woonsocket’s food environment, as well as key statistics from the new release of 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, released in December 2015. A list of all sources reviewed is included as an appendix to this memo.

#### Mapping

Annajane Yolken, Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation Manager at Thundermist, led the mapping portion of this project. Annajane and her team utilized mapping with Quantum GIS software to highlight spatial correlations between demographics, food access points, and transportation. The Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS) website provided base maps, including census tracts, streets, and bus routes. All demographic information was collected at the census tract level and obtained through the American Fact Finder census portal. The team converted raw numbers (e.g. number of people living below the federal poverty line) to percentages by dividing the number of people from the census tract in the specific demographic range by the total number of people in the census track. The Department of Health website provided food retailer information, including addresses and whether the establishments accept WIC and/or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Emergency food locations and senior center meal locations were identified through the HEZ working group’s partners, such as the RI Community Food Bank list. All address locations (i.e. food retailers, emergency food locations, and senior center meal sites) were geocoded in Quantum GIS using the MMQGIS plugin and Google Maps. Preliminary maps can be found in Appendix A.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.health.ri.gov/projects/healthequityzones/](http://www.health.ri.gov/projects/healthequityzones/)

## Interviews

The KK&P team completed six interviews with Thundermist staff members and eleven interviews with stakeholders from organizations whose work is related to food access in Woonsocket—the interview list was built with the HEZ food access working group. The literature review findings served as the basis for the questions asked during the interviews. A list of interviewees and interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Additionally, KK&P had several extended conversations with community members about food access in Woonsocket. These conversations arose during site visits to community organizations during the primary research (survey and focus group) phase.

## Focus Groups

KK&P staff led two focus groups (a third was planned but was not carried out) and drafted and implemented a community wide survey by partnering with several Woonsocket organizations. Both focus groups were held on January 19, 2016. The first focus group was held at the CCF Chaplin Perez Community Center. There were seven participants, who were invited by Heidi Collins, Director of CCF's Center for Financial Success. The second focus group was held at Riverzedge Arts with five high school-aged participants, all members of Riverzedge's Green Design Lab program. A third focus group was scheduled at NeighborWorks on January 19, but none of the invited community members were able to attend. The NeighborWorks focus group was rescheduled for February 8, but was then canceled due to inclement weather. The question guide used during the focus groups can be found in Appendix C to this memo.

In May 2015, prior to KK&P's engagement with this project, Eliza Sutton and Ckarla Agudelo of Thundermist conducted a focus group with residents of the Woonsocket Housing Authority's Morin Heights development. Thundermist provided an audio recording of the focus group to KK&P to be integrated into this project's research findings.

## Survey

A survey was administered in Woonsocket between January 19 and February 12, 2016. KK&P staff developed the survey questions, in collaboration with the Woonsocket HEZ steering committee members. The survey targeted Woonsocket residents over 18 years of age who make at least some decisions about food for their households. The survey consisted of 21 questions about how and where residents access food, food assistance programs they do and do not participate in, demographic information, and an assessment of food insecurity. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix D. KK&P and HEZ steering committee members identified community groups that could reach a large, diverse number of Woonsocket residents. The organizations that administered the survey were: Farm Fresh Rhode Island (at the Woonsocket Senior Center), Head Start (at all five Woonsocket sites), Thundermist (in the Thundermist Health Center waiting room, the WIC office waiting room, the Woonsocket Farmers' Market, and the RIPTA bus line serving the local Price Rite supermarket), NeighborWorks (among residents), CCF (at the food pantry distribution days), and the Community Care Alliance (CCA, during home visits). Ivy Bermudez of Thundermist contributed a significant amount of time to the survey administration process. Shayna Cohen, KK&P Senior Consultant, led a short training on the survey with a representative from each organization, who in turn trained any additional staff members helping with survey administration. Each organization administered the survey in ways that fit with existing programming (home visits, after school pick-ups, etc.) in order to capture responses from residents in places they already go. The survey was available in English and in Spanish and in large print. Survey participants had the option to complete the survey in person on paper, or were given a flier with a link to access the online survey at a later time.

Four hundred and fifteen Woonsocket residents submitted responses to the food access survey. Of those submissions, 63 were ineligible to complete the survey based on the qualifying criteria set forth at the beginning of the survey (over 18, resident of Woonsocket, and involved in food decisions in the home), leaving a total of 352 surveys for analysis (just 29 of which were completed online, rather than on paper). All individuals willing to complete the survey, even those who did not meet the eligibility

criteria, were also given the opportunity to enter a raffle for a gift card for a local grocery store. The names and contact information of survey participants were recorded on separate sign-up sheets.<sup>2</sup>

## Feedback process/engagement with food access working group

The KK&P team launched this project with a kick-off meeting that brought together 14 people, multiple staff people from each of the HEZ food access working group organizations mentioned above as well as the RI Community Food Bank. The group discussed the goals and parameters of community engagement (how engagement should be done, what it might yield, approaches the needs assessment research process should take in order to contribute to building community engagement in food access solutions); explored the broader context of food access assets and gaps in Woonsocket; discussed innovative programs and useful food or food access plans from other places; and participated in a visioning exercise, imagining what the food access plan, when implemented and successful, could yield. At this meeting, the list of stakeholders to interview in the needs assessment was generated.

Over the course of the project, Shayna Cohen regularly attended monthly HEZ food access working group meetings and communicated with HEZ partners individually. Annajane Yolken, who served as liaison between KK&P and the HEZ partners. Findings from the needs assessment were shared with the HEZ partners in two phases, in early January and in early March 2016. Based on client feedback and responses, KK&P drafted an outline of the action plan that follows, with guiding strategies and specific recommendations. At a March 14, 2016 meeting, KK&P presented this outline to the HEZ partners and their collaborators (including representatives from the Rhode Island Department of Health and Riverzedge) and built out the action plan that follows based on the discussion and feedback received.

## Plan for dissemination/partnership development

Together with Thundermist and the HEZ food access working group, KK&P developed a strategy for dissemination of the plan that has two key goals: 1) To spark new relationships and potential partnerships, particularly with food system sector leaders not currently around the HEZ table, and 2) To spread “the message” about food insecurity in Woonsocket and how a plan/action at the municipal level can approach addressing it. The dissemination process focuses on three key audiences with different strategies to address each. The first audience is “Leadership of Targeted Policy, Corporate, Philanthropic and Social Service Entities.” In addition to presenting the findings of the needs assessment and outline of the food access work plan at the HEZ Woonsocket Annual Meeting on March 31, 2016, the KK&P team will co-lead (along with Thundermist leaders and staff) approximately five one-on-one conversations, targeted and specific to each entity’s work and interests, in order to build relationships and to spark interest in work done and work to come. Thundermist and the HEZ partners will continue the process of one-on-one outreach over the course of year 2 of the HEZ.

Peer organizations are another key audience, such as Woonsocket-based social service organizations not (yet) represented at the HEZ food access table, as well as other groups (including other HEZ municipalities) who might value the learnings and process from the Woonsocket food access work. At the May 11 HEZ food access working group meeting, KK&P will facilitate a meeting to guide HEZ partners in developing a list of target peer organizations, and to define what the group wants those organizations (or their leaders or constituents) to know about the plan or to do as a part of implementing the plan.

The third and fundamental sector of the dissemination of the plan focuses on residents of Woonsocket. On April 26, KK&P will facilitate a discussion with the Woonsocket HEZ Ambassadors (residents hired to liaise between the HEZ and diverse communities across the city) with the goal of developing a set of outreach strategies and recommendations that the Ambassadors believe in and have the capacity to implement.

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<sup>2</sup> Upon reviewing the raffle entries, the KK&P team discovered that two individuals had completed the survey twice. The actual survey submissions were anonymous, however, and the team could not determine which responses had been submitted twice by the same individual. Thus each set of potentially duplicated survey responses was treated as unique.

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

## Summary of Findings

Detailed findings from each component of the food access needs assessment follow. Below are key themes and takeaways yielded by the assessment as a whole:

- The city is home to a significant population that lives in, or at the edge of, poverty and that experiences disproportionate incidence of diet-related health problems.
- Food access is seen as one piece of a larger issue: a lack of vibrancy and economic opportunity in Woonsocket.
- Though there is just one grocery store within city limits and it is not convenient from the city's center, residents of Woonsocket primarily rely on the large chain grocery stores in the area for grocery shopping. Local corner stores and other independent small groceries serve as secondary locations for food shopping.
- More than limits to geographic or transportation access, economic access to healthy, appropriate, affordable foods over the course of each entire month emerged as the key contributing factor to food insecurity in Woonsocket.
- Residents were concerned about having enough food to last before they could afford to buy more, and also actually ran out of food before they could afford to buy more. Residents also responded that the foods they want, and healthy foods (which are likely not mutually exclusive), are often not affordable.
- Economic development related to food is seen by many as a significant opportunity for the city, in terms of entrepreneurship, small business growth, and workforce development.
- Confusion exists about how food benefits (such as SNAP) are allocated, and residents feel that use of food assistance services is stigmatized.
- Focus groups and the resident surveys revealed that a majority of residents use a personal vehicle for grocery shopping. This finding did not align with findings from the literature and stakeholder interviews, in which Woonsocket residents' transportation challenges featured heavily. However, the survey did confirm that existing public transportation infrastructure is not robust or reliable enough to support the needs of Woonsocket residents without regular access to a vehicle, and that the bus is not a popular method of transportation for food access.
- The majority of survey respondents and focus group participants eat a home-cooked dinner every night, and there is strong interest among residents in community events focused on food and nutrition education and skill building.
- While local food is not seen as the answer to Woonsocket's food access challenges, it is widely viewed as an effective tool for economic development and resident empowerment.

## Literature Review

The KK&P team reviewed key literature provided by Thundermist and collected independently as an orientation to the project and to the Woonsocket community, to guide the creation of question sets for interviews, and to inform the questions asked in the resident outreach survey. Grant applications, project narratives and timelines, and meeting minutes provided by Woonsocket HEZ Action Team provided useful background on the project's objectives, context, and partners. The team reviewed additional documents, such as the Woonsocket Comprehensive Plan, the RI Food Policy Council's Woonsocket fact sheet, a needs assessments conducted by Woonsocket Head Start and Landmark Medical Center, and the YWCA's Woonsocket Walks Pedestrian Plan for additional context and insight into the current realities of Woonsocket's food environment. A list of all sources reviewed is included as in Appendix E to this memo.

A review of the new release of 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, released in December 2015, revealed that in recent years Woonsocket's median household income has decreased, while Rhode Island's and the United States' have increased, and that Woonsocket's percentage of households receiving SNAP has increased. Poverty levels have shifted slightly, but not appreciably.

	Woonsocket		Rhode Island		United States	
	2009-2013	2010-2014	2009-2013	2010-2014	2009-2013	2010-2014
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$36,058	<b>\$35,216</b>	\$56,361	<b>\$56,423</b>	\$53,046	<b>\$53,482</b>
<b>People below poverty</b>	25.8%	<b>26.1%</b>	13.6%	<b>14.2%</b>	15.4%	<b>15.6%</b>
<b>Children below poverty</b>	42.8%	<b>42.0%</b>	19.5%	<b>20.1%</b>	21.6%	<b>21.9%</b>
<b>Seniors below poverty</b>	12.9%	<b>13.3%</b>	9.1%	<b>9.3%</b>	9.4%	<b>9.4%</b>
<b>Households receiving SNAP</b>	26.5%	<b>28.3%</b>	14.1%	<b>15.6%</b>	12.4%	<b>13.0%</b>

Key impressions from the literature are below.

## Assets

Good coordination, cooperation and engagement among stakeholders: The existence of the HEZ food access team and the evident engagement of its members are a testament to its spirit of collaboration and shared buy-in for a better food environment in Woonsocket. These established partnerships are a crucial foundation for future successes.

Promising healthy food initiatives: The Woonsocket Farmers' Market, Healthy Foods Healthy Families, and Farm to Seniors programs are a few examples of great work already underway in Woonsocket, and evidence of the momentum for healthier food access in the community.

## Challenges

Significant incidence of diet-related health issues such as obesity and diabetes; for example, 37% of children visiting Thundermist are obese, compared to the US average of 17%. Although Landmark Medical Center's needs assessment found lower diabetes rates in its 6-ZIP code service area than state and national rates, pre-diabetes is higher; and cardiovascular health and overweight and obesity were identified as specific areas of need.

High levels of poverty and unemployment: As seen in the ACS figures above, Woonsocket poverty is dramatically higher than state and national averages. Woonsocket's unemployment rate is also higher than Rhode Island's, which itself is one of the highest state unemployment rates in the US.

Lack of employment opportunities: In a 2013 survey of Family Resources Community Action Program/CCA clients, 44% of respondents said that "lack of available jobs" was the most important barrier to employment for adults in their household; the same survey found 68% believed "not enough jobs" to be in the top three causes of poverty.

Poor transportation options and limited food access in most of the community: The HEZ Plan4Health narrative notes that car ownership is low, bus routes are minimal and infrequent, and there are limited supermarkets in Woonsocket. The narrative cites Thundermist, noting that "a lack of accessible, comfortable and frequent transportation was a barrier to obtaining healthy foods"; this sentiment was echoed in a survey of residents of Veterans Memorial Housing.

Inadequate emergency food resources: The HEZ narrative for its U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) planning grant describes the food pantry network as "weak", with limited hours, and primarily church-based locations.

## Leverage points to explore

Improved transportation options: It is clear that the HEZ team has already identified transportation as a priority area, and rightly so. Several sources describe transportation as a key barrier and opportunity for improved food access in the community.

Employment and economic development opportunities: Food access is closely linked with poverty; improved economic opportunities for Woonsocket residents would undoubtedly improve opportunities for healthier eating.

Improved access to healthy foods (financial access and physical access): Expanded transportation options and more numerous or better-sited food access points (e.g. a full service supermarket in central Woonsocket) would improve physical access to healthy food, but affordability is another key consideration. Programs like farmers market bonus bucks help improve financial access to healthy foods.

Stakeholder collaboration and community engagement: As previously discussed, the HEZ food access team has created a vital network for collaboration and communication among stakeholders. These relationships can be built on for sustained community impact.

## Mapping

The Thundermist team created several maps to illustrate food access in Woonsocket. Please see appendix A for preliminary maps created by the Thundermist team.

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The KK&P team completed six interviews with Thundermist staff members and eleven interviews with diverse stakeholders from organizations across the food system whose work is related to food access in Woonsocket, including planners, transportation planners, food retail business owners, farmers, food service managers, benefits administrators, and emergency food providers. A full list of interviewees can be found in the appendix. Below is a summary of key findings from the interviews.

## Assets

### **Woonsocket has several key pieces of infrastructure in place that could contribute to improving food access.**

Kitchen infrastructure at Senior Services (which also has a delivery van) and Woonsocket Public Schools is already playing a key role in providing healthy food to the community year-round (the city's eight congregate senior meal sites serve 3,900 unique participants each month). A commercial kitchen at the Woonsocket Area Career and Technology Center is used for vocational training, but could potentially provide further opportunities for community food preparation. NeighborWorks' new shared use commercial kitchen incubator and program/event space will be another key asset for training, entrepreneurship, and food processing.

With the large grocery stores located just outside the city limits and few car-owning residents, a number of small retail markets and ethnic food markets serve as key food access points for residents of central Woonsocket (e.g. Friendly Market, International Market, Little General). One such business interviewed as a part of this work noted that the store serves a base of regular customers (with shopping lists generated by older generations, even if younger generations are the ones doing the shopping). Many of the store's customers utilize SNAP/EBT cards and tend to "buy what they know—if the food is from their own country, that's all the better." Imported snack foods are stocked for younger generations while raw ingredients (produce, grains, staples) meet the older generations' demands.

### **Woonsocket is a small, tightknit community, with a strong foundation of communication and collaboration among organizations serving its low-income residents.**

The communication among the HEZ food access team itself is a strong foundation for future work, and indicates a vital willingness on the part of these diverse stakeholders to work together on new initiatives. Established periodic meetings of the community's food pantries further demonstrate a valuable spirit of collaboration not always seen among a community's emergency food providers. Finally, community-based organizations with deep roots in the diverse communities they serve are



key to the success of food access initiatives, and organizations like NeighborWorks, CCF, CCA, and Thundermist all work closely with the community members they serve.

