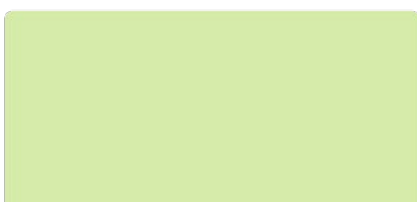
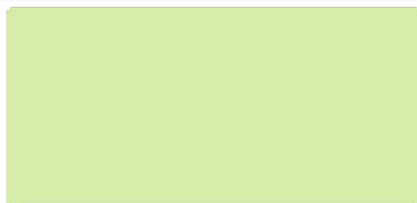
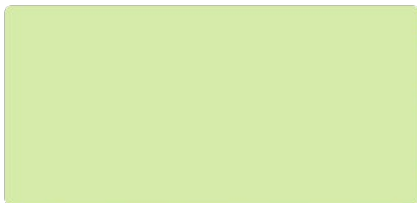




LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the
Local Foods System
and Downtown
Revitalization:

Actions and Strategies
for High Point, North
Carolina

October 24, 2016



Community Story

Located approximately 90 miles west of Raleigh, in North Carolina's Triad Region, High Point is known as the state's "International City." The city earned this nickname not only due to the semi-annual High Point Furniture Market, which attracts nearly 100,000 visitors from across the globe each year, but also due to the international diversity of the population that calls High Point home. High Point is additionally home to High Point University, a small -- but internationally recognized -- liberal arts college with a student body of approximately 4,500 students.



Downtown High Point is home to the semi-annual High Point Furniture Market. Image Credit: www.ncdda.com

Like many cities in the American South, High Point was built upon a foundation of railroads, tobacco, and textiles. In the late 19th century, the first furniture manufactures opened up shop. Today, furniture remains a key driver of the city's economy, through both the manufacturing of furniture and through the semi-annual Furniture Market. The city currently has over a million square feet of showroom space that is used by over 2,000 exhibitors during each Furniture Market event. In recent years, High Point has made an effort to diversify its economy by using its locational and regional advantages to attract other industries such as pharmaceuticals, logistics, and banking. Major employers in the area include the Bank of America; High Point Regional Health System; Guilford County Schools; City of High Point; Thomas Built Buses; Ralph Lauren; and High Point University.

Revitalizing High Point's urban core, which was once the community's industrial base, is a city priority. Once a primary manufacturing hub in North Carolina, the city lost 32.6% of manufacturing jobs or a total job loss of 5,419 positions from 2005-2013. This decline has disproportionately impacted High Point's urban core, where the closing of mills, factories, and other industrial sites have eliminated local jobs and left unused blighted structures behind. A recent analysis showed that 17% of properties in the urban core are vacant, and 6% owe back taxes. The Zillow Home Value index for 2014 shows High Point home values at roughly half that of the average North Carolina's, with property values in the urban core declining at a greater rate. The communities in the urban core are among the most impoverished, with the unemployment rate around 21% and poverty rate at 38.2%. It is also a racially and ethnically diverse area with 37.5% white, 47.5% black and 10.9% Hispanic residents. In April 2015, the Food Research and Action Center released findings of the 100 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), ranking the Greensboro-High Point MSA as #1 in food hardship and #4 in food insecurity. USDA also identified seven census tracts within the city as low income-low access, indicating food deserts. Adding to these grim statistics is the unique challenge of the High Point Furniture Market that operates for two weeks, two times a year, but occupies most of the downtown buildings, thereby rendering them unavailable to be used for traditional downtown business such as retail and restaurants.¹

High Point's population was estimated to be approximately 109,000 in 2014. The rate of obesity is higher in High Point (33.781%) than the North Carolina average (29.5%), reflective of overall poor health conditions in the community. Additionally, High Point's rate of diabetes is 12.7% which is 1.3% higher than the state average of 11.4%. Compounding the health issues is the prevalence of persistent poverty:

¹ From High Point Letter of Interest

the county's child poverty rate is 27.6%.² Specific to food access, the rate of food insecurity in Guilford County is 19.2% (or 95,040 people) compared to the 18.3% North Carolina average.³

In 2015, High Point requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places (LFLP) program to develop an action plan for promoting local food systems, and healthy, walkable, economically vibrant communities. The goals of the LFLP program are to create:

- More economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.
- Better access to healthy, local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- Revitalized downtowns, main streets, and neighborhoods.

