

November 2016

Local Foods, Local Places

*A Community-Driven Action
Plan for Baltimore, Maryland*



A technical assistance program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Transportation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Appalachian Regional Commission, and Delta Regional Authority



Community Story

Upton and Druid Heights are neighborhoods within Old West Baltimore, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The communities share a rich history as the center of affluent African American culture in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Key thoroughfares geographically define the two neighborhoods, including North Avenue, Division Street, McCulloh Street, Laurens Street, and Pennsylvania Avenue. At the center of Baltimore’s Local Food, Local Places initiative and these two neighborhoods is the Avenue Market, indicated by the green arrow on the map below.

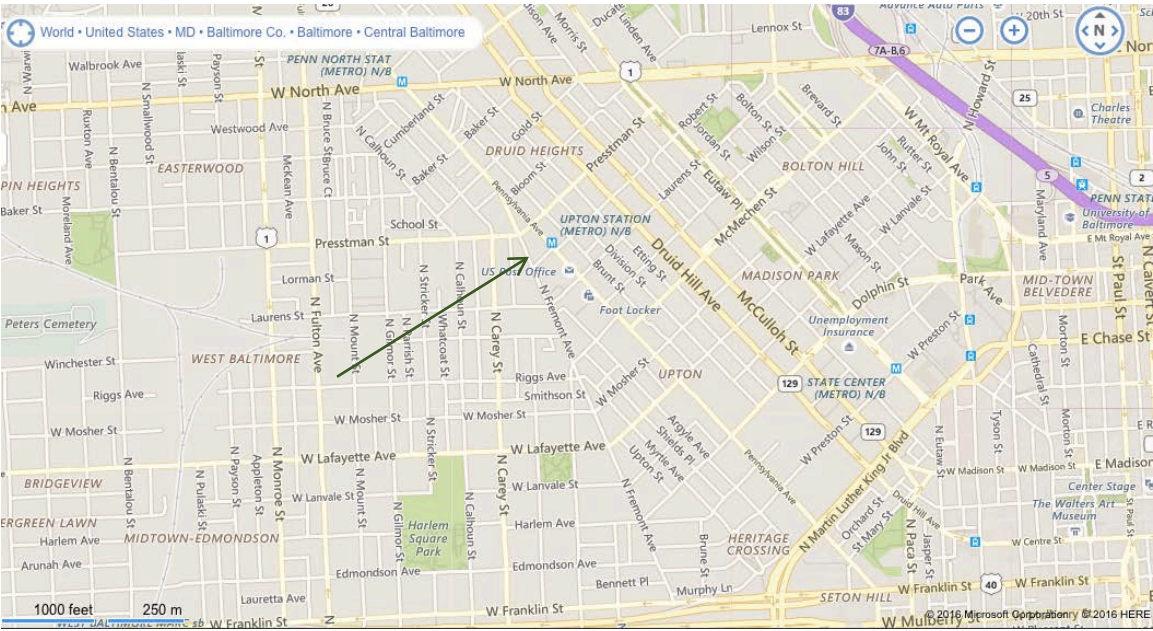


Photo credit: Bing

In the mid-20th century, population swelled due to the popularity of the neighborhood and well-known residents and professionals including Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Congressman Parren Mitchell, jazz artist Cab Calloway, and civil rights leader Lillie Mae Carroll Jackson. Eventually though, upper income black families began abandoning the area for neighborhoods farther from the center of the city. In the 1960s and 70s, controversial urban renewal projects changed much of the historic architecture and landscape of Upton and Druid Heights.



Today, there are civic monuments along the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor celebrating the area as Baltimore's premier historic African-American community. The Upton Planning Committee and Druid Heights Community Development Corporation are leaders in the neighborhood's revitalization efforts.



Left: Raised beds on an empty corner lot signal revitalization efforts

Right: Murals beautify the landscape and tell the history, old and recent, of the neighborhood.

A Metro stop and bus lines running along Pennsylvania and North Avenue help to make the neighborhood accessible, but the neighborhood is known for having one of the city's worst health profiles. Most recently, the area has also been at the center of a national discussion about race and law enforcement.

The Baltimore Public Markets Corporation is the oldest continuously operating public market in the nation. It is a unique hub and spoke design, comprised of a central market, Lexington, and five affiliate markets located around the city, including Avenue Market on the border of the Upton and Druid Heights neighborhoods.