**Woonsocket has a year-round farmers' market that is continually adapting to attempt to meet city residents' needs.**

Farm Fresh RI has operated farmers markets in Woonsocket since 2012. Like all of the organization's markets, Woonsocket's year-round market is focused on increasing access to healthy food and information about healthy food for low-income and otherwise marginalized populations. Whereas the summer market has become something of a destination market, traffic is slower at the winter market and because of the challenges of producing local food in the winter, affordability and pricing are bigger issues. Thus, Thundermist and FFRI together decided not to limit the winter market to local produce, and expanded the market to include produce purchased from local distributor Roch's, which sources primarily East Coast product and makes product origin information available. Interviewees noted that most customers didn't bat an eye at the addition of non-local product. However, because market traffic is slow and because local is not an exclusive focus of the market or a key criteria for its customers, the sustainability and longevity of the winter market is a question.

The market is equipped with EBT infrastructure, and market customers using SNAP receive a 40% bonus on their SNAP dollar purchases of fruits and vegetables (with no cap) through the Bonus Bucks program. Like most food retailers in town, the market's traffic rises and falls over the course of the month, peaking when SNAP dollars are renewed at the beginning of the month (with over 200 people in attendance) and slowing significantly at the end of the month when household SNAP allocations have been spent and budgets are generally tightest. WIC farmers' market coupons have very low redemption – only 38% – with redemption being highest if people can use the coupon the day they get it.

Pop-up markets have been attempted in several locations, with some success (primarily at public housing facilities). With increased planning and coordination between FFRI and Thundermist food programming leaders and pop-up market locations, these markets are seen as a high potential opportunity.

## Gaps and challenges

**The city is disproportionately home to a population that lives in, or at the edge of, poverty and that experiences disproportionate incidence of diet-related health problems.**

All interviewees talked about the city's high rates of poverty, obesity and diet-related disease (some detail on this is offered in the Literature Review summary above). A majority of the city's residents utilize SNAP benefits, and interviewees universally described their clients' struggles to stretch their household budgets and these benefit dollars to last the full month. Most interviewees also described the challenges facing residents who do not live consistently in poverty, but who struggle each month to make ends meet, and who may not be eligible for or take advantage of public benefits or social services. Interviewees emphasized the importance of creating a food access plan that targets these residents as well.

**With a low rate of car ownership, transportation is a key challenge and limit to food security.**

A primary challenge that was mentioned in nearly all interviews is transportation. RIPTA serves Woonsocket with two primary bus routes—one which circles the city and another which runs to Providence— as well as Flex Service, which has two vehicles running daily along major roads not served by a main bus line. Public transportation is highly utilized in Woonsocket, and local grocery stores (in town and just beyond the town borders) are served by public transportation. However, buses are seen as inconsistent, infrequent and not always available reliable, particularly in inclement weather or after 9:00pm, and are thus a limiting factor for low-income residents in accessing food markets and employment opportunities. As one interviewee put it, "A better bus line to PriceRite or WalMart would be a big, big help and people would use it." RIPTA currently offers free transportation to low-income passengers, but in July 2016 the free fare will be replaced with a "reduced" fare, an added expense for Woonsocket residents.

**With few grocery stores in the inner city, fresh produce is hard to come by and is often perceived to be unaffordable.**

Almost all interviewees described a landscape with limited access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables, with neighborhood markets offering a limited selection and with farmers' market prices, at times, being higher than what residents are comfortable paying. Emergency food providers in the city have been working to address this gap, but their own infrastructure limits their

capacity to meet the demand— most operate without access to cold storage. Connecting for Children & Families runs a fresh produce food pantry program in the summer that has been highly successful. But with their current resources and infrastructure, they run out of produce quickly and are not able to fully meet demand.

**City government and policy are not currently structured in a way that helps businesses— especially small businesses— thrive.**

Several interviewees described the city’s tax structure as a key limit to business growth and success, and thus economic development, in Woonsocket. One example that was cited was the city’s “homestead exemption”, through which single-family homeowners receive a 30% tax break, regardless of their household income. Businesses, in turn, are taxed at a higher rate than they would be in other nearby towns or cities, which one interviewee saw as an explanation for why key shopping areas serving Woonsocket are just outside the city limits.

The city’s zoning code was seen as another limiting factor for food access. A recent review by the Planning Department of city zoning codes revealed that only one of Woonsocket’s 50 zone categories allowed supermarkets. Zoning codes have since been revised making supermarket location in central Woonsocket a greater possibility. The mayor’s office has been in conversations with Market Basket to launch its first RI location in Woonsocket, but no commitments have yet been made.

At this project’s outset, the HEZ food access working group had identified coordination with the city comprehensive planning process as an alignment goal for this food planning process. While the comprehensive plan is already more or less drafted for 2016, the Planning Department has for the first time included in it a section on food and sustainability. Further, the comprehensive plan notes that “eliminating low-income and low-access areas or food deserts in Woonsocket is one of the City’s Livability goals.” The Department sees an opportunity to use the HEZ food access work plan to inform their future work and thinking related to land use and zoning for food purposes and looks forward to future collaborations with HEZ food access partners, above and beyond the comprehensive plan update scheduled for this year.

**Stakeholder organizations find themselves in a policy environment that is not oriented to or focused on the needs of low-income people.**

Several interviewees described a city government context that historically has been (and to some extent currently is) characterized by short-term wins and insufficient follow up and accountability. Stakeholders who have, in the past, had positive relationships with city leaders described relations with the current administration as somewhat strained. At this time, interviewed stakeholders do not see the mayor and city council as potential partners in food access work; some described an environment that is hostile and unwelcoming to low income people. By way of example, interviewees noted that affordable housing has not been made a priority by this administration; that a recent job creation program resulted in more jobs for residents of other towns than for Woonsocket residents; and that the current administration’s policy does not seem to take advantage of the urban environment in ways that could support resident health and wellbeing (such as potential for increasing walkability, enhancements to public transportation, food access). Several interviewees noted that the town’s current administration has had some downtown bus stops removed to reduce “loitering”, leaving long central stretches with no access to public transportation. Interviewees mentioned that 2016 will be a significant electoral year for Woonsocket, with the mayor, school board and city council all up for re-election.

## Opportunities

**Improved coordination and marketing of resources and services, along with more formalized collaboration among organizations, would maximize the impact of their efforts.**

Woonsocket has received local and national attention as a city and a population in crisis, one result of which has been a range of local and regional organizations and groups coming together to support the community. However, getting the word out to community members about the breadth and number of resources and programs available can be a challenge. The HEZ team, the food pantry network, and the newly rebooted Woonsocket Public Schools Wellness Committee<sup>3</sup> provide a valuable network

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<sup>3</sup> After several years of inactivity, the Woonsocket schools’ Wellness Committee resumed activity at the beginning of 2016. Communication between the HEZ team and the Wellness Committee could be a key point of collaboration.

and foundation for coordinating, streamlining, and marketing the community's resources. For example, a collaborative marketing campaign that incorporates basic information about SNAP and WIC enrollment, healthy food access points, description of the bonus bucks program, and food pantry locations and hours could be more effective than marketing each of those resources separately.

**Interviewees see improving access to information and skills around healthy food as a key component to improving community health.**

As is the case in any community, long-term behavior change and culture change around food will be key to meaningful health impacts, and this can only be achieved through deeper food-related knowledge and skills. Interviewees observed that more nutrition education is needed – and that community members are often eager to put new knowledge to use: “What I have found with seniors is that if you give them the information, they’ll use it. They will adapt their diets if you tell them about nutrition facts,” said one of interviewee. Marketing to make food and nutrition programs appealing and culturally relevant can tie into broader goals of health, well-being, and self-sufficiency.

Many education initiatives already exist that could be coordinated and supported for even greater impact. One of those programs (mentioned and celebrated by many interviewees) is FFRI’s Healthy Foods Healthy Families. Operated at the farmers’ market, the program runs throughout the growing season, with activities include cooking demonstrations (sometimes in partnership with interns from Johnson and Wales University). Participants receive \$20 in Bonus Bucks every third time they participate (up to \$120 per season per household). FFRI has also been focusing on farm to school and preschool nutrition education programming and, pending a national farm to school grant, is poised to expand that programming into an elementary school after-school program and more locations. It bears noting that RI leads the nation in farm to school efforts, with 37 percent of the cumulative statewide school food budget allocated to the purchase of local foods—and Woonsocket is one of three school districts purchasing more than the state average.<sup>4</sup>

Another key resources on this front, University of Rhode Island’s (URI) SNAP Education does a range of programs at multiple sites around the city, including senior public housing and Senior Services. FFRI has partnered with them on these programs and with Progreso Latino on nutrition education programming in public housing sites. WIC participants meet regularly with nutritionists, and the WIC office is motivated to improve nutrition education with (potentially) more hands-on experiences like cooking demonstrations, grocery store-based guidance for shopping on a budget, or even WIC nutritionists on-site at grocery stores to support program participants. Partnering with retailers for better signage to clarify which foods are WIC eligible is another potential leverage point (Stop and Shop and WalMart already do this; Price Rite is just beginning to accept WIC, so this is an opportunity).

**Economic development related to food is seen as a significant opportunity for the city, in terms of entrepreneurship, small business growth, and workforce development.**

According to interviewees, initiatives supporting food-related workforce development and entrepreneurship are increasingly popping up in Woonsocket. The Center for Children and Families offers employment training in culinary arts and healthcare. The Woonsocket Area Career and Technology Center offers a range of vocational training and certificate programs, including a culinary arts and baking program, and is highly regarded by interviewed stakeholders—one interviewee noted that leaders of this program are interested in expanding to include some food production (gardening/farming) as well as a broader food systems perspective as part of the curriculum. Further, Riverzedge Arts leads nationally celebrated year-round youth workforce programs, including a burgeoning “green” workforce development program with a focus on healthy environments (possibly to include food).

NeighborWorks’ commercial shared use kitchen and program space is eagerly anticipated by interviewed stakeholders as well. The kitchen build-out is almost complete, and the program is expected to launch in the spring. The kitchen will serve as an anchor to a multi-use space that NeighborWorks hopes will address food access issues in multiple ways. The organization has funding committed to focus on placemaking in downtown Woonsocket, and leveraging food as a tool for economic development

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<sup>4</sup> <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/find-your-school-district/rhode-island>

is a key interest. The full vision for the space beyond the kitchen has not yet been defined, and there is an opportunity for the HEZ food access working group and action plan to inform and guide the definition of this high potential space.

At the city government level, food related economic development—rather than food access—is broadly seen as “a way in” to dialogue.

**While local food is not seen as the answer to Woonsocket’s food access challenges, it is widely viewed as an effective tool for economic development and resident empowerment.**

Stakeholders universally agreed that any solution to food security gaps in the city must include foods beyond those produced locally, but almost every interviewee described the importance of *experiences* with local food (shopping for it, growing it, cooking it, eating it) as effective contributors to healthy food decision-making. In addition to the opportunities presented by the local farmers’ market and NeighborWorks’ kitchen space (as described above), community gardens were frequently mentioned as potential sources of healthy food and community engagement. Community garden spaces around the city are seen by many as underutilized due to lack of interest from committed gardeners: gardens have fallen prey to vandalism, theft and vermin; and resources, education and supports for gardeners are thin. With additional support, possibly including a market garden entrepreneurship program, a few stakeholders envisioned that these designated community garden spaces could be leveraged to enrich the farmers’ market experience, enable residents to “invest in their neighbors”, and create supplementary income opportunities.

## Morin Heights Focus Group

In May 2015, Eliza Sutton and Ckarla Agudelo of Thundermist conducted a focus group with residents of the Woonsocket Housing Authority’s Morin Heights development. Thundermist provided an audio recording of the focus group to KK&P to be integrated into the needs assessment.

Members of this focus group stated that they use a variety of grocery stores in the Woonsocket area, including PriceRite, Stop and Shop, and Walmart. The majority of the participants stated that they had been to the Woonsocket Farmers’ Market before, but that it was not a regular shopping location for them, nor had they been in several years. The main reasons that focus group participants preferred going to the supermarket are: better prices, convenience of a one stop shop, and a wider variety of produce at the supermarket. The participants all agreed and valued that the produce at the farmers’ market is fresher and handled by fewer people along the supply chain, and that they want to support the local farmers. However, due to their limited time, mobility, and budgets, the farmers’ market is not a feasible option for them. They did note that if the farmers’ market became more accessible, they would be willing to pay a small premium for local, farm-fresh produce. Some of the focus group participants drove themselves to the grocery store, and others either walked or took the bus, though they noted that at \$2 a trip, the bus is not particularly affordable.

The focus group participants also spoke to the challenges of planning community-wide events in their housing development. There is no tenant council/residents’ association, and there seem to be limited hours during which community events can be held. Residents said that the best ways to publicize community events such as cooking demonstrations or a pop-up farmers’ market are fliers, word of mouth, churches, and through a monthly newsletter written by a resident. They also noted that having childcare and/or activities for children is essential to any community event.

## Connecting for Children and Families Focus Group

The CCF focus group, comprised of seven adult participants (only one of whom was employed), covered many issues, including nutrition, food access, and food assistance programs. The focus group participants were all active home cooks with strong opinions and solid understandings of how to prepare nutritious food, as well as which foods make up a healthy diet based on their personal and medical needs. They get their information about what “healthy food” means from Thundermist practitioners, other medical offices and through the Internet.

*“You have to be personal with your food nowadays”*

The focus group participants are very price-conscious when it comes to grocery shopping, and they value fresh produce and meats. They watch for sales at grocery stores through newspaper inserts, and are mindful of

what reasonable base prices for foods are. Participants said they don't like to browse when grocery shopping, instead just going in for the items on their shopping list and leaving quickly, so as not to spend additional money. They remarked that they have noticed that some of their friends and family do not use effective budgeting techniques for grocery shopping. Participants felt that the prices at the farmers' market were too high, with one noting, "Even with the bonus bucks [SNAP incentive dollars], the farmers' market isn't worth it." They all agreed that if the market were more affordable for them they would happily shop there. Some participants drive themselves to the store, and others relied on family and friends for rides. None of the residents in this focus group used RIPTA bus service regularly, for grocery shopping or anything else. All have used food pantries at one point or another in their lives, with some of the participants using emergency food services frequently. Few mentioned shopping at corner stores, with one participant saying "I'd go to the food pantry before I'd go to the corner store [to buy food]."

Participants' household compositions were varied—some single, some with children and/or grandchildren living with them. Most participants eat at home whenever possible, so that if and when they aren't able to (or don't feel like) cooking, their wallet will allow for a meal out.

Participants discussed SNAP usage, their own experience of it and what they hear in their communities. All of the participants in this focus group used SNAP. One participant noted that the eligibility criteria can be very volatile—a slight rise in income can drastically reduce benefits or eliminate them all together. They all agreed that there is generally confusion about how SNAP is allocated. Several also mentioned that the SNAP administrator at the Woonsocket Department of Health lacked the emotional intelligence that is requisite for a social services professional—several participants shared stories of the administrator publicly embarrassing individuals or trying to tell eligible individuals that they are ineligible for SNAP.

Participants were asked for suggestions on how to improve health overall in Woonsocket, and they suggested a variety of ideas. One suggested creating a food assistance program like WIC but for seniors in the community. Other ideas were a healthy food kitchen where people can go to learn to cook nutritious and delicious meals; a gathering place where people can go to talk about any problems they are having (rather than having to identify and isolate a specific problem and seek a specialized social service provider to help address it); and a boarding home that can serve as transitional housing. They spoke about how important it is to have empathetic, empowering individuals leading social programs of all types. The participants also felt that Woonsocket currently lacks vibrancy, due to the lack of employment opportunities and community events. There was a general sentiment that residents do not have much to do to fill their time, whether through work or participation in community groups.

## Riverzedge Arts Focus Group

At the Riverzedge focus group, the conversation was wide ranging and provided a youth perspective on food issues in Woonsocket. Participants discussed school lunches, their roles in food purchasing and preparation at home, and how Riverzedge and the Green Design Lab could work on issues of food access and hunger in Woonsocket.

The students had wide-ranging responsibilities at home when it came to food purchasing and preparation. One of the participants was responsible for purchasing and preparing all of her family's food. One was not involved in that aspect of household life at all. Others were in between—participating in some food shopping, providing some input, or cooking with their parents.

*"I'm so disappointed in the fast food places. A sandwich is \$1 and a salad is \$4!"*

They were typically very dissatisfied with the quality of their school lunches and were generally unfamiliar with summer meal programs in Woonsocket.

The students commented that public transportation is unreliable and more than one of them had found themselves stranded somewhere and/or had been forced to walk long distances because a bus did not show up. The participants also talked about the general lack of economic opportunity in Woonsocket and how there are not enough

extracurricular activities for youth. They think that the shortage of activities and opportunities for youth in Woonsocket leads to negative social trends among youth in the town, like teenage pregnancy and drug use. The focus group participants expressed dismay that their classmates were uninterested in learning new skills and bettering themselves, and they would like to look for ways for Riverzedge and the Green Design Lab to involve more youth.