The LFLP program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). High Point was one of 27 communities across the United States selected to participate in the program in 2016 (Figure 1).

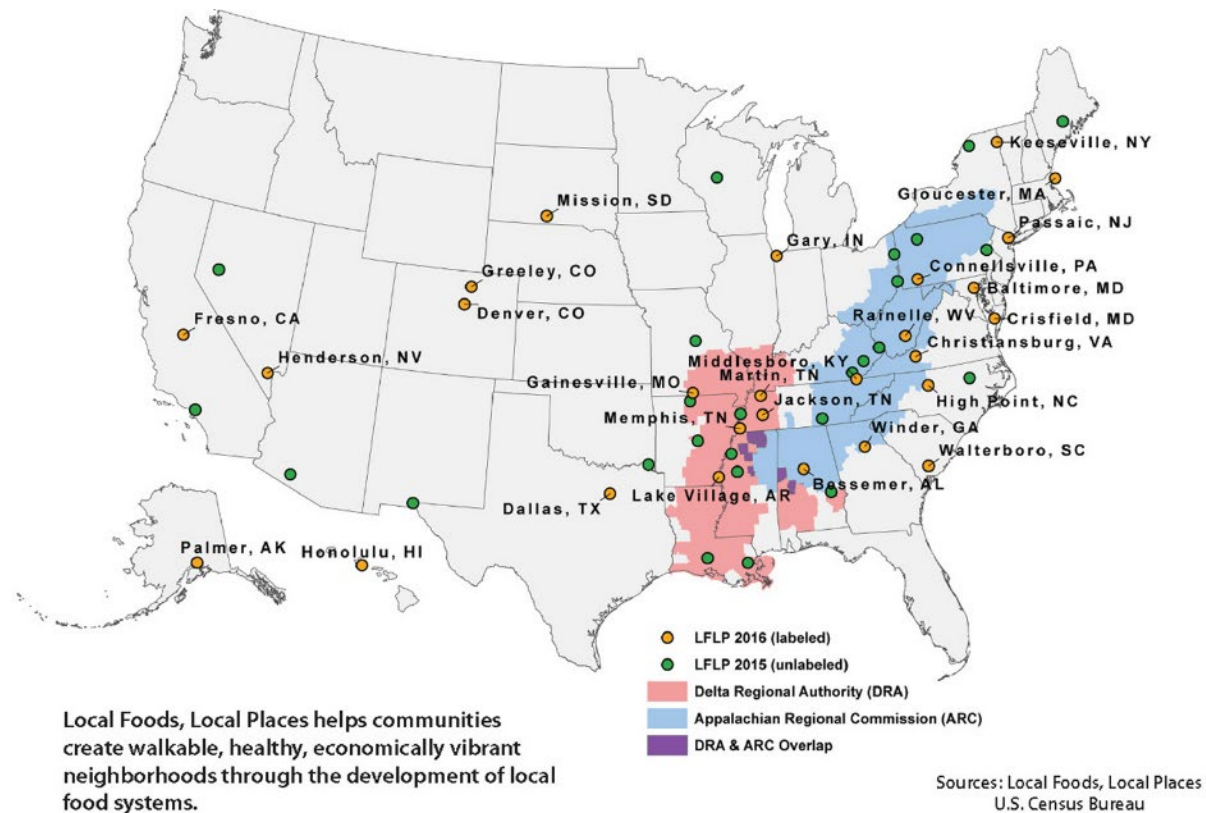


Figure 1 –Communities Receiving Technical Assistance Through LFLP in 2015 and 2016

A local Steering Committee was formed in preparation for this technical assistance award and is comprised of a wide variety of community partners (see Figure 2). Prior to the LFLP technical assistance, committee members have been involved in a variety of local food-related efforts including High Point's

² Obesity and diabetes data sourced from Healthy Food Access Portal Mapping Tool, <http://www.healthyfoodaccess.org/get-started/research-your-community>

³ Food insecurity is a state of being without reliable access to sufficient quantities of affordable, nutritious food. Data sources and information: Feeding America Map the Meal Gap, <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2013/overall>

farmer’s market, health programming through the High Point Library, community farming, and the Greater High Point Food Alliance. The committee hopes to enhance and formalize their efforts, along with establishing new initiatives, as a result of the LFLP process.