Avenue Market has a long history as a community anchor and was once an abundant source of fresh food. While Baltimore's other public markets have at least one source of fresh poultry, meat, seafood, and produce, Avenue Market has no consistent offering of these. The few stalls in operation are designed for takeaway service only, and the grocery store that filled 10,000 sq ft of the market for the past ten years vacated its space in February 2016 following the completion of its lease.



Exceptions to the traditional fast food vendors at Avenue include *Just Juice It!*, which makes smoothies and wraps. There is also a Saturday pop-up produce stand, *Fresh at the Avenue*, provided by a partnership between the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation and No Boundaries Coalition, a Central West Baltimore citizen advocacy group. Funding to support this program currently comes from the Whole Foods Market Whole Cities Foundation, but the goal is ultimately to make the program self-sustaining. Participation has been steadily increasing and the partners are exploring ways to offer *Fresh at the Avenue* on other days of the week.

The market serves many residents that live in nearby food deserts, with potential to serve more, but a 2015 listening campaign with over 250 residents conducted by No Boundaries Coalition, found that because quality and selection are low, 70% of respondents leave the neighborhood to buy food.

Challenges

Not surprisingly, a lack of healthy food access points means the Upton and Druid Heights neighborhoods around Avenue Market face significant health challenges.

A basic demographic profile of Baltimore is presented in *Figure 1*. In 2011, the Baltimore City Health Department developed Neighborhood Health Profiles to support community health improvement efforts, with a particular emphasis on a wide range of health determinants that have not been traditionally discussed as a part of standard public health practice. Each profile contains data about major health outcomes and presents them for each of 55 Community Statistical Areas in the city of Baltimore. Community Statistical Areas are clusters of neighborhoods developed by the City's Planning Department based on recognizable city neighborhoods. Each Neighborhood Health Profile compares the Community Statistical Area's health outcomes to the city as a whole. Analysis of these data reinforces that where residents live, learn, work, and play has a powerful impact on health.¹

¹ Baltimore City Health Department. "Neighborhood Health Profiles – Frequently Asked Questions." <http://health.baltimorecity.gov/neighborhood-health-profiles-frequently-asked-questions>. Accessed June 16, 2016.



Figure 1 - Demographic Profile of Baltimore

BALTIMORE	2010	2014
Total Population	651,154	622,271
Pct. Hispanic	1.70%	4.50%
Pct. Minority	69.00%	71.90%
Pct. < 18 Years	24.70%	21.20%
Pct. 65 or Older	13.20%	11.90%

Key information from the Neighborhood Health Profile for the Upton/Druid Heights neighborhood is presented in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2 - Upton/Druid Heights Health Profile

Food/Built Environment	Rank of 55 (1=best)	Health Outcomes	Rank of 55 (1=best)
Fast Food Density	33	Life Expectancy	55
Carryout Density	40	Heart Disease	54
Corner Store Density	40	Cancer	50
Liquor Store Density	42	Stroke	45
Tobacco Retail Density	41	Diabetes	55

Baltimore’s food access points are listed in *Figure 3*. In Upton/Druid Heights in particular, the number of food retail outlets is dwarfed by the number of liquor outlets. According to a No Boundaries Coalition 2014 study, the ratio of stores where residents can purchase hard alcohol versus fresh produce is 10:1.



Figure 3 - Food Access Points in Baltimore

Food Retail Store Type	#	Non-Retail Store Type	# Sites
Supermarkets	45	Food Pantry & Free Meals	223
Corner Stores	435	Kids Summer Meals	565
Convenience Stores	300	Kids Afterschool Meals	194
Farmers Markets	17	Senior Eating Together	59
Public Markets	6		
Virtual Supermarkets	4		

Safety is another key concern surrounding the market, driven primarily by the presence of drug activity. The neighborhood is void of most basic services, but saturated by cash-checking institutions and deemed not particularly aesthetically pleasing by residents. Many of the adjacent row houses are boarded, and permanent police presence is required at the Avenue Market to maintain general peace.

Opportunities

Despite significant health and economic challenges, the community remains committed to revitalizing the neighborhood, increasing options for healthy food, and improving health outcomes. The Avenue Market could again be a focal point to help achieve all of these goals.

Current healthy food access efforts reveal the work of long-time advocates, as well as renewed vigor by community organizations and funders. The partnership between the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation and the No Boundaries Coalition on *Fresh at the Avenue* has demonstrated a strong demand among local residents for fresh, healthy food options in the neighborhood. *Fresh at the Avenue* accepts Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, and redemptions grew 10-fold in the first three months the program has been operating out of Avenue Market.