They felt very fortunate that they are able to participate in Riverzedge programming and the Green Design Lab and noted that it has changed their outlook on life and that their instructors have taught them a lot (both about their project material and about life). They have had some projects related to food and gardening, and would be interested in doing more work outside. They have built several gardens for companies and on public property, grown squash, and made seed bombs, among other activities.

*"[Green Design Lab] has made us look at the world differently and opened my eyes"*

They all commented on the satisfaction of seeing a project through from start to finish and seeing a final project that makes a positive impact on the community. They had ideas about future Green Design Lab projects that they could implement related to food and food access, like growing vegetables on vacant lots and donating the produce to food pantries and soup kitchens in town.

When students were asked what their ideal solution would be to improve food access in Woonsocket, they expressed a desire for a gathering place that would provide a number of services (counseling, education, youth activities, etc.), as well as more things to do, like movie theaters, a skate park, or a roller rink. Improved parks, healthier prepared meals, and cooking classes were other ideas the students had on how to improve their community. It was very evident from the focus group with the students that they view food access as just one piece of a larger issue—of vibrancy, economic opportunity, a sense of community in Woonsocket.

## Survey Findings

### Demographics

Most survey participants were female (75.6%) with an average age of 41.5. 46% of participants classify themselves as white, and 33.8% classify themselves as Hispanic/Latino. 7.8% identified as Black or African American, 3.1% Asian, and 2.3% Native American. The remaining 7% identified as other or as multiple races. 42.9% of respondents were unemployed, and 56.5% have a household income of under \$25,000. 54.5% of households reported having at least one child, and the average number of children per household among respondents was 2.1.

Ninety nine of the surveys (28.1%) were completed during pick-up/drop-off times at Woonsocket's Head Start facilities, with the remainder of the surveys completed in the waiting room of the WIC office, in the waiting room of Thundermist's clinic, at CCF's Tuesday morning Food Pantry, at CCA programming and at-home visits, the Woonsocket Winter Farmers' Market, on RIPTA bus route 54 (which terminates at Price Rite) and Woonsocket Senior Services Center's Farm Fresh Rhode Island programming, and by NeighborWorks residents (online).

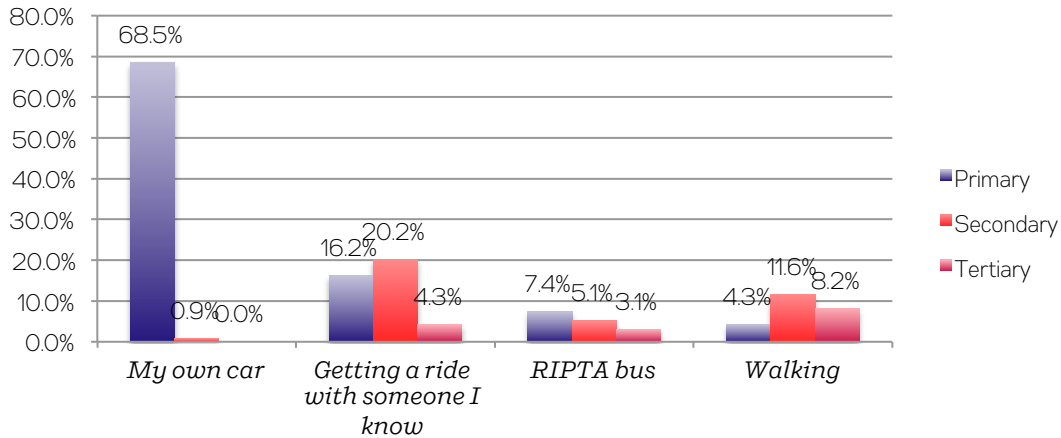
### Food Access

One of the unexpected findings of the survey was that the vast majority of respondents do their primary grocery shopping at a large chain store, rather than smaller neighborhood stores. Stop and Shop is the most popular, with 29.8% of respondents primarily doing their shopping there. 26.7% of respondents primarily go to PriceRite. Only 10 respondents (2.8%) listed a non-chain store as their primary place to buy food.

Walmart was the most common secondary grocery shopping location. 22.1% of respondents said they had gone to Walmart at least once per month in the past year for grocery shopping. PriceRite once again ranked second, with 17.6% of respondents saying they had shopped at PriceRite at least monthly in the past year. 85 respondents (24.1%) said they have shopped for food at a small, independent grocery store (such as Shaw's Meats or the International Market on Arnold Avenue) at least monthly over the past year.

The second unexpected finding of the survey is that the majority of respondents (68.5%) use their own cars as their primary means of transportation to get their food. Stop and Shop was the most common grocery shopping location for individuals who primarily drive themselves to go grocery shopping. 16.2% reported getting a ride with friends or family as their main transportation method, and just 7.4% of respondents reported that the RIPTA bus was their primary transportation method for getting food.

## Most used transit methods

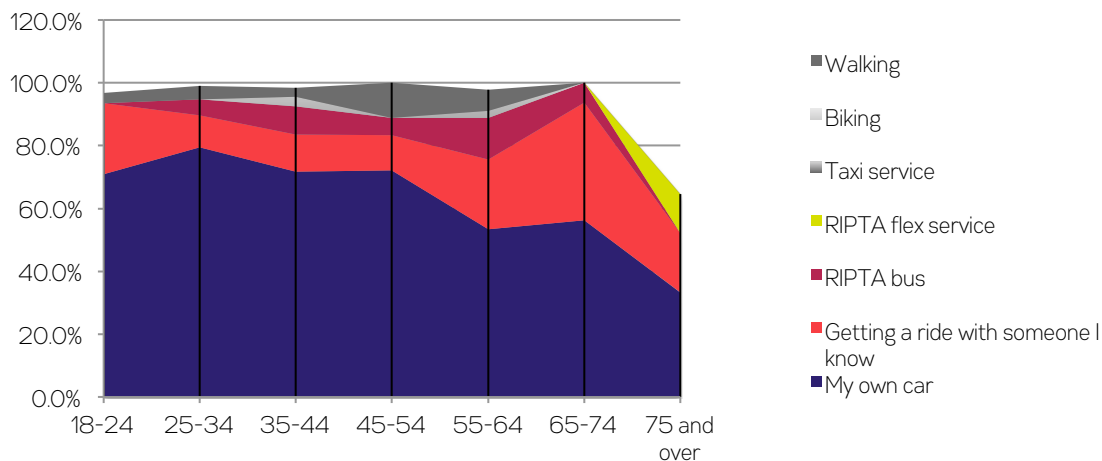


Looking to alternative or secondary transportation methods used to obtain food, 20.2% of respondents said that getting a ride in someone else's personal vehicle is their main alternative means of transportation, followed by walking (11.6%) and the RIPTA bus (5.1%). Walking is the most common tertiary means of transportation (8.2% of respondents), followed by getting a ride (4.2%) and RIPTA (3.1%).

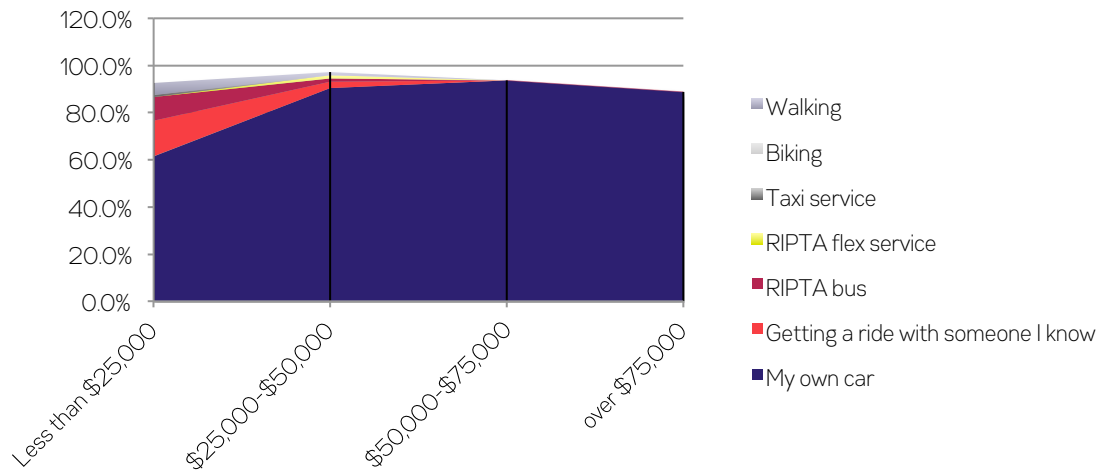
Of all respondents, 30.7% do not ever use their own car to get or buy food.

When looking at transportation by age, respondents aged 75 and older rely on their own cars less than other age groups (66.7% do not have cars), and their most common mode of transportation is getting a ride from others. Respondents with household income below \$25,000 also have a higher proportion of not owning their cars than the survey pool as a whole (37.5%).

## Most popular transportation method by age



## Most popular transportation method by income



The relatively low usage of the RIPTA buses by survey responses provides additional evidence that public transportation is not currently viewed an effective means to obtain food in Woonsocket. If they are unable to drive or get a ride, residents more frequently walk to the supermarket or other food provision sites than use RIPTA. The responses to this section of the survey also indicate that generally, residents do not face grave transportation challenges when accessing food. When asked about barriers to accessing food assistance programs, 8.2% of respondents said that lack of transportation prevents them from using food assistance programs that they would like to be using.

74.8% of respondents indicated that they are usually able to buy or get the food that they want. Of those that responded that they are *unable* to typically get the food they want<sup>5</sup>, 82.1% said they cannot afford the foods they want, 21.4% said they cannot get to the stores that sell the food they want, and 15.5% said the stores in Woonsocket do not sell the food they want. Inability to access emergency food resources due to time/location constraints and a lack of time to prepare food were also common reasons why individuals cannot buy or get the food they want to eat (13.1% each). Based on the responses to this portion of the survey, it seems that affordability is the primary barrier to food access.

Beyond using the supermarket to buy food, respondents used a variety of different methods for acquiring food. The farmers' market, food pantries, and family and friends were the three most common alternate methods of food access. 46.8% of respondents shopped at the farmers' market at least once in the past year, and 11.1% had done so in the past month. 23% of respondents used a food pantry in the past year, and 12.8% in the past month. 29.3% got food from family and/or friends in the past year, and 14.5% in the past month. The variations in the frequency of use is possibly seasonal—usage of the farmers' market is lower in winter months (during which the survey was conducted), while utilization of food pantries and family/friends is higher. Residents may not know that there is a year-round farmers' market, and/or they may be less willing or able to travel to Thundermist in the winter, compared with multiple other points of access in Woonsocket.

## Food at home and budgeting

A surprisingly high proportion of respondents, 75.6%, reported that they, or someone in their household, cooks dinner at home every day. Another 15.1% reported that they or someone in their household cooks dinner at home a few times per week. This high incidence of eating food at home could be attributed to a combination of factors: budget-conscious households, lack of desirable

<sup>5</sup> These responses include both those that responded "no" to the question "Are you usually able to buy or get the food that you want to eat?" as well as those that responded "yes" but subsequently provided reasons that they are unable to get the food they want.



or affordable prepared food options in Woonsocket, lack of transportation to access the desired prepared foods outside the home, or a preference to eat home-cooked meals. When looking across age, senior citizens (ages 65 and over) were found to less frequently eat meals at home (this is likely because many of the senior citizens surveyed participate in Woonsocket Senior Center programs, which includes congregate meals). Looking at race and ethnicity, Hispanic/Latino respondents have a higher rate of eating dinner at home daily (84%) compared to white respondents (71.7%). Respondents living in households earning under \$25,000 per year also eat dinner at home at a higher rate than the overall average (77.5% of respondents with incomes under \$25,000). Additionally, the majority of foreign-born respondents (81.3% of them) eat a home-cooked dinner every day.

Though the vast majority of respondents are eating dinner prepared at home at least a few times a week, there are still budget concerns in their households– the survey included Thundermist’s newly created two-question food insecurity screening, which yielded the following information. 50.1% of respondents said that at least once in the past twelve months, they were concerned that they would run out of food before they got money to buy more. 41.5% said that at least once in the past twelve months they actually ran out of food and didn’t have enough money to buy more. 76% of respondents that were *concerned* about running out of food at least once in the past year also reported using SNAP, and 83.5% of respondents that said they had actually run out of food at least once in the past year reported using SNAP.



**“Within the past 12 months, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.”**

**53% answered Yes**  
*Of those that answered yes:*  
 76% use SNAP  
 24% do not use SNAP



**“Within the past 12 months, the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.”**

**43% answered Yes**  
*Of those that answered yes:*  
 84% use SNAP  
 16% do not use SNAP

65.3% of respondents that were concerned about running out of food one month in the past year had a family income of less than \$25,000, and 69.9% of respondents that said they had actually run out of food once in past year had a family income of less than \$25,000. The answers to these and further analysis indicate that some residents, particularly low-income residents and those using SNAP, face challenges in making their monthly food budgets last through a full month. Like low-income respondents and those using SNAP, individuals without cars<sup>6</sup> also reported higher levels of food insecurity. Of the respondents without cars, 54.6% said they had been concerned about running out of food at some point in the past year, 50.9% reported actually running out of food and being unable to afford more at least once in the past year. Middle-aged respondents expressed more concern about running out of food–67.2% of 35-44 year olds and 66.7% of 55-64 year olds were concerned about running out of food once in the past year. None of the respondents ages 75 and older were concerned about running out of food. Of the 35-44 year old age group, 47.8% actually ran out of food at least once, and 58.3% of the 45-54 year old age group actually ran out of food once in the past year. Amongst those born outside of the U.S., 49.3% were concerned about running out of food, and 46.7% actually ran out of food once in the past year.

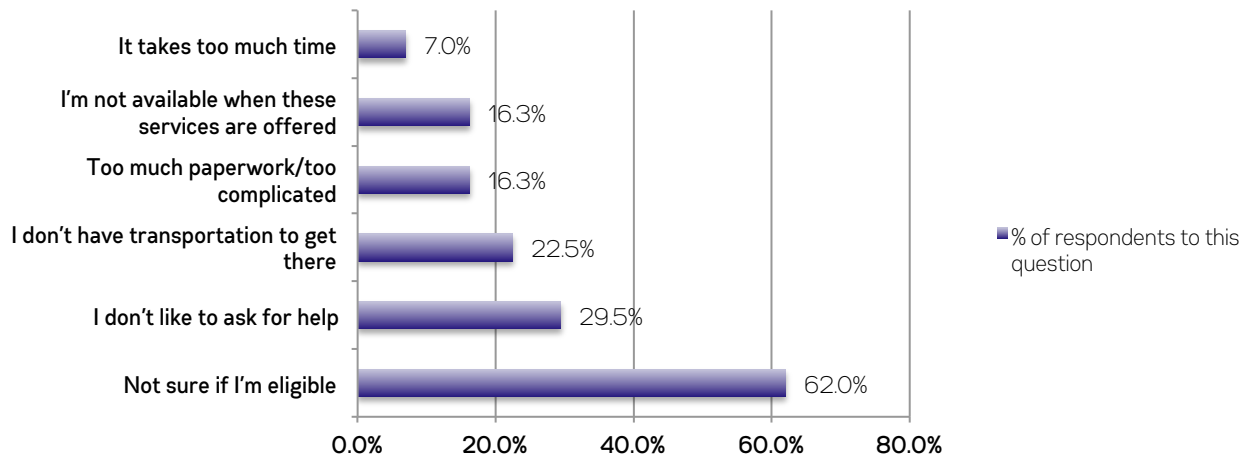
<sup>6</sup>Findings assume that respondents who did not rank “my own car” as a method of transportation do not have a car.

## Food Assistance

74.5% of the survey's respondents reported using some type of food assistance program. Of those respondents that indicated they have used an assistance program in the past year, 85.5% reported using SNAP and 29.8% using WIC. 32.4% of respondents indicated that they have use food pantries in the past year.<sup>7</sup> There were more modest usage rates for the Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program Vouchers<sup>8</sup> (2.6% and 14.5%, respectively), as well as the Woonsocket Farmers' Market coupons (8.5%) and soup kitchens or congregate meals (4%).

When asked if there are food assistance programs that the participants know about but did not participate in, 45% of respondents that answered the question at all answered "yes".<sup>9</sup> The primary reason that these respondents do not participate in the existing programs that they are aware of was uncertainty about their eligibility (62%), followed by not liking to ask for help (29.5%), and lack of transportation to access these services (22.5%). Too much paperwork and not being available at the requisite times were also challenges faced by some respondents (16.3% each). Responses to this section of the survey indicate that there is a lack of clear information amongst Woonsocket residents about eligibility requirements for (such as SNAP, WIC, and food pantries). Additionally, residents may feel there is stigma associated with participating in food assistance programs and therefore do not pursue additional (or any) assistance programs. During the CCF focus group, one participant told us that they felt there were always people in greater need, which may be a mindset that holds other residents back from asking for help as well.