In their request for LFLP technical assistance, the City of High Point and the LFLP Steering Committee named improving public property, in order to stimulate private investment, as a primary goal. Specifically, a planned renovation at the High Point Public Library is envisioned as a catalyst for improving health, wellness, and walkability and building community. Technical assistance was requested in order to ensure that the investment in the planned library plaza achieves maximum impact. There was no formal strategy in place for how to maximize the use of the plaza and how to best energize the space with community participation. Assistance was desired in order to help the city in developing a local farmers market as well as other health and wellness related programs that could be operated in the library plaza⁴.

Over the course of the three planning calls and workshop discussions, the community’s goals evolved from those in the initial request for technical assistance to the five shown later in this report and in Appendix A, and reflect the holistic, collaborative approach to community development already underway in High Point, North Carolina. The remainder of this report and appendices document the engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly, the action plan and next steps for achieving the community’s goals.

Engagement

The technical assistance engagement process for LFLP has three phases, illustrated in Figure 3 below. The assessment phase consisted of three preparation conference calls with the LFLP Steering Committee to establish the workshop goals, agenda, logistics, and stakeholder invitation lists. The convening phase included the effort’s capstone event—a two-day workshop in the community. The next steps phase included three follow up conference calls as well as process reporting and documentation.

The community workshop was held on September 8, 2016, and included a small lunch gathering with the Steering Committee members and regional, state, and federal partners; a tour of the community; and an evening community meeting at the Council Chambers of High Point City Hall (Day 1); and an action-planning session held in a gallery of the High Point Theater (Day 2). The community meeting and all-day working session were well attended by key stakeholder groups, residents, and local leaders. The workshop sign-in sheets are provided in Appendix D.

