

July 2016

Local Foods, Local Places

A Community-Driven Action Plan for
Passaic, New Jersey



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



Local Foods, Local Places

Community Story

Passaic is a densely populated city of about 70,000 people living in 3.2 square miles. It is located about 15 miles west-northwest of Manhattan Island. Within Passaic, between New Jersey Highway 21 and the Passaic River, lies the Eastside neighborhood. Passaic is home to a predominantly (71.7%) Hispanic population, many of whom live in Eastside, including many who have immigrated from Mexico (Figure 1).



Left: Market Street storefronts. Right: Mayor Blanco (left) and Business Administrator Rick Fernandez in front of a redevelopment site.

The Eastside neighborhood of Passaic has some challenges. It is the least affluent of the Passaic neighborhoods and has seen a significant lack of investment in the recent past. The



street and sidewalk infrastructure is older and in poor condition in some spots, and access to the Passaic riverfront has not been developed as a community asset.

PASSAIC	2010	2014
Total Population	67,861	70,651
Pct. Hispanic	62.5%	71.7%
Pct. Minority	81.7%	83.3%
Pct. < 18 Years	30.8%	32.8%
Pct. 65 or Older	8.2%	7.9%

Figure 1. Demographic data. Source: 2014 American Community Survey (ACS).

While the neighborhood has a strong sense of community internally, it can be somewhat isolated from the city at large due to English language barriers faced by many members of the immigrant population. A poor reputation with regards to safety and lack of awareness of the neighborhood’s offerings seem to keep some Passaic residents away from the restaurants and other businesses in Eastside, contributing to its isolation.

While there are many retail food outlets in Eastside (Figure 2), they are disconnected from the local foods system. Procurement of locally produced food is not in evidence at most of the food vendors in the area, and the city has no farmers markets on the Eastside.

Food Retail Store Type	#
Full Service Supermarkets	7
Limited Service Stores	88
SNAP Retailers ¹	127
Farmers Markets	1

Figure 2. Food retail offerings available in Passaic. Source: US Census via healthyfoodaccess.org

¹ SNAP is the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. SNAP Retailers are those stores (including farmers markets, corner stores, supermarkets, and more) that accept SNAP benefits.



include a community garden in the Eastside neighborhood run by City Green, a not-for-profit agency and potential project implementation partner. City Green is looking to relocate its Passaic Farm Stand and could potentially move into Eastside.

Another opportunity in Eastside is that the City has been awarded \$750,000 in grant funding to update the street and sidewalk infrastructure on Market Street. The City is exploring how streetscape improvements can best be leveraged to advance economic development goals on Market Street, including helping to establish it as a culinary corridor. The City has also recently passed new zoning regulations that make it easier to develop mixed-use buildings with residential units above first floor commercial.

The Eastside also has strong, active community organizations, Mi Casa es Puebla (“My Home is Puebla”), that provides education and health services. The organization’s Health Coordinator and Executive Director participated fully in the Local Foods Local Places workshop and were excited in the potential of several of the identified actions to dovetail with other efforts of the organization. Another participant was the local Boys and Girls Club, which has served the neighborhood for over 100 years, and is working with City Green on a community garden project.

Project Assistance

In 2015, the Passaic Enterprise Zone Development Corporation requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program to work with the community to develop a vision and action plan that would increase access to healthy, local food and strengthen the food-related businesses in the Market Street area to promote economic development and improve quality of life for residents. The Local Foods, Local Places 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:

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

Using development of a local food system to support these broad community goals is consistent with smart growth approaches that use investments to create places attractive



to people and businesses. Ten principles of smart growth were developed by the Smart Growth Network, an organization of diverse partners who work to encourage development that benefits the economy, community, public health, and the environment (see sidebar on previous page).

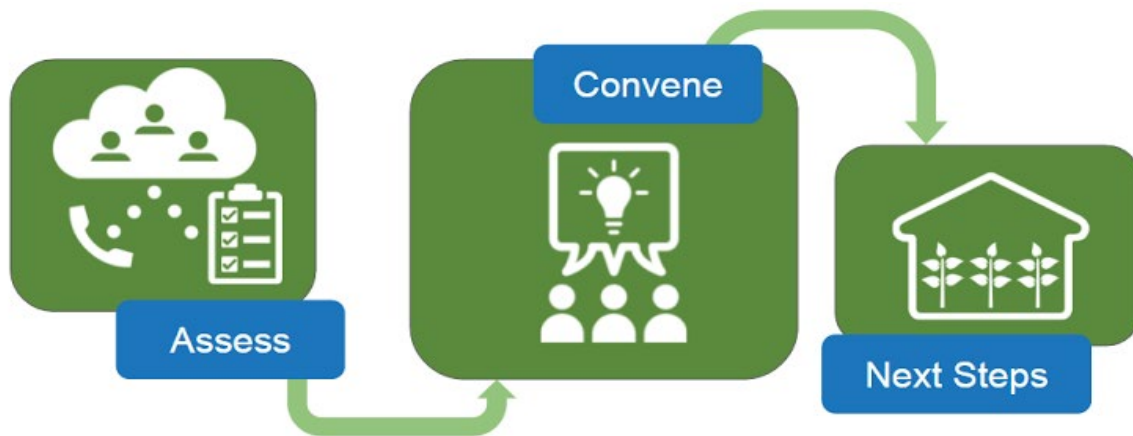


Figure 3. The diagram above lays out all of the steps leading to this action plan.