### Why don't you use social services you know about?



## Transportation

A higher number of respondents reported having their own cars than expected. However, analyzing the responses of the individuals identified as not having their own cars revealed the food access for this specific group. Looking at food security, 54.6% of respondents without a car were concerned they would run out of food at least one time in the past twelve months, and 50.9% of respondents without a car actually did run out of food at least once. A high proportion of respondents without cars used SNAP (74.1%), 13% used WIC. When asked if there are social programs that they are aware of but do not participate in,

<sup>7</sup> This figure does not align with the previous question that asked about food pantry usage in the past year, which was 23%. It is unclear why respondents would have answered this question differently.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that 10 individuals reported using the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Vouchers that did not also report using WIC.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that respondents that answered "no" or left this question blank but subsequently provided reasons for not using the programs were treated as "yes" answers.

respondents without cars said that the main reason they do not participate is because of a lack of transportation (28.9%), followed by uncertainty about eligibility (24.4%), and not liking to ask for help (14.4%).

## Envisioning a Healthier Woonsocket

Finally, respondents were asked to share their ideas to make healthier food more accessible in Woonsocket. 56% of the survey respondents gave at least one answer to this question, and answers were wide ranging. The most common responses were:

- A grocery store more convenient to downtown Woonsocket: 55 responses. Of these, 15 respondents mentioned specific grocery store names, with 9 expressing desire for a Market Basket store location (perhaps because Market Basket's communications with Woonsocket's Mayor have been in the news in recent months). The Market Basket was the fourth most popular primary grocery shopping location for survey respondents (3.4% of respondents).
- More affordable healthy food: 50
- More farm fresh food/farmers' markets/healthier foods in corner stores: 44. One respondent suggested a night market, for residents who work during the day and are unable to visit the Woonsocket farmers' market.
- More information about nutrition, healthy recipes, budgeting, and existing food assistance programs: 19
- More (and more affordable) public transportation options: 11. Suggestions included more bus stops and routes, special shuttles for individuals with special needs or for SNAP recipients
- Eased qualifications for SNAP: 9. Some individuals reported that they are just above the threshold to qualify for SNAP, but still face challenges in affording food every month.

## THE ACTION PLAN

### *Good Food Jobs*

A recent paper from the City University of New York examining good food job policies in New York City made recommendations about how to create high quality jobs that increase food employment and promote access to healthy food:

- Making the creation of good food jobs (fair wages, benefits, safe working conditions, and producing/distributing affordable, healthy food) an explicit goal of food policy. Collaboration with the Restaurant Opportunity Center a possible way to design good food service jobs.
- Create a municipal infrastructure for good food jobs initiatives, including workforce development and training programs, collaborative funding mechanisms for food areas experiencing growth, and identification of shrinking and growing sectors,
- Intersectoral thinking—encouraging government, civil society, and private sector to collaborate through shared projects.

A leading theme across the needs assessment was the lack of living wage career or "good" workforce opportunities in Woonsocket. The KK&P team strongly recommends the following frameworks for thinking about all of the strategies, activities and recommendations presented below. First, address food insecurity as a symptom of economic insecurity to support the creation of broader economic opportunity in Woonsocket. And second, increase inclusion of community members (and the HEZ Ambassadors as a gateway to community members) in planning for and promoting food programs, services and activities.

What follows are strategies and activities for improving the landscape of food and access in Woonsocket. The strategies are not meant to be mutually exclusive, and there are synergies between many of them. There is no "magic bullet" in building vibrant, healthy, equitable food systems. But the research team strongly believes that all of the recommendations below would serve the HEZ's goal of increasing food access in Woonsocket and leveraging food to enhance quality of life in the city.

The strategies focus on infrastructure, "place", information, integration, and the geography of food access. Many of the programs and services described below can create work opportunities as they grow and scale, while in the early years, this will be a one person and one job at a time impact area.

The strategies and recommendations are as follows:

- Strategy #1 – Bring food to people, and bring people to food
  - Contribute to city efforts to bring a grocery store or supermarket in central/downtown Woonsocket
  - Create a pilot grocery delivery service for Woonsocket’s SNAP shoppers
  - Support independent retailers in offering healthy foods
  - Innovate with farmers’ market models and programs
- Strategy #2 – Increase integration and promotion of existing assets and services
  - Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming
  - Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services
  - Build on success of programs that incentivize healthy food purchases
- Strategy #3- Create a community “headquarters” for food access, activities and information in central Woonsocket

## Strategy #1 – Bring food to people, and bring people to food

This strategy focuses on the geography of improving food access: improving services that meet Woonsocket residents with affordable healthy foods where they are. Many of recommended activities under this strategy involve engaging food retailer partners, a process that can be time-consuming and the success of which will depend on the HEZ partner’s ability to understand the retailers’ challenges and desires and to position “the ask” in those terms.

### *Contribute to city efforts to bring a grocery store to central Woonsocket*

The only grocery store within Woonsocket city limits is Price Rite, located on the city’s northern boundary in a commercial business district, far from the city’s downtown and the concentration of low-income households nearby. The HEZ partners can support the current Mayor’s efforts<sup>10</sup> to bring a grocery store to the city, and guide those efforts to ensure that a new food business is centrally located. In 2013, the City passed a new zoning ordinance which permits supermarkets in “Commerical-1” zoning districts, which according to the comprehensive plan’s new sustainability section, significantly expands the range of allowable supermarket locations in the center of the city, most of which are in census tracts identified by the USDA as food deserts. While zoning may not be a limiting factor, prices of real estate may be. Past studies have revealed that downtown real estate may be price prohibitive for a full scape supermarket—a smaller format store (which many chain and independent retailers can offer) should be considered.

An exciting model is emerging now of grocery stores co-locating with federally qualified community health centers, with federal funding from the Healthy Food Finance Initiative (HFFI, more detail in the Funding Recommendations section below), which supports healthy food businesses seeking to locate in USDA identified food deserts. Such a model, housed at Thundermist’s Clinton Street location, could serve Woonsocket well—such opportunities to co-locate food and health services should be investigated further as part of a broader strategy to bring food retail closer to downtown.

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<sup>10</sup> Woonsocket’s Mayor and members of City Council are all up for re-election in the fall of 2016. If necessary, the HEZ food access working group can be the entity that ensures that these efforts continue across political administrations.

It is important to note that some HFFI funded food retail initiatives have struggled and some have failed. The HEZ working group must work with the Mayor’s office to identify and court a nimble retail partner with expertise and interest in serving low-income customers with foods they want to buy in the form (i.e. fresh, frozen, fresh cut) they want. Further, grocery store access alone has been shown not to significantly shift people’s purchasing or consumption habits and doesn’t change the (perceived and real) price differentials between less processed, healthy foods and more processed unhealthy foods. A suite of complementary services—such as education, incentives, transportation, and nutritionist support—can help. Engaging retailers in conversations about health and access, their operations and corporate social responsibility priorities may be a “way in.”

Laying the groundwork for a new grocery store in a low-income low-access area can take years. And even a central Woonsocket grocery location won’t be easily accessible to all without sufficient transportation options in place. Exploring transportation services (such as coordinating taxi or Uber ride services from densely populated neighborhoods, housing facilities or other community institutions) that might support various populations in accessing existing markets in an essential interim step, and will be an important ingredient for the new market’s success.

### First Steps

- Approach the Mayor’s office with interest in learning more about their ongoing efforts and with an offer to support those efforts and to share findings from the needs assessment that may inform the effort.
- Explore the Mayor’s office’s interest in supporting a health center/grocery co-location model.
- Open dialogue with Commerce RI about potential incentives packages for retailers.
- Open dialogue with HFFI and Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), which provides support services to HFFI projects (including those focused on health/food services co-location).
- Explore food retail partners. Consider both national chains (like Market Basket) as well as RI-based retailers (like Roch’s, Dave’s, or even a Woonsocket based corner grocer with ambitions to scale up).
- Investigate the Brockton model (description below) for key learnings and best practices in co-location of a grocery store with a community health center.
- Consider NeighborWorks’ undeveloped downtown buildings as alternate potential locations.

### Rollout Process

<i>Year 1</i>	Build relationships with the Mayor’s office, Commerce RI, HFFI and other potential funders Research co-location models Explore food retail partners
<i>Year 2</i>	Identify high potential retail partner Pin down funding/incentive mix Market research, demand analysis, location analysis to be conducted
<i>Year 3</i>	Continue retail partner development, research and market development, as necessary

### Partners and Roles

- Thundermist— lead discussions with external partners (Mayor, HFFI, LISC), providing deep context about food insecurity and the importance of downtown/central city as a market location; models research and business modeling for grocery store location in or near new facility; engage the RI Department of Health in the process
- Farm Fresh RI— leverage understanding of food businesses to facilitate process of identifying and vetting potential retailers
- NeighborWorks – business modeling to understand how grocery store location could fit with NW building stock; coordination with Thundermist on location selection/priority

## ***Case Study: Vicente's Tropical Grocery and Brockton Neighborhood Health Center (Brockton, MA)***

### ***Summary***

Vicente's Tropical Grocery, a successful supermarket in Brockton, MA, opened a second store in a vacant warehouse at main intersection in Brockton, in July 2015. Vicente's owners invited the Brockton Neighborhood Health Center (BNHC), a non-profit, federally qualified health center, to open a location next door. BNHC approached Vicente's about a collaboration when word of the store's expansion became public. Brockton is home to large Haitian and Cape Verdean communities, as well as smaller populations of immigrants from many parts of the world. Vicente's supplies ingredients for a variety of ethnic cuisines for its customers.

### ***Programs***

Vicente's and BNHC have collaborated on programming to encourage healthy eating. The grocery store has nutritional guidelines and labels throughout. BNHC staff take customers on guided visits through the store, and the BNHC nutritionist have developed healthier versions of traditional Haitian and Cape Verdean recipes, which will be taught in the new BNHC teaching kitchen. Eventually, there will be a livestream of these cooking courses into Vicente's. Nutrition and cooking classes at BNHC will be free for patients, and BNHC doctors will offer fruit and vegetable prescriptions to patients.

Vicente's has also developed a rewards system for customers purchasing healthier products—produce and other healthy products earn more points towards the store's loyalty program. Eventually, health center patients will receive store credits for improved health outcomes like lower blood pressure or cholesterol. The rewards program was developed independently through the partnership between the store and BNHC.

### ***Funding***

Funding for this project came from several sources. The renovation of the vacant warehouse into a grocery store cost \$19 million. The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) and Boston Community Capital (BCC) financed the acquisition of the shopping plaza. TRF, BCC, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) provided debt financing to develop the supermarket. JP Morgan Chase and the Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation provided New Market Tax Credits, with JP Morgan Chase as the investor.

### ***Impact***

The Vicente's/BNHC partnership and facility is still new, so evaluations of health outcomes and store/clinic programming have not yet been released. Economically, the project was estimated to create about 200 new jobs for the community, and revitalized a formerly vacant shopping center. Longer-term positive health and economic outcomes from this project are anticipated.

### ***Application in Woonsocket***

Stakeholder interviewees and a high percentage of survey respondents indicated that a downtown grocery store is very desirable in Woonsocket. The presence of Thundermist in central Woonsocket creates the possibility for collaboration between a future supermarket and the clinic. Programming initiatives similar to those in Brockton could be developed in Woonsocket. The desire for place-based solutions for health equity also makes this project an attractive model for Woonsocket to follow. The transformation of currently vacant lots or buildings in downtown Woonsocket into a supermarket would help to revitalize the downtown area. The Reinvestment Fund and Boston Community Capital both operate in Rhode Island, and LISC Rhode Island (already a partner to several organizations around the HEZ food access table) is another potential partner for a project like this.

## Create a pilot grocery delivery service for Woonsocket's SNAP shoppers

In a 2015 article, The Washington Post described Woonsocket as a kind of SNAP capital—the attention paid to the connection between monthly SNAP benefit renewal and overall economic activity in Woonsocket can be leveraged. Historically, grocers offering home delivery services to customers ordering online have not been able to serve customers using SNAP dollars because SNAP/EBT transactions were required to take place in person. Allowances in federal policy have been made and several pilots are running nationally now in which retailers are providing home delivery at no cost to SNAP shoppers. With support and allowances from the USDA, a local supermarket could begin providing delivery to customers' homes; or with programming support from a HEZ partners, residents' orders could be placed as a group and delivery could be made to a central convenient location (such as public housing, a community center, Thundermist, etc.). One facet of USDA's pilot efforts in this arena has focused on senior citizens and people with limited mobility—new partners can be built into this process to ensure that these vulnerable populations are served by this initiative.

### First Steps

- Outreach to USDA Food and Nutrition Services to understand the status of the pilots underway, successes and challenges and upcoming opportunities.
  - o One area to explore is how limits to Internet access are impacting low-income people's ability to order groceries online and innovative solutions to filling this gap.
- Outreach to Stop & Shop to test interest in offering Peapod delivery service to Woonsocket SNAP shoppers—under what circumstances, with what caveats, with what kind of partnership or external support.

### Rollout Process

<i>Year 1</i>	Outreach to USDA and Stop & Shop to test possibilities, interest and timeframe/conditions Research best practices and findings emerging from current pilots If necessary, identify a community organization partner to support coordination of residents' online orders
<i>Year 2</i>	Launch pilot delivery services to limited number of resident homes or to 1-2 central locations
<i>Year 3</i>	Expand number of central delivery locations or grow from central to home delivery model

### Partners and Roles

- Thundermist— coordinate and lead outreach to USDA and Stop & Shop; engage RI DOH in the process
- NeighborWorks – leverage concentrated "customer" base (e.g. residents) and potential central delivery location (refurbished building downtown) and

## ***Case Study: Fresh Direct SNAP Grocery Delivery Pilot Program (Bronx, NY)***

### ***Summary***

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers SNAP, has initiated a pilot program for grocery delivery for SNAP recipients in three cities: Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco. In each city, the USDA identified an existing grocery delivery service (Crisp! in Chicago, Fresh Direct in New York, and Good Eggs in San Francisco) to carry out the pilots.

### ***Programs***

Fresh Direct has made public many of the details of their SNAP delivery pilot. The Fresh Direct SNAP delivery service is currently available in two zip codes in the Bronx. Customers paying with SNAP benefits shop online the same way as any other Fresh Direct customer. When checking out, SNAP customers select SNAP/EBT and a delivery window, and are presented with an estimated total. The customer's EBT card will not be swiped until their groceries are delivered, which means that the EBT cardholder must be present at the time of delivery in order for a payment to be processed. SNAP customers will be presented with a final total and an EBT Purchase Total at the time of delivery. SNAP customers are not charged tax, delivery fees, or any other surcharges. SNAP customers may only buy SNAP-eligible items through this service, and cannot mix their payments with credit or debit cards for these orders.

### ***Funding***

The USDA and each delivery partner arranged funding and incentives for this program separately.

### ***Impact***

A grocery delivery program can be particularly useful to customers without regular access to a car, senior citizens, and/or those shopping in bulk. The Fresh Direct program is still in pilot phase and has not released any data on uptake or impact.



## *Support independent food businesses in offering healthy foods*

According to the findings of the needs assessment, Woonsocket’s corner stores, convenience stores, dollar stores and pharmacies are not *primary* food sources for many Woonsocket residents, but residents do depend on them for snacks, food on the go, and grocery needs between major supermarket shopping trips. Some of these establishments are family run and are institutions for certain neighborhoods or ethnic groups. These retailers can be supported in increasing their offerings of healthy foods in ways that are reasonable, desirable and profitable to them. Independently owned restaurants are another potential audience for this work, with the potential for design special menus and events to draw in customers around healthy foods presented in new ways.

Corner store “make-over” and revitalization projects around the country have struggled—healthy foods can be highly perishable, cold storage infrastructure costs can be prohibitive, and distribution channels for small volumes of foods can be hard to find and maintain. But new partnerships, best practices, case studies and policy directions (at local, state, federal and corporate level) have emerged in recent work and research that make this a field worth considering for Woonsocket. Success in these models comes, not surprisingly, when retailers know their customer base’s habits and needs well and when motivation to shift product offerings comes from the owner. It is important to note that healthy offerings need not only be in the form of fresh, perishable foods – shelf stable foods (beans, grains, spices, sauces) and frozen fruits are healthy offerings that can support Woonsocket’s culture of home cooking while minimizing the retailer’s risk.