⁴ From Letter of Interest

LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES STEERING COMMITTEE

Mary Sizemore: Director, High Point Public Library

Patrick Harman: Director, Hayden-Harman Foundation

Carl Vierling: Director, Greater High Point Food Alliance

Mike McNair: Director, City of High Point Community Development Department

Lee Gann: Manager, High Point Farmers and Arts Market

Brian Gavigan: Board Member, Chamber of Commerce

Figure 2 – LFLP Steering Committee in High Point

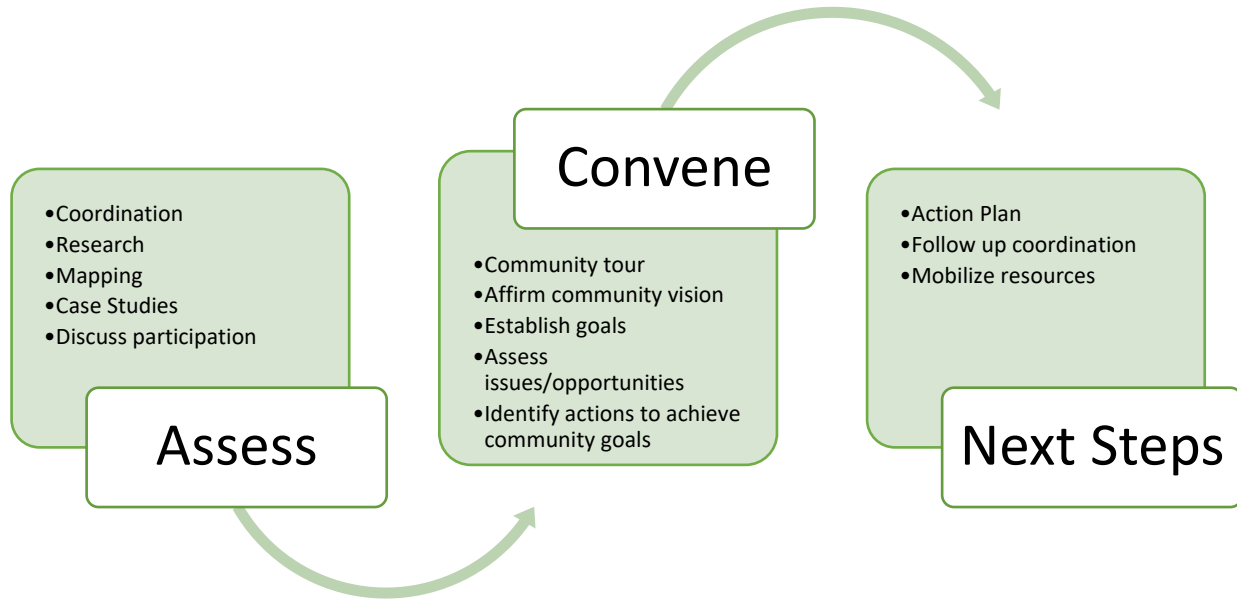


Figure 3 - Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Process Diagram

Community Tour

The LFLP Steering Committee organized an informal lunch at a local High Point restaurant on September 8th to introduce the project and the local leadership committee, consultants, and federal agency representatives. Following lunch, the Steering Committee led a tour of key places and projects in High Point including a number of High Point’s residential neighborhoods such as Washington Street, West End, Southside, and the Country Club area; High Point University; the downtown furniture market district; and the commercial areas surrounding the library. Additional stops were made at the Burns Hill Community Garden, the West End Ministries garden, the World Relief garden, and the Macedonia Resource Center. The tour provided an overview of the challenges and opportunities, and allowed for informal discussions about the local food system and place-making efforts. A number of the locations visited are shown in pictures found in Appendix G.

Vision and Values

The first night of the workshop was attended by over 40 High Point residents and several regional partners representing state and federal agencies. Mary Sizemore, Director of the High Point Public Library and organizer of the LFLP Steering Committee, welcomed attendees to the event and spoke about the community’s ongoing efforts. She outlined the goals of the workshop process as well as the larger, longer-term goals of the Steering Committee. The consultant team introduced the topics and program overview with a short presentation. Community members and other attendees were asked to write on index cards three challenges and three opportunities for building the local food system and bringing new life to downtown High Point. Those ideas are summarized in Figure 4 and presented in Appendix B—Workshop Feedback.

The themes shared during the opportunities and challenges revealed many of the group's aspirations for using the library as a catalyst for community development, economic revitalization, improved health, enhanced access to healthy, local food, entrepreneurship opportunities afforded by local foods, community pride, and increased coordination among partner organizations (Figure 4). These values and visions provided a positive, forward thinking backdrop for the future for the remainder of the workshop. The first day concluded with a review of the workshop goals and discussion about the direction for action planning to follow the next day. These goals were further refined, evolving into the action plan implementation tables that are summarized below (full version in Appendix A). In addition, creating the action plan, the second day of the workshop included presentations of case studies by the consultant team covering building capacity, activating outdoor gathering spaces, adaptive reuse, cooperative grocery stores, commercial kitchens, farmer's market best practices, entrepreneurship, and other food system-related technical information.

Action Plan

The culminating product of the workshop was a strategic action plan to guide implementation. The plan is organized around five goals and includes actions the participants brainstormed at the meeting and refined during follow up calls. The action plan matrix helps to further clarify, prioritize, and define roles and responsibilities for moving forward on these actions. The goals and actions that are part of this plan are summarized below and are contained in their full detail in Appendix A.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges:

- Poverty and food insecurity
- Lack of awareness of the benefit of healthy food
- Transportation/access issues- getting to healthy food
- Placemaking and downtown revitalization
- Connecting a highly culturally diverse community
- Fragmented organizations and initiatives

Opportunities:

- Improve partnerships and connections between the many existing organizations that are already doing great things
- The library is a community asset that will continue to support local food-related programming and development
- Diverse cultural communities can be brought together through food
- Many vacant/ underutilized spaces primed for activation
- Investment in greenways offers opportunities to connect healthy food to healthy living
- Existing medical facilities and health

Figure 4 - Workshop Participants' summarized thoughts on the challenges and opportunities present in the local food system and community development efforts.

GOAL 1: Strengthen and grow High Point’s Farmers and Arts Market.

The Farmers and Arts Market is held at the High Point Public Library every Saturday morning from May 21st through the end of October. Phase 2 of the High Point Library site improvements includes permanent market facilities as part of the public plaza envisioned there. These new and improved facilities represent a substantial investment and an opportunity to grow and take full advantage of the library space. The market has been on-going and successful, though it has faced some competition from the very sizeable Piedmont Triad Farmers Market located approximately ten miles from High Point. Despite the draw of this larger market, its inaccessibility to the low-income population in High Point creates a need to bring local, fresh and healthy food downtown. Growing the market at the library will have multiple benefits, including increasing food access in downtown, creating opportunities for community activity and interaction, and increasing the value of the library facility to the community. This goal outlines a number of actions that participants created specifically to grow and make the market a more robust and vibrant asset to High Point residents.