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 following participants:

- Chair: Joseph Buga, City of Passaic/Passaic Urban Enterprise Development Corporation
- Kathleen Caren, Open Space Coordinator at City of Passaic
- Nico Caraballo, Grants Managers for Millennium Strategies, LLC
- Sara Elnakib, Family & Community Health Sciences Educators at Rutgers
- Adam Farrah, Vice President of Union County Economic Development Corp.
- Simone Flores, Program Manager of Passaic Community Development
- Miryam González, Health Coordinator at Mi Casa Es Puebla
- Colin Leary, Director of Lynx Redevelopment
- Jennifer Papa, Executive Director of City Green
- Dr. Patricia Ruiz Navarro, Director of Mi Casa Es Puebla



Left: Workshop lunch. Right: participants taking notes during the community tour.

The main sessions of the Passaic workshop were held on June 1st and 2nd, 2016 at Mi Casa Es Puebla in the Eastside neighborhood. Prior to the workshop’s first public session, the technical advisory team, local steering committee, and federal partners participated in an informal lunch and community tour. Mayor Dr. Alex David Blanco led the tour, stopping to talk with several business owners and developers.

Over three dozen people attended the workshop, with many participating both days. See *Appendix A: Workshop Attendees* for details of workshop participants. A compilation of photos from the workshop and tour can be found in *Appendix B: Workshop Photo Album*. 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: Community Asset Mapping Results*.

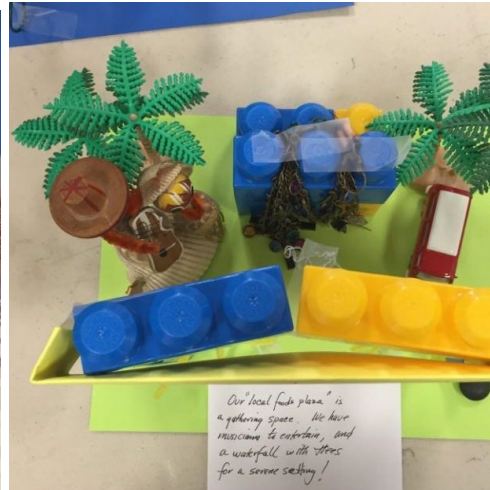
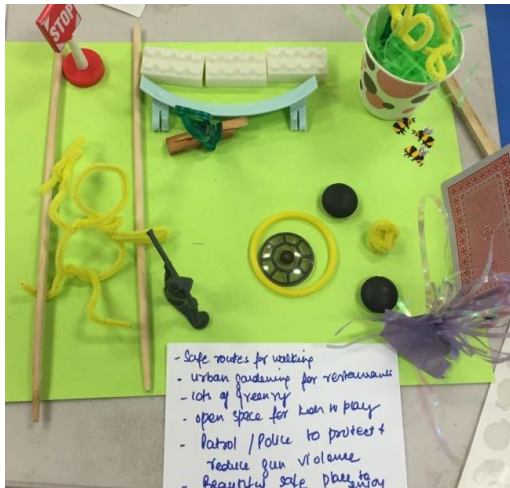
Vision

The community’s aspirations include improving access to healthy, local foods in the Eastside neighborhood with a particular focus on the Market Street corridor. There is considerable excitement and optimism that Eastside and Passaic are “in the midst of a food renaissance.” Workshop participants deemed the vision for a culinary corridor as a “brilliant” idea and promising opportunity to increase healthy, local food options. See *Appendix E: Workshop Exercises* for details.

A vision for the neighborhood emerged where **the health benefits of eating local, healthy food are well understood, businesses offer healthy, local options, and the area is**



known as a culinary destination. Comparisons were made to nearby neighborhoods in Paterson and elsewhere that are known for the richness of offerings in a particular family of cuisine, such as Middle Eastern food.



Above: Two examples of the “City as Play” projects. Below: participants engaging in the exercise.

In one exercise, participants made visual representations of successful integration of local foods in their community. Some ideas represented in the projects included: a local foods gathering place; gateway entrance signs; expanded/safer sidewalks; planter boxes; places to get kids involved; community gardens; greenery; outdoor seating areas; bike lanes; patrol and enforcement for safety; strings of lights above the street; public art; showcase farm plots; fruit stands; and better parking management. *More comments from the City as Play activity can be found in Appendix E: Workshop Exercises.*



- Action 1.3 Provide information to businesses about financing & business support resources available to support healthy changes
- Action 1.4 Identify potential sites and development partners in Eastside to host the Buying Club (cooperative to purchase food directly from farmers) and Food Hub.