### First steps

- Explore opportunities with CVS/pharmacies division to offer increased healthy and/or fresh food offerings and related merchandising at the two CVS Woonsocket retail pharmacy locations, including the location in Thundermist’s lobby. CVS does this in larger markets at a pilot scale—leverage their corporate Woonsocket headquarters location to showcase their best innovations in healthy food provision.
- Explore partnership opportunities with WIC at the state level to provide training and support to WIC retailers on healthy food promotion and vending.
- Initiate dialogue with anchor independent food retailers- such as Friendly Market and International Market- about what their customers are looking for, their ambitions for growth, their perspectives on healthy food, and the kinds of supports they might need. Approaching these business owners in their native languages will be essential—the HEZ ambassadors can potentially be a resource here.

### Rollout Process

<i>Year 1</i>	<p>Research best practices and outreach to local comparable efforts (to understand and anticipate general and RI-specific challenges)</p> <p>Outreach to retailer partners</p> <p>Explore funding opportunities and supports</p> <p>Pilot implementation at 1 market; evaluate success of the pilot</p>
<i>Year 2</i>	<p>Expand pilot implementation to 2-3 more stores</p> <p>Tweak approach based on evaluation</p> <p>Provide ongoing support, key infrastructure (cold storage, reach in coolers, e.g.) and targeted training to retailers (fresh food handling, merchandising, other needs they express)</p>
<i>Year 3</i>	<p>Expand programming as motivated retailers are identified</p> <p>Continue to provide support to retailers and stay in close contact to understand what supports are needed</p>

## Partners and Roles

- Thundermist – leverage role as local WIC administrator to drive partnership at state level; leverage partnership with CVS to explore healthy food offerings within the clinic
- Farm Fresh RI – leverage relationships with the retail sector, as possible; consider partnering with interested retailers to host pop-up markets
- NeighborWorks – poll residents to learn more about where they shop in the neighborhood, what they buy and what they wish they could buy, and share findings with local retailers as a way to initiate discussion about market potential of healthy food offerings.
- HEZ Ambassadors – facilitate between retailers and HEZ partners
- WIC – leverage access to and relationship with WIC authorized retailers

### *Innovate with farmers' market models and programs*

Woonsocket residents value the city's year round farmers' market, but sometimes find the prices prohibitive. At the same time, many farmers want to be able to serve all customers (including low income customers) but as small scale producers cannot compete with supermarket pricing, particularly given the costs of spending a day at the market. Successful models abound in which non-farmers (e.g. youth or veterans) purchase product directly from local farmers and re-sell it from a farmers' market-style booth or tent. Such programs free farmers up from time consuming marketing (reducing prices a bit), create new and flexible venues for residents to access local food, and offer non-farmer participants opportunities to build business, merchandising and sales skills, and in some cases micro-entrepreneurship opportunities.

At the same time, the needs assessment revealed an underutilized community garden land base in Woonsocket. A program such as above can also serve as a potential market outlet for home gardeners, leveraging those community garden plots and creating opportunities for supplementary income and community empowerment. Farm Fresh RI partners with the Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT) in Providence on a program that provides supports and a market venue for aspiring market gardeners (in this case Hmong residents), and could bring learnings and expertise from that program to bear in Woonsocket. SCLT is also introducing a farming apprenticeship in 2016 focused on veteran and minority aspiring farmers, in partnership with a Woonsocket farmers' market vendor, Blue Skys Farm, a further potential opportunity for residents to grow and market (in this case commercially) food.

A model like this may have synergies with supporting retailers in increasing healthy food offerings– having a regular or infrequent visiting produce market in front of the store could be a way to demonstrate and build demand for fresh foods, as an end in and of itself or as a gateway to engaging independent retailers in offering healthy product in their stores. It could also have synergies with nutrition or food education efforts and allow nutrition education providers and farmers' market organizers to innovate with market locations, including public housing facilities, religious institutions, social service organizations and schools.

## First Steps

- Explore potential partnership opportunities with non-profits providing skill building or entrepreneurship supports (such as Riverzedge or CCF)
- Explore regulations that may complicate or inhibit models (for example, in order for customers to use WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Coupons, the transaction must be made directly with the farmer)
- Facilitate discussions with local farmers to find potential suppliers
- Identify market structure that would work well for Woonsocket–standing market in additional location, pop-up market linked to high density events or areas

## Rollout Process

<i>Year 1</i>	<p>Identify a host organization to train produce re-sellers, cultivate market “host” sites (one-offs and committed/regular sites, and identify produce sources and target product mix to offer</p> <p>Research existing models and look internally to key learnings about what works in pop-up markets</p> <p>Pilot 5 pop-up markets</p> <p>Identify, adapt and implement training programs for re-sellers</p>
<i>Year 2</i>	<p>Pilot 1-2 regular host market sites (e.g. public housing, a corner store, hospital, pharmacy, Head Start)</p> <p>Grow event-based pop-up markets to &gt;1 month</p> <p>Learn more about customer base- improve and expand product offerings in targeted way</p> <p>Increase number of re-sellers</p> <p>Expand training offerings and supports for re-sellers</p>
<i>Year 3</i>	<p>Full implementation: 2-3 regular host market sites and 2 or more pop-up markets per month</p> <p>Continue growing responsive supports and trainings for re-sellers</p>

## Partners and Roles

- Farm Fresh RI – leverage market expertise and farmer network; bring in Southside Community Land Trust expertise as relevant for market garden programming and supports
- Thundermist – leverage local food programming and expertise and pop-up market experience
- CCF - potential host organization for training the produce re-sellers (micro enterprise training opportunity)
- NeighborWorks – inventory community garden and orchard properties and users/potential users
- Head Start – potential market site

## Strategy #2 – Increase integration and promotion of existing assets and services

A key asset in Woonsocket is the network that is building—in the form of the HEZ food access working group— among anchor non-profit, social service and health service organizations with significant client bases and complementary capacities. An opportunity exists for Woonsocket to be at the forefront of food security and food access work by increasingly drawing connections between health and food, mental health and food, affordable housing and food, workforce opportunities and food, youth programming and food, and more. This strategy innovates by integrating.

### *Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming*

The HEZ working group can leverage RI's momentum toward increasing spending on primary care (as opposed to emergency room services) and utilize NeighborWorks' newly built commercial kitchen for "culinary medicine": evidence-based hands-on programming that combines the art of cooking with the science of nutrition and healthy eating to enable doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, case workers and other health care providers to better advise and support their patients, while also offering formal community cooking workshops to engage with their patients around food. Initially developed as a partnership between Tulane Medical School and Johnson & Wales University, culinary medicine is an accredited program available as an elective for medical students and allied health students (at institutions licensing the curriculum) and available as continuing medical education (CME). The culinary medicine program is now licensed by several dozen institutions nationwide, primarily medical schools, and one nursing program. With Thundermist as a host implementation site, this training could positively impact the health and behaviors of providers themselves and their patients, while also creating innovative, social impact workforce training opportunities in the health care field. Students at the Beacon School and Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center both offer culinary training programs for youth that could be enhanced with culinary medicine offerings.

Institutions utilizing culinary medicine have been working to identify paths to monetize the program by making nutrition education and support of this kind reimbursable by health insurance companies. Diabetes support groups, self-management training program, and prevention program are seen as high potential options that engage people in groups for nutrition and food education (and are also focus areas of the HEZ in the coming years). Until the education programming itself is reimbursable, combining culinary medicine offerings with an already reimbursable clinic visit (dietician, nutritionist, pediatric weight check visits, e.g.) as a way to draw people into the programming.

#### **First Steps**

- Explore the Goldring Center curriculum to ensure that it's aligned with the HEZ and Thundermist objectives and standards for nutrition.
- Reach out to Johnson & Wales to understand how the school could support culinary medicine programming in RI.
- Explore partnership opportunities with area colleges, universities and community colleges to find a host higher education partner for culinary medicine training implementation and/or for CME.
- Review standards of care and reimbursement to identify opportunities to a) link culinary medicine programming with reimbursable visits to encourage participation, and b) monetize the programming itself by making it reimbursable by health insurance companies.
- Explore reimbursement potential with Blue Cross BlueShield, Neighborhood, United and other insurers serving RI.

## Rollout Process

<i>Year 1</i>	<p>Develop relationships and conduct background research described above</p> <p>Initiate licensing process</p>
<i>Year 2</i>	<p>Secure higher education partner (if necessary)</p> <p>Secure license from Goldring Center</p> <p>Launch culinary medicine offerings</p> <p>Train Thundermist clinical staff in Woonsocket (CME)</p> <p>Continue to pursue options for making programming reimbursable</p>
<i>Year 3</i>	<p>Extend culinary medicine offerings beyond Thundermist to other health care providers and food and health related workforce training programs</p> <p>Continue to pursue options for making programming reimbursable</p>

## Partners and Roles

- Thundermist – coordinate culinary medicine adoption in Woonsocket, for training or CME; host programming and integrate culinary medicine into health service model; train clinical staff across the organization
- NeighborWorks – host culinary medicine trainings in shared use commercial kitchen
- CCF – engage culinary workforce development participants engage outside partners with culinary training programs

## *Integrate promotion and unify messaging of food related education, skill building and services*

Nutrition education programming and advice are offered by a wide range of organizations and providers in Woonsocket, including but not limited to Thundermist and other health care providers, SNAP Ed (via URI), WIC nutrition counselors, and Farm Fresh RI market programming. An opportunity exists to provide Woonsocket residents with a unified message about nutrition and health, including what “healthy food” is, how to make it delicious and joyful, and how to access, prepare and eat more of it on a budget. Whether or not culinary medicine licensing and accreditation are sought/implemented in Woonsocket, the cornerstones of culinary medicine’s evidence-based curriculum could provide a foundational, aligned message on which Woonsocket nutrition education partners could collaboratively and individually build. Some nutrition education providers are already working together to ensure consistency across messaging (e.g. Farm Fresh RI and SNAP Ed at URI), providing a foundation for these efforts.

Whether culinary medicine anchors this approach or another source, the needs assessment made it clear that Woonsocket residents are hungry for education that is personal, practical and non-judgmental. Programming—in group settings or one-on-one coaching formats—can listen, respond to and be shaped by the realities of Woonsocket residents, including limits and constraints on time, budget, or home kitchen infrastructure; health and medical dietary requirements, at the individual and household level; and cultural, religious, ethical and other influences on food choices. One example of personalized, practical nutrition coaching could involve partnering with an area supermarket to have a staff nutritionist (e.g. from Thundermist) on-site for well-promoted special events/days, to guide people in shopping for specific health needs within a given budget and food benefit program regulations. The first days of the month after SNAP benefits renew would be an excellent strategic time to have a nutritionist available for grocery shopping support. Many big food retailers have nutritionists at the corporate level, and

some are beginning to staff stores with this expertise—such a partnership might fit a need on the industry side and is a good “gateway” partnership opportunity with big food retailers in the area.

Further, a network already exists among emergency food providers in Woonsocket, including infrequent meetings and more frequent informal collaboration and communication. The HEZ food access working group has sought to build on this foundation by creating a one-pager listing food related resources and services, from summer meals to food pantries. Next steps in integrating emergency food resources would be to increase alignment, coordination and clarity of food pantry days, times, offerings, and regulations (such as number of times per month a household can attend) to ensure that resources are spread over the course of the month and are available at a variety of times. Once this integration has occurred, promoting food services as a unified offering will be a next step. A HEZ Ambassador emphasized the need to truly saturate the city with information about food resources, to ensure that residents who primarily stay within the bounds of their neighborhoods are reached.

It is essential that food benefits, programs and services be nonjudgmental and non-dogmatic, and that they be delivered with kindness. The needs assessment revealed that the SNAP administration office in Woonsocket is a place where some people feel they are disrespected and treated unfairly. This is low hanging fruit: reaching out to leadership in that office to share results of this needs assessment and the experiences it revealed would be a strong first step in increasing resident access to benefits and reducing stress and stigma around their use.

### First Steps

- Convene HEZ food access working group partners for preliminary review of messaging from their nutrition education programming (including education that happens in the clinical settings, social settings and beyond), identification of best practices for Woonsocket specifically, and to build commitment to aligning nutrition messaging.
- Identify “anchor” nutrition and food messages that can be put forth in all nutrition and food education offerings— these could be from the Goldring culinary medicine curriculum, one of the HEZ partner’s curricula, or elsewhere.
- Reach out to store managers at local supermarkets to begin to explore the possibility of having a HEZ partner staff nutritionist on-site in the first days of each month, or for scheduled and promoted events.
- Conduct analysis of the emergency food services and congregate meals available to identify gaps (time of day, time of week, time of month, population served, kinds of foods provided, etc.) As possible, adapt schedules and menus to fill these gaps, and promote accordingly.
- Reach out to the SNAP administration office to share needs assessment findings and begin a conversation about reducing stigma and improving customer experience.

### Rollout Process

<i>Year 1</i>	Review existing nutrition messaging to identify best practices and points of misalignment Identify shared anchor messages Develop unified nutrition guidelines/curriculum for Woonsocket community organizations Forge relationships with local supermarkets to bring nutritionists on-site Analyze emergency and food benefit services to identify gaps and improve frequency, range and quality of service
<i>Year 2</i>	Expand the group of nutrition education providers beyond the HEZ food access working group (to organizations based in Woonsocket and beyond but serving the city) Increase frequency of presence of nutritionists at supermarkets
<i>Year 3</i>	Continue to innovate and expand nutrition programming in Woonsocket

## Partners and Roles

- Farm Fresh RI - convene HEZ partners with nutrition education programming to identify a shared set of messages and unified strategy for promoting nutrition education programming and other food access resources
- Thundermist- pursue partnership with local supermarket to have nutritionists on-site
- Head Start, NeighborWorks, CCF - promote food access services and offerings

### *Build on success of programs that incentivize healthy food purchases*

Woonsocket has a tremendous asset in its year round farmers' market and the Farm Fresh RI "Bonus Bucks" program offered there, through which an additional \$2 is given for every five SNAP/EBT dollars a farmers' market shopper spends. There is currently no ceiling to the amount of Bonus Bucks any given person can earn. These incentives are available to any SNAP-using customer at the farmers' market but can also be earned by participation in the food education program Healthy Food Healthy Families (operated at the farmers' market by FFRI) and can be received in the form of a "prescription" from a doctor through the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program (hosted at Thundermist in partnership with FFRI and Wholesome Wave).

Woonsocket residents face a range of realities that call for incentivizing healthy food in multiple forms (frozen, fresh cut) and from multiples sources (farmers' markets, grocery stores): infrequent shopping trips, tight budgets, constraints on time to manage whole produce, and the expense of food waste from perishability and picky eating.

Around the country, models like these are exploring expansion to food retail sites other than farmers' markets. The USDA's final report on their Healthy Incentives Pilot (released in 2014), through which select residents of Hampden County, MA were given incentive dollars for select healthy food SNAP purchases at local supermarkets. And both Fair Food (Michigan) and Wholesome Wave (Connecticut) are piloting expansion of SNAP incentive programs to grocery stores. These three pilots have included local foods and non-local foods, fresh and frozen foods, as well as independent grocers and large supermarket chains. Wholesome Wave's pilot program has also experimented with providing vouchers for taxi service to mitigate transportation access challenges.

The HEZ food access working group has an opportunity to build on existing incentive programs using knowledge being gained elsewhere in pilot programs, to expand the use of incentives beyond farmers' markets, beyond fresh food, and (potentially) beyond local food. This will not be easy. It will require close partnership with and strong supports for area retailers (to support potential shifts in their check-out operations, point of sale technologies, merchandising and supply chains). Funding the incentives, if they are extended beyond local food and farmers' market, may also be challenging, as the USDA's newly created Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive program (FINI) makes almost \$17 million available for incentivizing healthy food purchases with SNAP, but gives priority to programs that focus on locally grown produce and which connect low-income consumers to agricultural producers (non-local foods, as well as non-fresh foods, are allowable under FINI). An opportunity exists to partner with the USDA as well as private funders to explore the possibility of making incentives available to food insecure residents who are *not* currently eligible for SNAP, but who live at the edge of SNAP eligibility and are vulnerable nonetheless.

## First Steps

- Gauge interest of select local corner stores and supermarkets in participating in a healthy food incentive program.
- Research existing pilots and models to understand key challenges, obstacles, and necessary conditions for success.
- Reach out to USDA regional office, Wholesome Wave, and other potential implementation partners to discuss potential program models.
- Collaborate with WIC and the Department of Health at the state level to explore common interests related to incentives programming.