The High Point Public Library parking lot hosts the weekly Farmers and Arts Market. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning.

- **Action 1.1:** Diversify and grow the vendor base at the market by securing the participation of specific types of food producers (meat, seafood, specialty prepared foods, melons, etc.).
- **Action 1.2:** Create and maintain a robust co-activity program at the market, focusing on kids’ activities, entertainment, and education.
- **Action 1.3:** Investigate options for expanding the market time to possibly a weekday afternoon or evening though surveys, talking to vendors, and possibly testing the options out through a pop-up market.
- **Action 1.4:** Develop a Farmers and Arts Market advisory board to craft a mission statement for the market, determine the purpose of the market, direct activities, and more. The board can also help promote the market in the community and help identify new vendors.
- **Action 1.5:** Make a concerted effort to “get the word out” about the market and the new facility at the library through a coordinated graphic campaign using social media, flyers, utility bills, and visual aids and renderings from the library’s architect.

WHAT	WHO	WHERE
HEALTH PROGRAM	HOSPITAL	INSIDE
CULINARY KIDS	USDA - WNCG	INSIDE
FARMERS MARKET	CITY + VENDORS (10-3)	OUTSIDE
ARTISTS AT MARKET	CITY + VENDORS	OUTSIDE
EDUCATION GARDEN		"
MUSIC PROGRAM		"
FALL FESTIVAL		"
ADVERT. FARMERS MARKET		"
MEET THE POLICE CHIEF		"
FIRE DAY		"
4TH OF JULY FREE RACE		"
CITY EMPLOYEE DAY		"
CITY FOOD -	H'HOOD PRODUCERS	
COOKING DEMONSTRATIONS		
KIDS POETRY BASKETBALL		
ATHLETIC PROGRAM -		
TOUCH A TRUCK	OF. LEA?	
KIDS IN THE KITCHEN	OF. LEA?	
BOOK MARKET		
YOGA CLASS		
DISEASE MGT	FOOD AT MARKET VENDORS + FRESH COMMUNITY CLINIC	
FOOD TRUCK VENDORS -		
BANDS/MUSIC + SEVEN MUSICALS		
COOKING CLASSES		INSIDE
BUSINESS WALK/RUN		
BICYCLE RIDE		
ART FOR SALE		
BUSINESS APERTURES + COMPOST AREA	CHAMBER	OUT/IN

Working group exercise on activating the What, Who and Where at the Framers Market and the Library Plaza.

GOAL 2: Increase library sponsored health and wellness programming.

The High Point Library is centrally-located and accessible community asset with the potential to engage all segments of the population. The library is already committed to promoting local food and general community wellness in High Point, through events such as the weekly farmers market and other health-related programming. However, there is an opportunity for the library to combine resources with other community partners, such as High Point University (HPU), High Point Regional Hospital, and Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC), to expand their on-site health and wellness programming in an effort to reach more residents and have a greater impact on health in the community. The actions included within this goal area focus on identifying and building potential partnerships, such as with HPU’s health professions programs or GTCC’s culinary arts programs; determining ways to engage the full-spectrum of community members, from kids to seniors; and using the library’s assets and resources to help build and promote a culture of healthy, active living in High Point.

- **Action 2.1:** Host public brown bag events for prescription medication information, “ask a doctor/ dentist,” or other health-related programming and rotate featured events monthly.
- **Action 2.2:** Begin an education campaign for community youths and adults about why local food economics are important.
- **Action 2.3:** Sponsor additional culinary kids programming at the library and add a “culinary kids” program at the Historical Society Museum.
- **Action 2.4:** Develop and host new special events including cultural food events, Saturday morning “celebrity chef” demos using seasonal produce from the farmer’s market, themed events based on a particular seasonal food, and more.
- **Action 2.5:** Develop and host new food-related literary programming.
- **Action 2.6:** Develop a walking and fitness program based at the library with walking route maps and possibly pedometers that can be borrowed.



A community garden at the Macedonia Family Resource Center helps to close the needs gap. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning.