The neighborhood is home to a participant in the Baltimore City Health Department’s Healthy Corner Store program—Lafayette Market Convenience Store operated by Ms. Okie. The Healthy Corner Store program is part of a suite of community-based food access and food justice programs sponsored by the Baltimore City Health Department.



The faith-based organization Strength to Love II operates an urban farm in neighboring Sandtown that trains and employs formerly incarcerated residents. With one of the first long-term City land leases for agriculture, the farm focuses on commercial salad green production. Strength to Love II is planning a new aquaponics facility a few blocks from the market. The organization and Baltimore Public Markets Corporation would like to partner to supply Avenue Market with fresh fish and produce, providing residents with much-needed healthy food while creating a reliable retail outlet for the production facilities.

Baltimore City is a major partner to the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation. Mayor Rawlings-Blake is committed to improving food access and economic development, and is especially excited by projects that do both. The Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI), an intergovernmental collaboration, seeks to increase access to healthy, affordable food and create linkages between local efforts. BFPI has a long history of working with the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation and non-profit organizations in the area. BFPI and the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future recently released *Mapping Baltimore's Food Environment: 2015 Report*, which outlines the concept of designating food outlets as "supermarket alternatives" if they provide a variety of healthy, staple foods comparable to a supermarket's offerings. BFPI and the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation prioritized Avenue Market for reaching Supermarket Alternative status.

Historically, the market is in an area known for the iconic arabbers, fresh produce merchants who sell fruits and vegetables from colorful, horse-drawn carts. Once a common sight, only a handful of arabbers maintain the tradition today. The market is adjacent to a stop on Baltimore's subway line, which runs from Johns Hopkins Hospital in East Baltimore to the suburbs, bringing thousands of people past each day. Buses also stop directly adjacent to the market and run along the key neighborhood thoroughfares of Pennsylvania Avenue, North Avenue, and Dolphin Street.

In 2015, the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program to develop and action plan for achieving its vision. The program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Transportation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the Delta Regional Authority. Implementing the actions described later in this plan can bring several benefits to the community including:



- Improved access to healthy, local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- More economic opportunities for local farmers and business.
- A revitalized downtown that is the economic anchor of the community.

Engagement

Leading up to the workshop, a local steering committee and federal partners convened three times by conference call and webinar to discuss the community's goals and plan the event. The local steering committee was comprised of the community's primary point of contact Robert Thomas, Executive Director of the Lexington Market & Baltimore Public Markets Corporation, and the following:

- Wanda Best, Executive Director, Upton Planning Council, Inc.
- Tiffany Welch, Community Food Organizer, No Boundaries Coalition
- Holly Freishtat, Food Policy Director, City of Baltimore
- James Hamlin, Owner, The Avenue Bakery and President, Pennsylvania Avenue Redevelopment Collaborative
- Johnnie Williams, Director of Operations, Baltimore Public Markets Corporation

Prior to the workshop's first public session, the technical advisory team, local steering committee, and federal partners participated in a site visit of key sites, including the Avenue Market, a local convenience store that participates in the city's Healthy Corner Store program (Lafayette Market), an Upton community garden, and Strength to Love II, which supplies fresh produce to Fresh at the Avenue.



Left: The Avenue Market with the marquee of the last grocery store tenant

Right: Tiffany Welch, of No Boundaries Coalition explains how Fresh at the Avenue operates



Above: The Lafayette Market Convenience Store offers fresh produce on a consistent basis. The owner, Ms Okie (right), shares her passion for providing healthy food to the community.



Left: Volunteers tend to the Upton City Farm, just a block from the Avenue Market. Right: Clayton Williams, Master Gardner, explains the operations inside one of a dozen greenhouses at Strength to Love II, which grows primarily greens for sale at Fresh at the Avenue.

The main sessions of the Local Foods, Local Places workshop were held over two days at the Lexington Market May 23-24, 2016. The first session on the evening of May 23 began with opening presentations from key community stakeholders, including an introduction to the Avenue Market by Executive Director, Robert Thomas. See *Appendix A: Avenue Market Overview* for the history of the market, its layout, and examples of vendors. Sessions two and three on May 24 focused on case studies of potential concepts for the Avenue Market, group brainstorming, community asset mapping, and finally action planning. Approximately 50 people attended, with many participating both days. See *Appendix B: Workshop Attendees* for details of workshop participants. Presentation slides from both days are found in *Appendix C: Presentation Slides*. A link and visual representation of results of the asset mapping exercise are found in *Appendix D: MyCommunity Asset Mapping*. During this exercise, participants used an interactive map platform to identify neighborhood landmarks, organizations, services, and other resources that could inform and influence the action plan.