## Rollout Process

<i>Year 1</i>	Information gathering from Woonsocket residents, potential partners, funders, state and federal agencies and potential partner grocery stores Pilot program design (at one grocery location)
<i>Year 2</i>	Rollout of pilot program Evaluation of pilot program—uptake, usage, and customer and grocery store satisfaction Refine/revise program as needed
<i>Year 3</i>	Scale up of program (to 2-3 locations, diverse in store type and city geography, as possible) Program evaluation Further scale up as possible

## Partners and Roles

- Farm Fresh RI - build on foundations and knowledge of what works
- Thundermist (with FFRI) - engage USDA to explore pilot incentive program possibilities

## Strategy #3 – Create a community “headquarters” for food access activities and information in Woonsocket

The strategy focuses on answering residents’ call for a “place”: a headquarters for food activity, social engagement, work and information in Woonsocket. This place must focus on people. It should be associated with vibrancy not emergency, but should creatively contribute to meeting food security needs. It should nourish people physically, emotionally, and socially. The prevalence of depression among Woonsocket residents emerged many times in the needs assessment, as did a need for a place to go and something gratifying to do (for the young, the old, the unemployed or underemployed, the socially isolated). A community space focused on food could serve to reduce feelings of hopelessness or isolation.

NeighborWorks’ newly renovated building on South Main Street, in possible combination with other nearby buildings in NW’s real estate portfolio, represents a significant opportunity to create a headquarters for food activities and information in Woonsocket. The South Main Street building includes a newly build shared use commercial kitchen (available for food entrepreneurs to rent by the hour), cold storage, event space, an outdoor market patio, and office space. The activities below are presented with that space in mind, but could be implemented at an alternate site or in a more dispersed manner. In addition to potentially hosting a range of activities recommended in Strategies 1 and 2 (such as a central location for grocery delivery services or even as an eventual site for a small format grocery store), based on the findings of the needs assessment, the KK&P team sees an opportunity for this headquarters to also include some combination of the following:

- Leverage kitchen and cold storage infrastructure to benefit emergency food providers – Emergency food providers in Woonsocket (as elsewhere) struggle to increase their offerings of fresh and frozen healthy foods due to limited access to cold storage infrastructure. Having access to the cold storage would enable emergency food providers to seek and accept more fresh food donations, and access to a commercial kitchen creates the possibility of processing these foods to minimize waste and to make the foods more convenient to food insecure people (e.g. soups, sauces, and frozen or fresh-cut produce). This space offers to opportunity to partner with area culinary workforce and training



programs to bring apprentices and trainees (along with volunteers) into the commercial kitchen to put their knife skills to bear on minimally processing foods for area pantries.

- Community Café- Launching a full service café is an expensive and risky business, and a demand study and business plan should be conducted before pursuing. More immediately, food based events—community meals—at lunchtime or dinnertime would be an opportunity to feature the businesses using the commercial kitchen (caterers, in particular) and a time for Woonsocket residents from a mix of backgrounds to convene together around food. Meals could be offered on a pay-what-you-can or suggested donation model. Partnerships with area organizations could bring films, art or music into the space to enrich these events.
- Food transportation – This could be a place from which residents could share taxi service to area grocery stores. If demand for shared transportation services is considerable, a shuttle or van service could be created.
- Youth programming – Woonsocket youth are hungry for a place to go and something gratifying to do. Skill building programming focused on cooking, food processing, food marketing, even culinary medicine could be offered, perhaps in partnership with Riverzedge to develop satellite food programming on-site.

NeighborWorks has a number of buildings in the Island Place Historic District poised for redevelopment. To prompt discussion and planning between NeighborWorks and the HEZ partners, the chart below illustrates the space available in those buildings and the potential uses they could serve.

	Lower Level (retail/ production)	Event & Market Plaza (retail/ production)	1st Floor (retail/ event)	2nd Floor (live-work, office)	Roof Garden	3rd Floor (live-work, office)	TOTAL
40 South Main Street	3,350	3,000	3,510	-	650	-	10,510
15 Island Place	-	-	6,400	5,038	-	5,038	16,476
68 South Ma Street Bldg. 1	6,500	600	10,266	8,383	-	-	25,749
68 South Main Street Bldg. 2	-	-	14,444	16,918	-	16,918	48,280
TOTAL	9,850 sq ft	3,600 sq ft	34,620 sq ft	30,339 sq ft	650 sq ft	21,956 sq ft	101,015 sq ft

### First Steps

- NeighborWorks must identify points of resonance between this action plan and the organization’s own needs (e.g. for revenue to be drawn from properties, desired mix of tenants and uses, etc.) Models such as Austin’s Sustainable Food Center (described in the case study text box that follows) or the ReFresh Project in New Orleans (<http://broadcommunityconnections.org/projects/refresh>) can serve as fodder for inspiration.
- Leverage NW’s built-out space on South Main Street as a laboratory for trailing new collaborations and programming:
  - o Explore collaboration potential with emergency food sector and providers or food-related workforce and training programs.
  - o Begin programming for food-related events and/or community dinners.
- Coordinate a tour for HEZ partners (including executives and program leads from each organization) of NW’s Island Place properties.

- In concert with the tour, conduct a visioning meeting to identify key needs for and uses of a food headquarters and to determine how, if and in what way the NW buildings and this food “place” might be a fit.
- Explore opportunity create a Community Food Project application through a mix of recommended activities housed within this “place”.

**Rollout Process**

<i>Year 1</i>	<p>Visioning and planning around idea of “place” broadly and use of NW buildings as a home</p> <p>Identification of key partners needed/desired</p> <p>Leverage the South Main St event space and kitchen as a laboratory for new programs and collaborations</p> <p>Commence market research and business modeling</p>
<i>Year 2</i>	TBD – based on market research and business modeling
<i>Year 3</i>	TBD – based on market research and business modeling

**Partners and Roles**

- NeighborWorks – identify recommendations within this action plan best suited to NW’s current holdings; lead engagement process with HEZ partners; lead market research and business modeling process to align the best and highest use of these buildings from the perspective of the HEZ with NW’s own organizational needs
- CCF – serve as liaison between NeighborWorks and emergency food providers in Woonsocket on strategies for shared cold storage use
- HEZ partners- think individually and collaboratively about how existing programming as well as recommendations included herein could be amplified through development of a shared space.

## ***Case Study: Sustainable Food Center (Austin, TX)***

### ***Summary***

The Sustainable Food Center (SFC) in Austin, Texas creates opportunities for individuals to make healthy food choices and to participate in the local food system. Through organic food gardening, relationships with area farmers, interactive cooking classes and nutrition education, children and adults have increased access to locally grown food and are empowered to improve the long-term health of Central Texans and their environment.

### ***Program***

The SFC has three prongs of programming. The Grow Local program offers education and resources to adults and children to start and sustain gardens at schools, homes, and areas accessible to neighborhood residents. The Farm Direct program connects local growers with schools, urban residents, and institutional food service operations worksites in demand of fresh produce through a weekly farmers' market and direct marketing projects (farm-to-cafeteria, farm-to-school, and farm-to-work). SFC hosts four of the largest farmers' markets in Texas, which all accept and double SNAP and WIC benefits. The Happy Kitchen/Cocina Alegre program is a nationally recognized cooking and nutrition education program that nurtures skills in food selection and preparation. SFC also offers many other community events, such as film screenings, and workshops on everything from creating natural bath products to rainwater harvesting to the healing power of spices. All programming is free for low-income participants.

### ***Funding***

The SFC recently coted a capital campaign to finance the construction of its first building, which has programming rooms, a teaching kitchen, and a 2.3-acre community and teaching garden. Revenue is generated through kitchen rentals and sales of merchandise. SFC also has corporate, government, and individual donors, and partners with other organizations to execute its programming.

### ***Impact***

SFC has a wide-reaching community presence in the Austin area. The Grow Local program serves over 11,000 community members in 2014-2015, 56.2% of whom were low income. Their farmers' markets sold \$20.9 million for the same period, with 104 farmers and small businesses participating as vendors and 175,000 customers. The Happy Kitchen program's free six-week series served 552 people over the year, and 154 of those participants also participated in free follow-up courses.

### ***Application in Woonsocket***

A hub for food-related activities in Woonsocket could enhance the health of the community and satisfy part of the need for a community center/activity hub noted by focus group participants. While such a hub should be designed to appeal to as broad a range of Woonsocket residents as possible (including but not limited to low income people), such a center could also include more social service-oriented programming. SFC offers guidance to organizations looking to adapt SFC programs.

## NEW PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to the roles and responsibilities outlined in the strategies and recommendations above, new partners will be needed in order to implement this action plan. In the course of the needs assessment and a facilitate conversation with current HEZ food access working group members on this topic, the following new potential partners were identified. The chart below identifies the new potential partner, the specific action plan activities most likely to align with the potential partner’s work/mission, and notes on the potential partner’s role, capacities, or community reached.

New Partner	Relevant Action Plan Activities	Role/Capacity/Community
Beacon School	Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming	Engage culinary program participants- career ladder opportunity  Draws students not just from beyond Woonsocket
Community Care Alliance	Innovate with farmers’ market models and programs  Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services	Referrals to food pantries  Mental health care services- opportunity to link food to mental health care  Serenity Center (addiction recovery)  Work with populations in shelters  Large population served  Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models
Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative	Contribute to city efforts to bring a grocery store or supermarket in central/downtown Woonsocket  Create a community “headquarters” for food access, activities and information in central Woonsocket  Support independent retailers in offering healthy foods  Innovate with farmers’ market models and programs	Working on licensing issues for mobile food vending- could inform new market strategies  General commitment to placemaking and growth in Woonsocket
Emergency food providers	Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services  Create a community “headquarters” for food access, activities and information in central Woonsocket  Innovate with farmers’ market models and programs	Regular meetings among network of emergency food providers are a foundation to build on  Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models  Coordination around utilization of NW commercial kitchen and cold storage to serve pantry clients

New Partner	Relevant Action Plan Activities	Role/Capacity/Community
Johnson & Wales University	<p>Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming</p> <p>Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services</p>	<p>Founding partner for culinary medicine</p> <p>Opportunities to develop partnership for medical/nursing students or for CME</p> <p>Leverage Culinary Nutrition department interns for linking cooking with nutrition education</p>
Landmark Hospital	<p>Innovate with farmers' market models and programs</p> <p>Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming</p> <p>Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services</p>	<p>Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models</p> <p>Audience for culinary medicine trainings</p> <p>Delivery site for new practical, hands-on nutrition education offerings</p>
Lincoln Pediatrics	<p>Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming</p> <p>Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services</p>	<p>Outside Woonsocket but significant provider of pediatric care to residents</p> <p>Audience for culinary medicine trainings</p> <p>Unify nutrition education/messaging</p> <p>Delivery site for new practical, hands-on nutrition education offerings</p>
Medical and allied health schools in RI	<p>Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming</p>	<p>Partners with medical and/or nursing programs for culinary medicine training</p>
Organizations supporting residents with limited mobility	<p>Create a grocery delivery service pilot for Woonsocket's SNAP shoppers</p> <p>Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services</p>	<p>Specific organizations not yet identified</p> <p>SNAP pilots (restaurant and grocery delivery) have focused on this population</p> <p>Specific food insecurity needs to address</p>
Pharmacies	<p>Support independent retailers in offering healthy foods</p> <p>Innovate with farmers' market models and programs</p>	<p>Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models</p> <p>Leverage CVS corporate headquarters and Walgreens' community engagement for increased healthy food offerings (daily or in market events)</p>
Religious institutions	<p>Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services</p>	<p>Diverse audiences for promotion of food events and services</p> <p>Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models</p> <p>Potential site for community based nutrition education/skill-building</p>

New Partner	Relevant Action Plan Activities	Role/Capacity/Community
Restaurants (chain and small independents)	Support independent food businesses in offering healthy foods	Health education/promotion activities Special events and menus Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models
Rhody Food on the Move	Innovate with farmers' market models and programs	Leverage mobile produce market structure already up and running and with history in Woonsocket HEZ members not WIC is not currently accepted (limitation)
Riverzedge	Innovate with farmers' market models and programs Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming Create a community "headquarters" for food access, activities and information in central Woonsocket	Expertise in youth programming and "place" creation for youth Growing food-related programming—selling seedlings at farmers' markets Potential host organization/youth micro-entrepreneurs for new market models or market garden growing network
Senior Services	Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services	Access to senior populations through senior center and meal sites Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models Potential site for community based nutrition education/skill-building
Seven Hills	Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services Create a community "headquarters" for food access, activities and information in central Woonsocket	Services related to early childhood, disabled adults, mental health, behavioral health Workforce development (including a certificate program in Food Service and Café Seven Hills in Woonsocket with Café Management Program students) Opportunity to link food security and food to mental health care Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models
Small food retailers	Support independent retailers in offering healthy foods Innovate with farmers' market models and programs Build on success of programs that incentivize healthy food purchases	Potential site for pop-up markets or new market models Audience for trainings and support for increasing healthy food offerings Merchandising/signage related to healthy foods (particularly those that are SNAP/WIC eligible)

New Partner	Relevant Action Plan Activities	Role/Capacity/Community
SNAP Outreach and SNAP Education at URI	<p>Create a pilot grocery delivery service for Woonsocket's SNAP shoppers</p> <p>Build on success of programs that incentivize healthy food purchases</p> <p>Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services</p>	<p>Experience in managing and creating the SNAP restaurant pilot</p> <p>Deep understanding of the SNAP program and participating populations</p> <p>Diverse resources/audiences for education</p> <p>Build on existing relationship</p>
Sojourner House	<p>Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services</p> <p>Create a community "headquarters" for food access, activities and information in central Woonsocket</p>	<p>Providence-based organization with Woonsocket safe house for victims of domestic violence</p> <p>Thundermist has partnership</p>
Southside Community Landtrust	Innovate with farmers' market models and programs	Leverage expertise on community garden development and maintenance, market garden programming, and new farming apprenticeship program
Supermarkets	<p>Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services</p> <p>Create a pilot grocery delivery service for Woonsocket's SNAP shoppers</p> <p>Build on success of programs that incentivize healthy food purchases</p>	<p>Host nutritionists or cooking demos on site (low hanging fruit)</p> <p>Host pilot grocery delivery service (longer term)</p> <p>Implement pilot SNAP incentive program (longer term)</p>
USDA Food and Nutrition Services	<p>Create a pilot grocery delivery service for Woonsocket's SNAP shoppers</p> <p>Build on success of programs that incentivize healthy food purchases</p>	Allow and support new pilot programming, share best practices from recent pilots nationwide
Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center	Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming	Engage culinary training program participants in culinary medicine
Woonsocket Housing Authority	<p>Create a pilot grocery delivery service for Woonsocket's SNAP shoppers</p> <p>Innovate with farmers' market models and programs</p>	<p>Potential site for new markets models and audience for nutrition education offerings</p> <p>Potential central grocery delivery site</p>
Woonsocket Mayor's Office	<p>Contribute to city efforts to bring a grocery store or supermarket in central/downtown Woonsocket</p> <p>Create a community "headquarters" for food access, activities and information in central Woonsocket</p>	Create incentive package to attract food business or support existing food retailer (with knowledge of Woonsocket communities) to grow

# IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

	Short Term <i>HEZ Year 1</i>	Medium Term <i>HEZ Years 2 &amp; 3</i>	Long Term <i>HEZ years and beyond</i>
<b>Strategy 1- Bring food to people, and bring people to food</b>			
Contribute to city efforts to bring a grocery store or supermarket in central/downtown Woonsocket			●
Create a pilot grocery delivery service for Woonsocket SNAP shoppers			●
Support independent retailers in offering healthy foods	●	●	
Innovate with farmers' market models and programs	●	●	
<b>Strategy 2- Increase integration and promotion of existing assets and services</b>			
Integrate health care services and food access through culinary medicine programming	●	●	●
Unify messaging and integrate promotion of food-related education, skill-building and services	●	●	
Build on success of programs that incentivize healthy food purchases		●	
<b>Strategy 3- Create a community headquarters for food access, activities and information in central Woonsocket</b>			
Create a community headquarters for food access, activities and information in Central Woonsocket		●	●



## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Funding Source	Amount	Description/Notes
Working Cities Challenge	Express interest by April 29, application due May 31 7-10 \$15,000 design grants Implementation grants in 2017 (likely \$300K-\$500K)	Sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Working Cities as a grant competition that is designed to support cross-sector, collaborative leadership and ambitious work to improve the lives of low-income people in smaller cities in Rhode Island
Community Food Projects (CFP) Competitive Grants Program (USDA)	Grants for FY 2017 will likely open in the fall of 2016 FY2016 total program funding was \$8.64 million, with individual grants ranging in size.	Funding for community food projects, planning projects, and training and technical assistance. Goal is 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 agricultural needs.
Local Food Promotion Program (USDA)	May 12 deadline Up to \$100,000 planning grant or bigger implementation grant	Grants with a 25% match to support the development and expansion of local and regional food business enterprises to increase domestic consumption of, and access to, locally and regionally produced agricultural products, and to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets. Both planning and implementation grants available.
Farmers Market Promotion Program (USDA)	May 12, 2016 deadline Maximum award per grant is \$50,000	The purpose of the FMPP is to increase domestic consumption of, and access to, locally and regionally produced agricultural products, and to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets by developing/improving/expanding domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, CSA programs, agritourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities.  Now can be combined with LFPP in simultaneous awards