GOAL 3: Address community food insecurity.⁵

High Point is a community of socioeconomic diversity and, unfortunately, many residents are low-income, and lack access to grocery stores that carry affordable, healthy food. The city also has a large refugee and immigrant population which contributes to language barriers that make it difficult to ensure vulnerable residents are receiving the assistance they need. The actions below were created to help address the goal of alleviating food insecurity: increasing the supply of fresh, healthy food in every neighborhood; improving access to that food; and ensuring that local food is affordable for all residents.

- **Action 3.1:** Support existing neighborhood-scale food hub models (e.g. commercial kitchen, cooperative grocery and café, summer feeding locations, food banks, incubator spaces for food-related uses).

⁵ Food insecurity is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx>

- **Action 3.2:** Assess the feasibility and potential design of a food access shuttle system.
- **Action 3.3:** Organize an annual “ask” for collaborations with higher education institutions on community projects
- **Action 3.4:** Initiate a vegetable prescription program.

GOAL 4: Build community, partnerships, and place through local food programming.

The City of High Point, nicknamed North Carolina’s International City, is extremely diverse, with residents and visitors coming from many different countries. In addition to cultural diversity, the full spectrum of socioeconomic conditions is represented in High Point as well, from the highest of income brackets to the most vulnerable of very-low income families. This diversity is both an asset and a challenge to the City. Building community by bringing these diverse groups of people together will be a key to the success of High Point’s efforts. Food and gardening are activities that people from diverse cultures share in common, and are activities around which people can come together through food-sharing food, growing food, preparing food and more. This goal focuses on actions that recognize food as a convener of people, in order to build community, forge partnerships, and construct a narrative that tells the story of the people who call High Point home through their varying relationships with food.

- **Action 4.1:** Support and develop a “Community Voices” documentary arts project with resident interviews creating a narrative around food issues in High Point.
- **Action 4.2:** Set up an online food system communication portal or email listserv to connect needs, resources, events, and more for High Point.
- **Action 4.3:** Host and promote a community dinner series highlighting unique cultural traditions in High Point’s neighborhoods.
- **Action 4.4:** Find resources for, and manage, a mini-grant program for neighborhood-specific food-related projects that also help improve the environment and build community
- **Action 4.5:** Begin an “Adopt a Community Garden” Program in High Point.

GOAL 5: Promote and grow local farmers and local food in High Point.

A community-wide commitment to local food and local food producers is a critical element in a sustainable food system. A strong, public commitment to supporting local foods- and making sure healthy local foods are available and accessible to all community members- has a number of benefits including improved resident health, growing the local economy (and ensuring money spent local, stays local), supporting food sovereignty⁶, and providing a variety of environmental and quality of life benefits. The actions associated with this goal are focused on a few key factors: ensuring all of High Point’s neighborhoods



The Burns Hill Community Garden is one of High Point’s many neighborhood-run gardens. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning.

⁶ The U.S Food Sovereignty Alliance defines food sovereignty as “the right of peoples too healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume

(especially those currently designated as food deserts⁷) have access to healthy, fresh, local foods; educating community members on the importance of local foods and how the promoting and growing High Point's local food economy can benefit all residents; the preservation and protection of land to ensure local food producers can continue to farm and raise livestock in a cost-effective manner; and helping to bridge between the producers of local food and the consumers of food to create new markets for local food products.

- **Action 5.1:** Develop a cooperative grocery store, ideally combined with fast/casual restaurant.
- **Action 5.2:** Preserve land for agricultural production through land use protections such as agricultural overlay/protection districts or transfer of development rights (TDR) program.
- **Action 5.3:** Forge connections between local farmers and institutions (schools/ hospitals) through the creation of a for-profit or non-profit enterprise.

Implementation and Next Steps

Three post-workshop conference calls were held during October and November 2016, following the workshop. The calls were held with the LFLP Steering Committee and a few additional stakeholders whose interest was cultivated during the workshop. They worked to refine the action plan and add clarifying language.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Implementation Tables
- Appendix B – Workshop Feedback
- Appendix C – Community Data Profile
- Appendix D – Workshop Sign-in Sheets
- Appendix E – Funding Resources
- Appendix F – References
- Appendix G – Workshop Photo Album

food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”
<http://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/what-is-food-sovereignty/>

⁷ A food desert is a low-income census tract where a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/about-the-atlas.aspx>