Goal 2: Strengthen place-based identity

- Action 2.1 Establish a cohesive visual identity to brand the Market Street area (Gateways, signage, public art + murals, graphic standards)
- Action 2.2 Establish a citizen-led commission to explore the potential of a public plaza along Market Street; Establish a community engagement plan.
- Action 2.3 Improve neighborhood cleanliness (new paint jobs, address code violations, set up Clean & Green program to clean regularly, awareness campaign).
- Action 2.4 Lobby the City of Passaic to reinstate the facade improvement program (covering 50% of costs up to \$3,500).

Goal 3: Increase local foods accessibility & affordability

- Action 3.1 Add a weekly farmers market and add more Veggie Mobile stops in Eastside
- Action 3.2 Get corner stores to offer fresh, healthy options
- Action 3.3 Promote community gardens with input and ownership from residents and local associations. Offer transportation and other accommodations to encourage participation by seniors.
- Action 3.4 Engage transportation planners to improve residents' public transportation access to food stores

Goal 4: Develop resources for healthy food access & wellness

- Action 4.1 Improve walkability in the Market Street area, e.g. by increasing security, beautifying the area, removing obstacles along sidewalks, and providing comfortable places to rest
- Action 4.2 Create space for physical activity in the Market Street area, e.g. by cleaning up brownfields and empty lots for parks, playgrounds & walking paths (after identifying owners and acquiring property, as necessary).
- Action 4.3 Provide nutrition education for residents, e.g., through: increased education at hospital discharge, prenatal nutrition programs, health workshops, local foods classes, identify Association of chefs, incentives for chefs to learn healthy cooking techniques



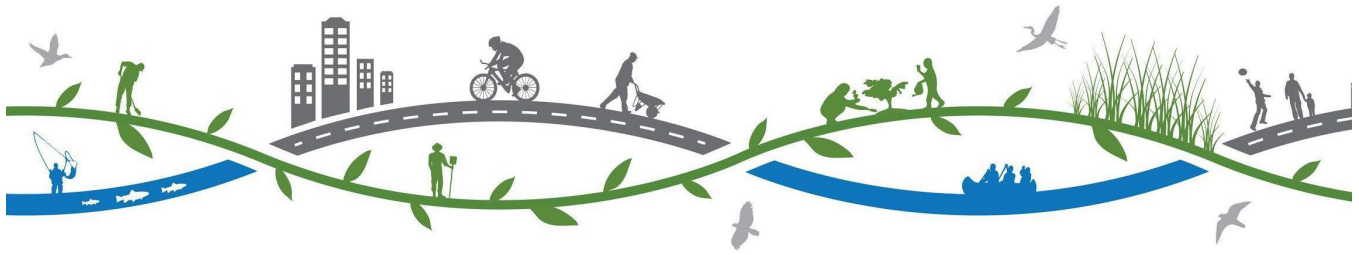
Goal 5: Enhance & promote the Market Street area as a distinctive cultural corridor

- Action 5.1 Establish a business group for the Market Street area with a branding committee
- Action 5.2 Evolve the business group into a Business Improvement District
- Action 5.3 Create branded events, e.g. restaurant night, food festival, Cinco de Mayo festival, senior week, jazz night, chef cook-off
- Action 5.4 Explore getting outdoor seating: Do ordinances need changing? Who (which restaurants) are interested? Where is there space?

Implementation

The Action Plan identified many short-term action steps including several that did not require new funding sources. The project defines short-term action steps are those that can be completed within six months. Some of these Actions include:

- Action 1.1 Assess restaurant and food business owners' awareness, needs, interest, and concerns related to offering local and healthy food
- Action 2.3 Improve neighborhood cleanliness - *Start talking to business owners*
- Action 2.4 Lobby the City of Passaic to reinstate the facade improvement program - *Begin conversations*
- Action 3.1 Add a weekly farmers market and add more Veggie Mobile stops in Eastside - *Farmers Market operating monthly (Note: weekly market has been established as of July 2016. See Appendix H for the Market poster).*
- Action 3.2 Get corner stores to offer fresh, healthy options - *Work to get 2-3 stores on Market Street/Eastside included among the 6 pilots being selected for the Healthy Corner Store initiative.*
- Action 4.1 Improve walkability in the Market Street area - *Compile "before" photos, crime report, and a baseline survey of physical and perceptions*
- Action 4.2 Create space for physical activity in the Market Street area - *Identify owners and possible sites, and strategies for funding.*
- Action 4.3 Provide nutrition education for residents - *Use existing Hospital educational materials.*
- Action 5.1 Establish a business group for the Market Street area with a branding committee - *Call for interest and hold the first meeting*
- Action 5. 4 Explore getting outdoor seating - *Assign project lead at first meeting*



Appendices

- Appendix A - Workshop Participants
- Appendix B - Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix C - Presentation Slides
- Appendix D - Community Asset Mapping Results
- Appendix E - Workshop Exercises
- Appendix F - Action Plan
- Appendix G - Funding Resources
- Appendix H - Passaic LFLP Press Coverage
- Appendix I - Veggie Mobile Market Poster

Photo Credits

Photos in the report and appendices are from Erica Heller and Chris Freda unless otherwise noted.