Funding Source	Amount	Description/Notes
Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Program (USDA)	Applications for FY 2016 were due in December 2015.	<p>FINI supports projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase. There are grants for FINI pilot projects, multi-year community-based FINI projects, and multi-year, FINI large-scale projects.</p> <p>FINI projects must have the support of the State agency responsible for SNAP administration, operate through authorized SNAP retailers, and in compliance with SNAP regulations, agree to participate in FINI program evaluation, ensure that the same terms and conditions apply to purchases made by individuals with SNAP benefits as apply to purchases made by individuals not receiving SNAP</p>
Healthy Food Finance Initiative	<p>Applications for Community Economic Development grants due April 27, 2016. Award ceiling per project is \$800,000</p> <p>CDFI New Market Tax Credits deadline likely December 2016</p>	<p>Brings grocery stores and other healthy food retailers to underserved urban and rural communities. Loans, grants, and technical assistance are available through the USDA. Two areas of grantmaking: New Market Tax Credits and Community Economic Development Funds</p> <p>Community Economic Development grantees must be a private, non-profit community development corporation.</p> <p>Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund offers tailored resources and innovative programs that invest federal dollars and private capital for market-based approaches to supporting economically disadvantaged communities. New Market Tax Credits are part of this program.</p>
The Main Street Rhode Island Streetscape Improvement Fund	<p>Projects can receive up to \$300,000</p> <p>Applications were due February 2016.</p>	<p>The Main Street Rhode Island Streetscape Improvement Fund awards grants or loans on a competitive basis for improvements to commercial districts. Funding is available for projects that improve streetscapes in central business districts, such as enhanced sidewalks, new street furniture, new way-finding signage, upgraded building facades or improved street lighting.</p>



## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Preliminary maps drafted by Thundermist

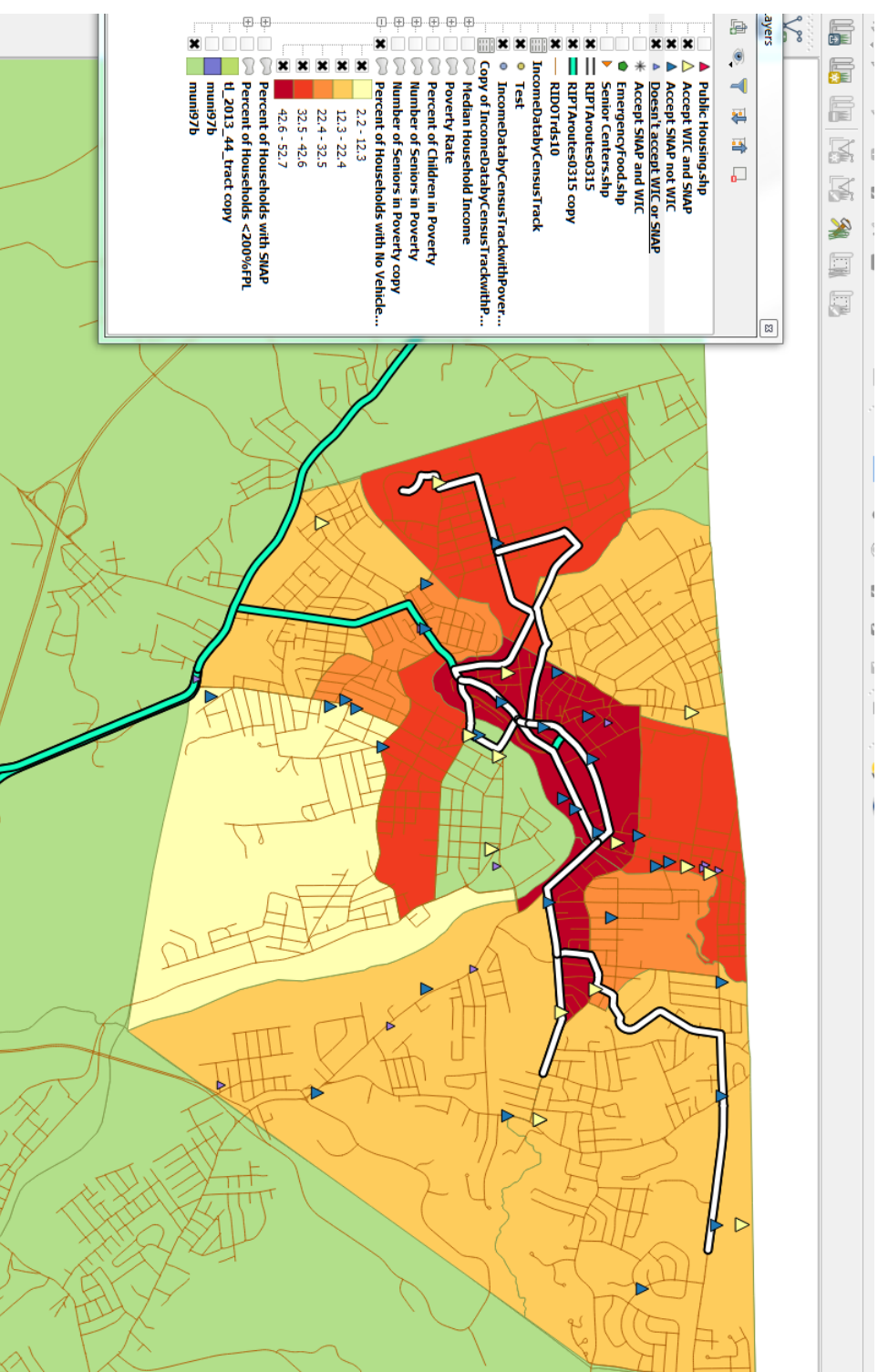
Appendix B: Stakeholder interview questions and interviewee list

Appendix C: Focus Group questions

Appendix D: Woonsocket Healthy Food Access Survey

Appendix E: Sources used for literature review

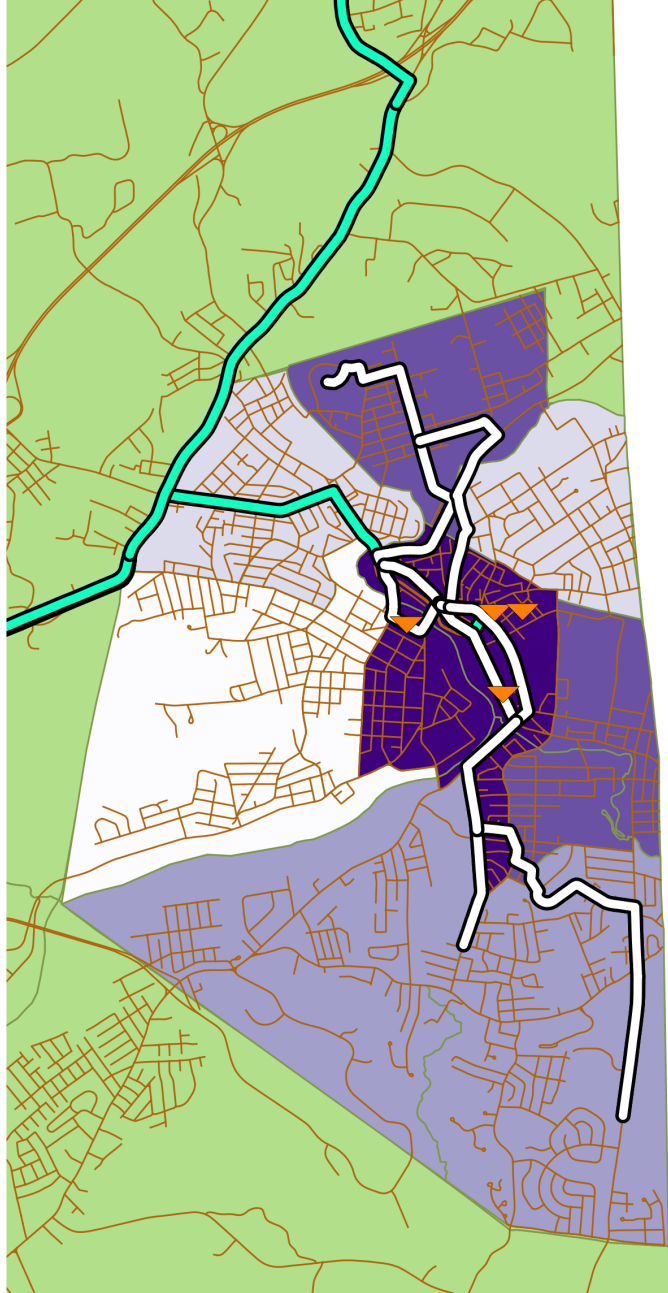
Appendix A: The maps included here are preliminary maps produced by Thundermist. They are expected to be refined and completed by September 2016.  
Map 1: Car ownership, SNAP, and WIC retailers





Map 2: Percent of seniors living in poverty and senior meal sites

# Seniors in Poverty and Senior Centers in Woonsocket



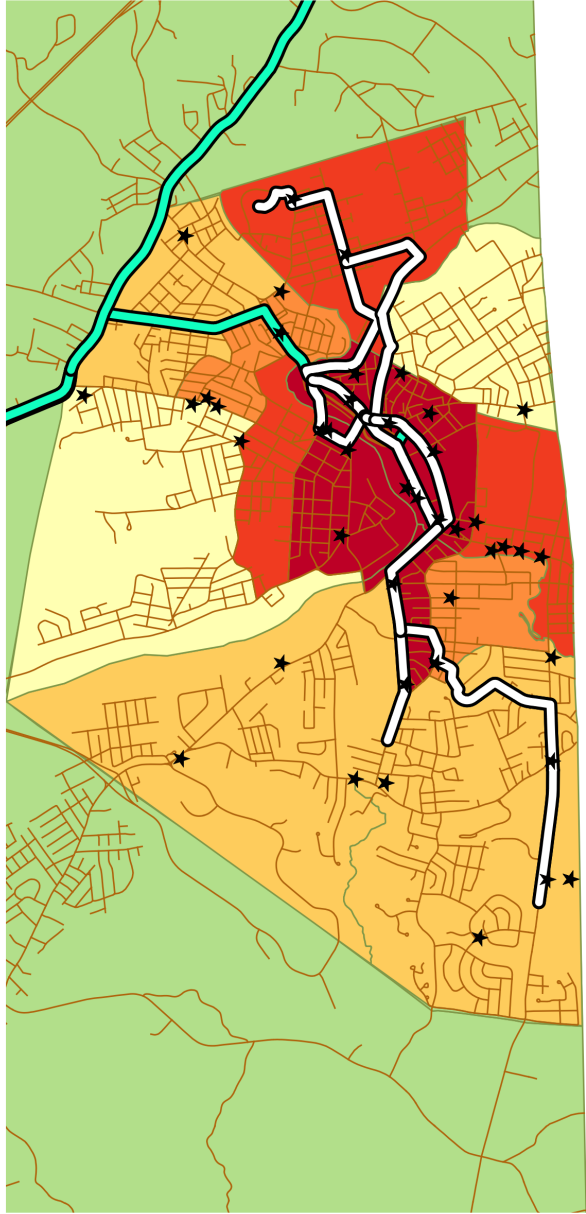
### Legend

- ▶ Senior Centers
- ▭ RIPTA Bus Route 87
- ▭ RIPTA Bus Route 54
- Percent of Seniors in Poverty
  - 5.3 - 6.3
  - 6.3 - 13.8
  - 13.8 - 21.2
  - 21.2 - 25.8
  - 25.8 - 38.0



Map 3: Percent of households with SNAP and SNAP retailers

### Households on SNAP and SNAP Retailers in Woonsocket

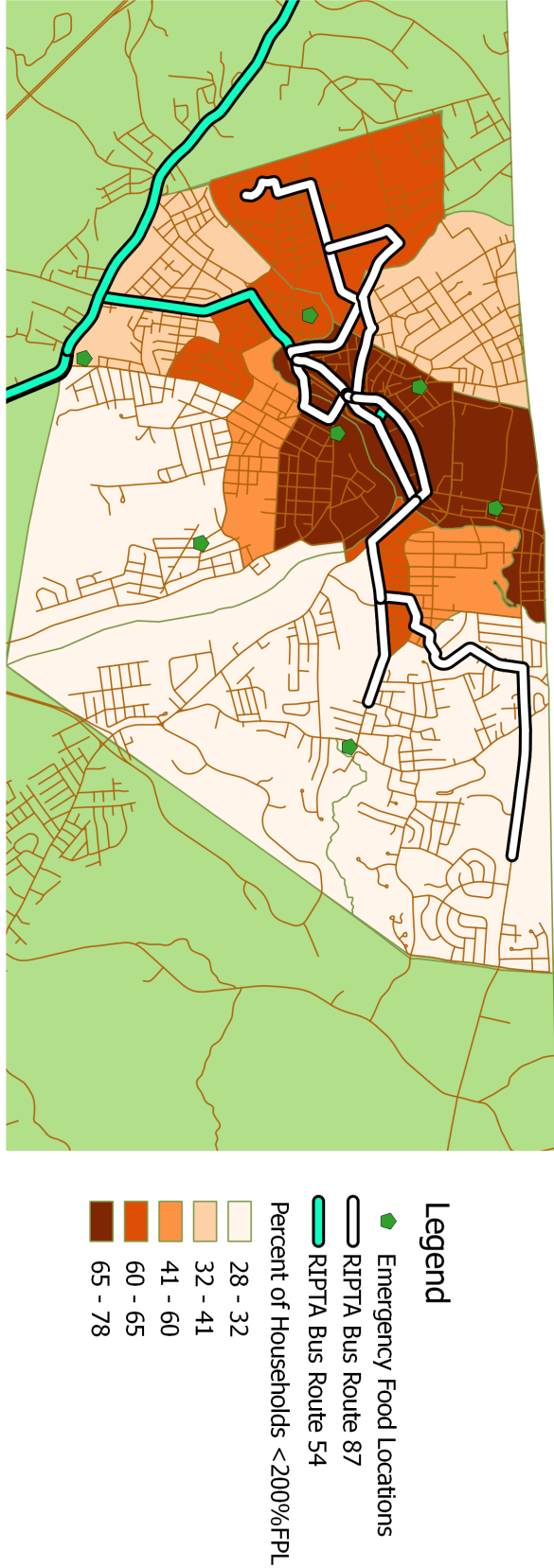


- Legend**
- ★ Retailers that Accept SNAP
  - RIPTA Bus Route 87
  - RIPTA Bus Route 54
- Percent of Households receiving SNAP
- 5 - 18
  - 18 - 22
  - 22 - 32
  - 32 - 41
  - 41 - 54



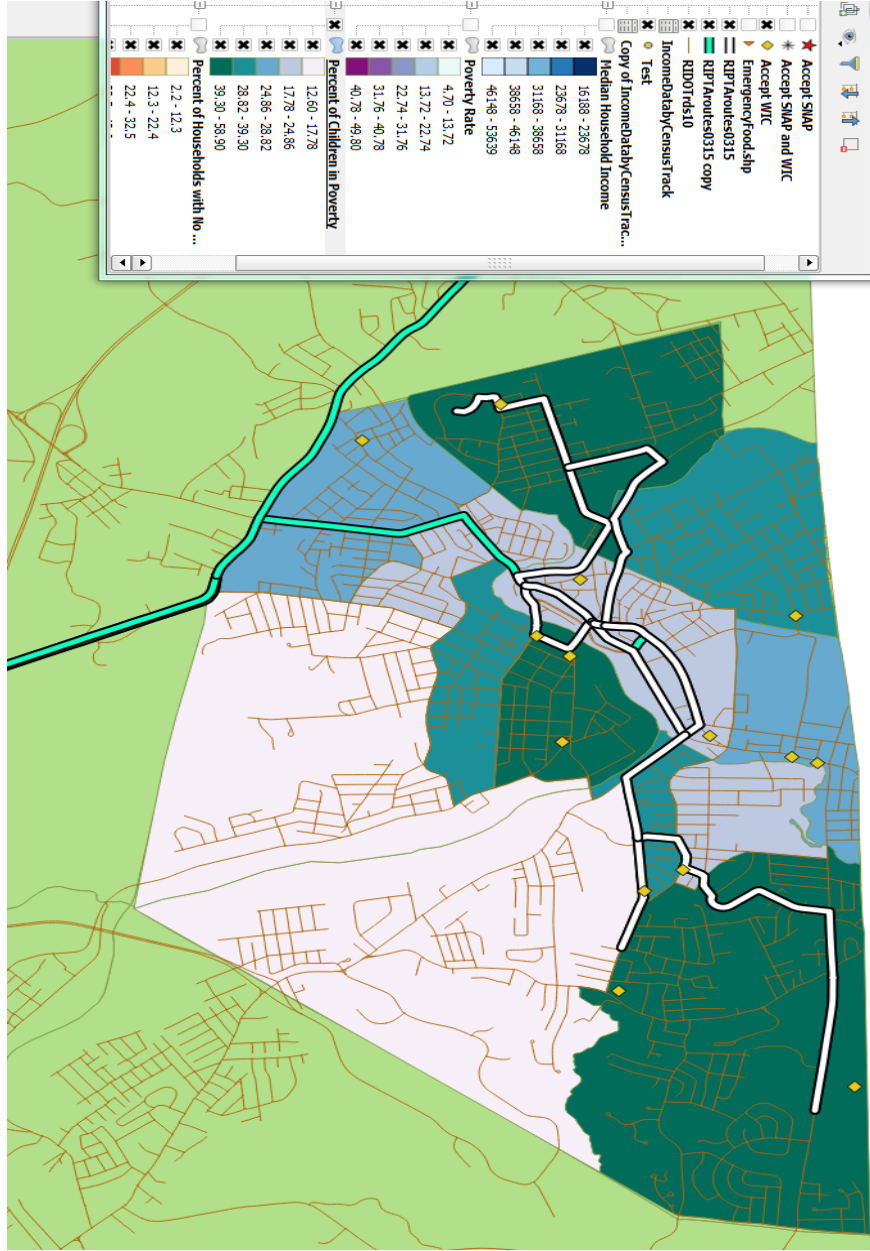
Map 4: Households living under 200% of the federal poverty line and emergency food sites