Above: Jules Howie of the Upton Planning Committee helps open the workshop with a history lesson of the neighborhood and the community's plans for the future.

Vision

The heart of the community's vision is to make the Avenue Market a consistent resource for healthy, fresh food that in turns creates jobs and spurs entrepreneurship. The Avenue Market has the potential to be an important hub of intergenerational gathering that would help make the Upton/Druid Heights neighborhood a vibrant destination again. The community believes in itself and has a strong identity to build upon as it plans to work together to reintroduce local, healthy foods for all. See *Appendix E: Community Visioning* for details.

Action Plan

Prior to the workshop, the community identified five core goals that were in turn refined and expanded upon through a series of group exercises. The outcome of the community's work is outlined below and detailed in *Appendix F: Implementation Action Plan Tables*.

Goal 1: Activate available Avenue Market space (10,000+ square feet) with new concepts targeting increased access to affordable healthy food.

- Action 1.1 Research different models of food-related businesses that could occupy the former Murry's grocery store space at the Avenue Market
- Action 1.2 Determine what "healthy and affordable" means to the community



- Action 1.3 Create an Avenue Market Master Plan with the collaboration of a community advisory committee
- Action 1.4 Activate vacant spaces during Fresh at the Market with pop-ups
- Action 1.5 Develop a partnership with arabbers

Goal 2: Identify local food supply chain partnerships to support current and future Avenue Market outlets (e.g. urban farms, Farmers' Markets)

- Action 2.1 Address asset needs for food distribution from urban farms to the market, including aggregation facility
- Action 2.2 Increase land security for farmers
- Action 2.3 Identify more outlets to sell local food

Goal 3: Realize Avenue Market's potential to deliver additional services to the community (e.g. workforce development, entrepreneurship incubation)

- Action 3.1 Identify and recruit entrepreneurs and businesses to operate in area around Avenue Market
- Action 3.2 Establish shared infrastructure needs for entrepreneurs (e.g. space to offer classes, jobs board for posting positions, skills gap inventory)
- Action 3.3. Establish a partnership between the Urban Youth Initiative and the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation

Goal 4: Establish integration points between Avenue Market and existing or emerging projects along Pennsylvania Avenue to create a safe, walkable corridor (e.g. Main Streets, LINCS)

- Action 4.1 Enhance the look and feel of the metro stop to attract commuters
- Action 4.2 Evaluate walking routes to Avenue Market and connect with the City's walking plan
- Action 4.3 Extend free shuttle bus service (Charm City Circulator) to Avenue Market

Goal 5: Expand the market's appeal beyond the immediate neighborhood

- Action 5.1 Investigate options for seating, a community meeting place, and services (e.g. wifi, public restrooms)
- Action 5.2 Increase security/provide drug activity alternative by participation in LINCS Public Safety Process
- Action 5.3 Set-up community advisory committee
- Action 5.4 Integrate arts and entertainment into the market



Above: Groups of workshop participants tackle the who, what, and how of specific goal action items.

Implementation

Many community organizations, businesses, and individual stakeholders are prepared to support implementation of the action plan. Some of their offers and asks of the process are listed in *Appendix G: Offers & Asks*.

Potential funding sources are identified in *Appendix H: Funding Resources*, and additional resources related to local food systems are identified in *Appendix I: Additional Resources and References*.

High Priority Actions

The highest priority action item is to identify an occupant, food business or related concept enterprise, for the 10,000 square foot former Murry's grocery space in the Avenue Market. As the anchor tenant space of the market, much relies on the success of defining the best use of the space and a willing partner to take on a long term lease. Because the space is currently unoccupied, time is of the essence. One of the first action items is to research concepts that could work and fulfill the vision of the community for the space.



Appendices

- Appendix A - Avenue Market Overview
- Appendix B - Workshop Attendees
- Appendix C - Presentation Slides
- Appendix D - MyCommunity Assets Map
- Appendix E - Community Visioning
- Appendix F - Implementation Action Plan Tables
- Appendix G - Offers and Asks
- Appendix H - Funding Resources
- Appendix I - Additional Resources and References

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