### Emergency Food Locations and Poverty Rates in Woonsocket





Map 5: Percent of Children in Poverty and WIC Retailers





Thundermist (6 interviews):

Karla Agudelo, Health Equity Program Manager

Keri Grothe, Nurse Practitioner

Dennis Horta, WIC/social services

Chuck Jones, CEO

Pat Slader, Case Worker

Eliza Sutton, Food Access Manager

External (11 interviews):

Ainsley Cantoral, Director of Resource Development, Antonio Rodriguez, Community Engagement Specialist, and Margaux Morisseau, Director of Community Engagement  
*NeighborWorks*

Kim Clark, Farm to Cafeteria Coordinator  
*Farm Fresh Rhode Island*

Heidi Collins  
*Center for Financial Success*

N. David Bouley, Planning and Development Director, and Jennifer Siciliano, Deputy Director of Community Planning  
*City of Woonsocket*

Christina Dedora  
*Blue Skies Farm*

*Friendly Market*

Rebekah Greenwald  
*RiverzEdge Arts*

Seth Morgan  
*RIPTA*

Ellen Shalvey  
*Sodexo Food Service Director for Woonsocket Schools*

Linda Thibault, RN, Director of Senior Wellness  
*Senior Services, Inc.*

Thea Upham and Mikayla Anthes  
*Farm Fresh Rhode Island*

**Interview Guide: Thundermist and HEZ Food Access Working Group**

1. Please tell me more about your work, specifically as it relates to this project.
  - a. (Prompt for specific relevant activities and programs, target customers/clients/ beneficiaries, scale of programming, infrastructure key to running programming, plans for growth or expansion).
2. How would you describe the food “landscape” in Woonsocket: how agriculture/gardening, retail, restaurants, institutional feeding, and social service organizations intersect to feed people?
3. What are the principle demographic, health and economic trends in Woonsocket? What’s changing and why?
4. How would you describe the relationship between healthy food and economics here? (seeking here to get at key issues related to the character of poverty and limited food access in Woonsocket, *specifically*)
  - a. Who has access to fresh and nutritious foods?
  - b. Where is food access achieved for low-income residents?
  - c. Who lacks access? – Characteristics of residents, demographics, e.g.
  - d. What are the key factors limiting access to or service of fresh nutritious food?
    - i. Prompt if needed: food pricing, organizational budgets, infrastructure, number or location of retailers, transportation, poverty.
5. Where are the most substantial gaps in food access in Woonsocket –geographically or in service?
  - a. Geographically, where is food access most limited?
  - b. In what sectors (retail, institutional, emergency food, e.g.) is access most limited?
  - c. Who are the players who work to fill those gaps, and what are they doing?
6. Are there any city officials working to address the intersection of food, poverty and health? (Prompt for Mayor’s office, planning, health, transportation, economic development, or social service initiatives)
  - a. If so, who? And where are they working? If not, why do you think that is?
7. In your view what are the most impactful or successful efforts currently underway in Woonsocket to address issues of food access? Who leads these efforts? Who is engaged in/by them? Who is marginalized/not engaged?
  - a. Please describe.
  - b. Who are key players involved?
  - c. In what way are they successful, and what makes them work?
  - d. What kind of investment, support or other resources could make them more successful?
8. Where in the supply chain do you see the greatest opportunity to intervene to improve access to healthy affordable food?

- a. (Production/agriculture, manufacturing, distribution, institutional food, restaurants, retail, farmstands or farmers' markets).
9. To what extent are the people and organizations that are working to address food access issues collaborating with each other?
    - a. Who else should be at the table (e.g. part of the HEZ food access working group)?
    - b. Examples of successful collaborations (present, past, or in the works)
    - c. What future collaborations would you like to see/do you think would positively impact food access in Woonsocket?
    - d. What, if any, are limits to collaboration among key players in this field? (cultural, historic, political, interpersonal, turf, competition for funding/resources, etc.)
  10. What are the city's greatest assets that could be better leveraged to increase healthy food access?
  11. What are the greatest challenges that you would anticipate the HEZ might face in working to increase food access?

**Specific questions/arcs of questions by sector:**

*Local food/agriculture*

- To what extent are farmers’ markets, farm stands, or other modes of local food sales meeting food access needs now? (e.g. hours and locations, transportation availability to market, SNAP/WIC/Senior coupon acceptance, matching programs)
- In your view what is the potential for the city’s local food activity (e.g. farmers’ markets, farm to school) to serve as a lever for increasing access to healthy food for low-income residents?
  - To what extent should local food be looked to in support of this goal?

*Public health/nutrition/social service*

- What are the key diet related public health issues facing the city’s population now?
  - What kinds of trends are you seeing related to these issues (i.e. are they declining? On the rise? Being addressed in new ways?)
- What services or resources exist to support residents with diet related illness?
- What services, resources or efforts exist to prevent diet related illness?
- Demographically, where are the greatest areas of need in terms of food access?

*Retail*

- In your view, is the number of food retail establishments in the county (or their locations around the city) a key factor limiting food access?
  - If so, where are new stores needed, what kind of stores, what kinds of supports would new stores need in order to open?
- SNAP/WIC acceptance, as % of total sales
- How does your store specifically serve low-income customers?
- How could your store serve low-income residents better?

*Institutional food service/restaurants*

- Demographics of eaters
- Definitions of healthy, nutritious, and/or affordable food (and how does menu work to meet those definitions)
- In your view what is the potential for the city’s local food activity (e.g. farmers’ markets, farm to school) to serve as a lever for increasing access to healthy food?
  - To what extent should local food be looked to in support of this goal?



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## FOCUS GROUPS

### WOONSOCKET HEZ FOOD ACCESS

#### KICK-OFF

Favorite foods to eat or cook and why

#### SOURCES

Where do you currently get food for your household?

- Prompt for all sources (grocery stores, corner stores, pharmacies, dollar stores, farmers markets, programs, food assistance, gardens, hunting, etc.
- Prompt for composition of household and how that factors in

How do you choose the places where you get or buy your food?

What factors make you choose these sources?

- Prompt for convenience, price, food quality, accept benefits, availability of specific foods or kinds of foods (religious, ethnic)

Are there places you would like to shop that you currently don't purchase any food at?

- If so, what keeps you from shopping there? What could change that would enable you to access food from these places?

Is buying food that is locally grown or produced important to you? Why or why not?

#### TRANSPORTATION

How do you get to the places where you shop for food?

How easy or hard is it for you to get to the places where you get your food?

- Follow up questions about transportation or delivery availability

How often do you eat out or bring in food, vs. cook at home?

Where do you most commonly go to eat or take out food?

What kinds of factors do you consider when deciding to cook at home, eat out, or bring in?

- Prompt for transportation, cost, kitchen capacity, cooking/budgeting/shopping skills, etc.)

### FOOD QUALITY

How would you describe the quality of the food in the various places you access food?

- Prompt for healthy, fresh, shelf life, etc.

What kinds of foods do you buy/receive?

What kinds of foods do you want to buy/receive that you can't currently access?

- Prompt healthy food

What does the phrase "healthy food" mean to you?

Are times in the month or the year that your household is not able to eat as much food, or as much healthy food, as you would like?

- Prompt for end of the month
- Prompt for summer meals for kids

If so, what are the factors that limit your healthy food access?

- Prompt store location, transportation, money, seasonal work, seasonal gardens, other

How do limits in your ability to access food affect you?

- e.g. Anxiety about where enough/good food will come from, health outcomes related to available food options, etc.)

### BENEFITS PROGRAMS

What kind of food assistance programs do you currently participate in, or have you ever participated in?

- Prompt SNAP, WIC, elderly meals, meals on wheels, school meals, summer meals

What has been your experience accessing these benefits and using them to purchase food?

- Prompt for experience with retailers (e.g. treatment)

### EMERGENCY FOOD

What has been your experience accessing food from community food providers like food pantries or soup kitchens?

How important are these programs to you- what makes them important?

What makes them work for you?

- Best features of the programs.

What could make them work better?

- Worst features of the programs.

Are there programs or services that you know you are eligible for that you don't participate in?



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food  
is  
good  
business

- If so, what keeps you from participating?
- What could change that would make participation work for you?

#### INFORMATION

Where do you get and share information in your community (about food, services, other things)?

What kind of information or knowledge about food would you like to have that you don't have now? Skills?

#### NEW CONCEPTS

If you were given a pool of money to build a new place or provide a new service that would give people in your community better access to the kinds of foods they want, what would it be?

If you could change anything about Woonsocket to create more opportunity, potential and energy for more people, what would it be?

# Woonsocket Healthy Food Access Survey

This survey is for the Woonsocket Health Equity Zone, which is a project of the Rhode Island State Department of Health, led by Thundermist Health Center in partnership with other community organizations. We want to learn more about how people in our community get their food.

The survey includes a few questions that might be considered sensitive. The survey is completely anonymous and only takes about 5 minutes to complete. It will help your community plan for better and healthier food for all residents of Woonsocket.

First, let's make sure you are eligible to take the survey.

Are you age 18 or over?      \_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_ NO

Do you reside in Woonsocket?   \_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_ NO

Do you make some of the decisions about food for your household?   \_\_\_ YES  
 \_\_\_ NO

If you answered YES to ALL THREE of these questions, you're eligible to take the survey. Great! Please continue.

1. Where do you buy most of the food for your family or household?

*Please name a specific store.*

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Over the last year, what other stores did you visit for food shopping at least once per month?

*Please list up to three (3).*

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where else have you gotten food over the last year?

	<i>At least once this past year (X)</i>	<i>At least once per month (X)</i>
A. Farmers' market or produce stand	___	___
B. Food pantry	___	___
C. CCF's Pantry Express – Summer Fresh Produce Program	___	___
D. Community meal or soup kitchen	___	___
E. Friends or family	___	___



4. Please rank in order of frequency the ways you travel to get your food.

Mark "1" for the travel method you use most often, "2" for the method you use second most often, etc. For travel methods you never use, please mark "0".

- \_\_\_A. My own car
- \_\_\_B. Getting a ride with someone I know
- \_\_\_C. RIPTA bus
- \_\_\_D. RIPTA flex service
- \_\_\_E. Taxi service
- \_\_\_F. Biking
- \_\_\_G. Walking
- \_\_\_H. Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

5. How often do you or someone in your household cook dinner at home?

- \_\_\_A. Every day
- \_\_\_B. A few times per week
- \_\_\_C. A few times per month
- \_\_\_D. I/we rarely cook dinner at home

6. Are you usually able to buy or get the food that you want to eat?

- \_\_\_A. Yes
- \_\_\_B. No

If NO, why not?

Please check all that apply.

- \_\_\_A. I cannot afford it
- \_\_\_B. I cannot get to the stores that sell the food I want
- \_\_\_C. The stores in town don't offer the kinds of foods I want to eat
- \_\_\_D. Emergency food resources (like food pantries or soup kitchens) are not conveniently located or open at hours that work for me
- \_\_\_E. I don't have time to shop for it
- \_\_\_F. I don't have time to prepare it at home
- \_\_\_G. I don't have a fully functioning kitchen at home to prepare it
- \_\_\_H. Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

7. On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being very important), how important is it to you to eat healthy foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains?

Please circle the number that best corresponds.

Not at all important					Very important
1	2	3	4	5	

For the following two statements (questions 8 and 9), please indicate whether the statement is true or not true for your household.

8. "Within the past 12 months, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more."

- A. Yes
- B. No

9. "Within the past 12 months, the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more."

- A. Yes
- B. No

10. Which of the following services or benefit programs did you use in the past year?

*Please check all that apply.*

- A. SNAP/EBT/Food Stamps
- B. WIC (Women, Infants and Children)
- C. Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Coupons
- D. WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Coupons
- E. Farmers' Market Bonus Bucks
- F. Food pantry
- G. Soup kitchen/congregate meal program (such as the Senior Center)

11. Are there stores you would shop at (or shop at more) if they accepted SNAP or WIC benefits? If so, please name up to three specific stores.

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12. Are there services or programs that you know about and think seem helpful, but that you don't use?

- A. No
- B. Yes (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**Why don't you use them?**

*Please check all that apply.*

- A. Not sure if I'm eligible
- B. Too much paperwork/too complicated
- C. It takes too much time
- D. I don't have transportation to get there
- E. I'm not available when these services are offered
- F. I don't like to ask for help

13. What could change in Woonsocket that would make healthy foods easier to find, buy and eat? This could be a new business, program, service, or something else. Think big and think creatively about what could make a healthier Woonsocket!

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These last questions are about your background and other basic information.

14. What year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

15. What is your gender?

- A. Female
- B. Male
- C. Transgender/other

16. Which best describes your race or ethnicity?

*Please check all that apply.*

- A. White/Caucasian – non-Hispanic
- B. Hispanic or Latino
- C. Black or African American
- D. Asian
- E. American Indian/Alaskan Native
- F. Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

17. Were you born in the United States?

- A. Yes
- B. No (please specify country of origin): \_\_\_\_\_

18. INCLUDING YOURSELF, how many people are in your household? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of them are children (age 0-17)? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of them are seniors (age 65 or older)? \_\_\_\_\_

19. Are you employed?

- A. Full-time
- B. Part-time
- C. Seasonally
- D. Contract worker, inconsistent employment
- E. Not employed

20. Which of the income ranges below includes your annual household income?

- A. Less than \$25,000
- B. \$25,000-50,000
- C. \$50,000-75,000
- D. \$75,000-100,000
- E. More than \$100,000

21. In general, would you say your health is:

- A. Excellent
- B. Very good
- C. Good
- D. Fair
- E. Poor



good  
food  
is  
good  
business

## SOURCES

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4. Farm Fresh Rhode Island WFSAPP Proposal
5. Farmers Market Analysis 2014
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7. Landmark Medical Center CHNA Summary Report
8. NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley: Food Access Workgroup Meeting Notes, July 13, 2015
9. Neighborworks Blackstone River Valley: WHAT Food Access Workgroup Meeting Notes, Sept. 14, 2015
10. Plan4Health Grant Narrative
11. Rhode Island Food Bank Emergency Food Provider List
12. Rhode Island Food Policy Council: Meeting Notes, Sept. 28, 2015
13. Rhode Island Food Policy Council: Woonsocket Snapshot
14. Rhode Island Licensed Food Businesses 2011
15. Thundermist Health Center: Food Access Workgroup Meeting Notes, June 2, 2015, 1:00-2:15
16. Thundermist Health Center Woonsocket Food System Assessment and Planning Project Logic Model
17. USDA Food Environment Atlas
18. USDA Planning Grant Summary
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20. Veterans Housing Skills and Interests Survey
21. WHAT Plan4Health Grant Application
22. WHAT Workplan and Timeline
23. WIC Participant Surveys, Site 150, 151, and 600
24. Woonsocket Food System Assessment and Planning Project Narrative
25. Woonsocket Head Start Needs Assessment
26. Woonsocket HEZ Evaluation Data
27. YWCA: Woonsocket Walks, Pedestrian Walking Plan