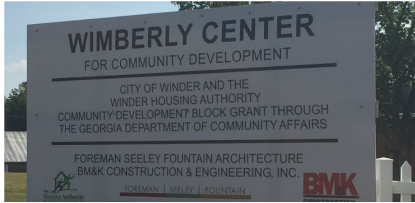
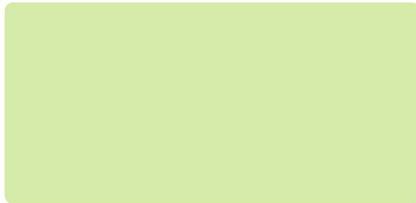




LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

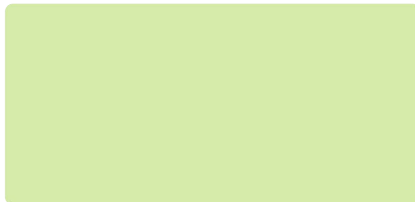
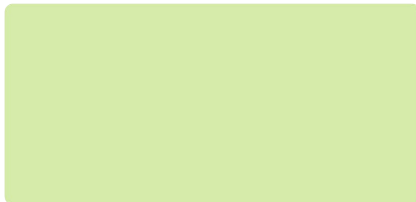
Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the Local Foods System and Downtown Revitalization:

Actions and Strategies for Winder, Georgia

August 2016



Community Story

Winder, Georgia, is a small city of about 14,000 people in the rural, Appalachian region of the Atlanta metropolitan area. Winder is the seat of Barrow County and a community that developed over centuries from a small settlers' outpost, then named Jug Tavern, to a city at the crossroads of northeast Georgia. Winder covers nearly 13 square miles of land, a large portion of which is covered by Fort Yargo State Park and Fort Yargo Lake. Its southern border lies about one mile from State Route 29 (University Parkway), at the halfway point between the cities of Lawrenceville and Athens. Its northern border is approximately seven miles from Interstate 85, near Braselton.



A family waits to cross the street in downtown Winder. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

Once a vibrant community with a thriving agricultural industry, Winder is experiencing a great need for revitalization. As with many other rural communities, a shift in industry and a downturn in the economy has left a lingering impact on the town. Today, the median per capita income in Winder is \$17,751, considerably lower than the State of Georgia, at \$25,182, and 19% of Winder's population is living below the poverty line¹.

The focus of the Local Foods, Local Places project in Winder – the Glenwood neighborhood – is located within walking distance of downtown Winder, and is identified in the city's Urban Redevelopment Plan as an area in great need of revitalization. The neighborhood is considered a food desert due to a high poverty rate and low access to food. Further compounding the issue, the Winder-Barrow Middle School, located in the Glenwood neighborhood, was vacated by Barrow County School District in 2013 when a new school was constructed a few miles away. The former school became yet another vacant structure challenging the redevelopment of this already economically-disadvantaged neighborhood.

Seeing potential in the unused structure, the Winder Housing Authority (WHA) purchased the school and the surrounding property to create the Wimberly Center for Community Development, with the goal of developing a catalyst to spur other urban revitalization efforts. Community engagement activities to help direct the programming of the center identified a desire for a host of programs and services including expanded space for the Boys and Girls Club, a branch for the nonprofit ACTION Inc., new Housing Authority offices, a senior center, workforce training classrooms, a community kitchen and culinary arts education program (using the school's existing kitchen), a community garden, and a



Sign at the former school site, the future Wimberly Center for Community Development. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

¹ From the letter of interest that Winder submitted for the Local Foods, Local Places program.

fitness trail. Renovations of interior spaces have already begun and tenants are anticipated as early as late summer 2016.

Within the Glenwood neighborhood and larger Winder community, the need for revitalization is well understood and documented. The Wimberly Center may provide a means for achieving this community renewal. In partnership with the City of Winder, the Housing Authority received \$500,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding from Georgia's Department of Community Affairs to fund renovations needed for the building. Additionally, Mayor David Maynard, Barrow County Board of Commissioners Chair Pat Graham, and Georgia House Representative Terry England support the redevelopment of the Center. The following partner organizations are engaged in development of the Center: ACTION, Inc., Barrow County Boys and Girls Club, Barrow County Senior Services, Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, Piedmont CASA, Barrow Ministry Village, Family Connections, and Peace Place.

While property, programmatic elements, and partnerships were beginning to emerge to support the Center's redevelopment, technical assistance was still needed to facilitate community engagement and support implementation. In 2015, Winder requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places² (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). Winder was one of 27 communities across the United States selected to participate in the program in 2016. In their request for LFLP technical assistance, the Winder Housing Authority named skill-building, forging cross-generational relationships, improving community health and nutrition, and bringing vitality to the Glenwood Neighborhood as primary goals.

The remainder of this report and its appendices document the engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly, the action plan and next steps for achieving the community's goals. A

LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Michelle Yawn, Winder Housing Authority

Lisa Gautreaux, ACTION, Inc.

Derek Hutchens, Boys and Girls Club of Winder Barrow County

Pamela LeFrois, Food Nutrition, Barrow County Schools

Chris Maddox, Winder Downtown Development Authority

Wanda McLocklin, Barrow County UGA County Extension Office

Theresa Owen, Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

Winder LFLP Steering Committee Members

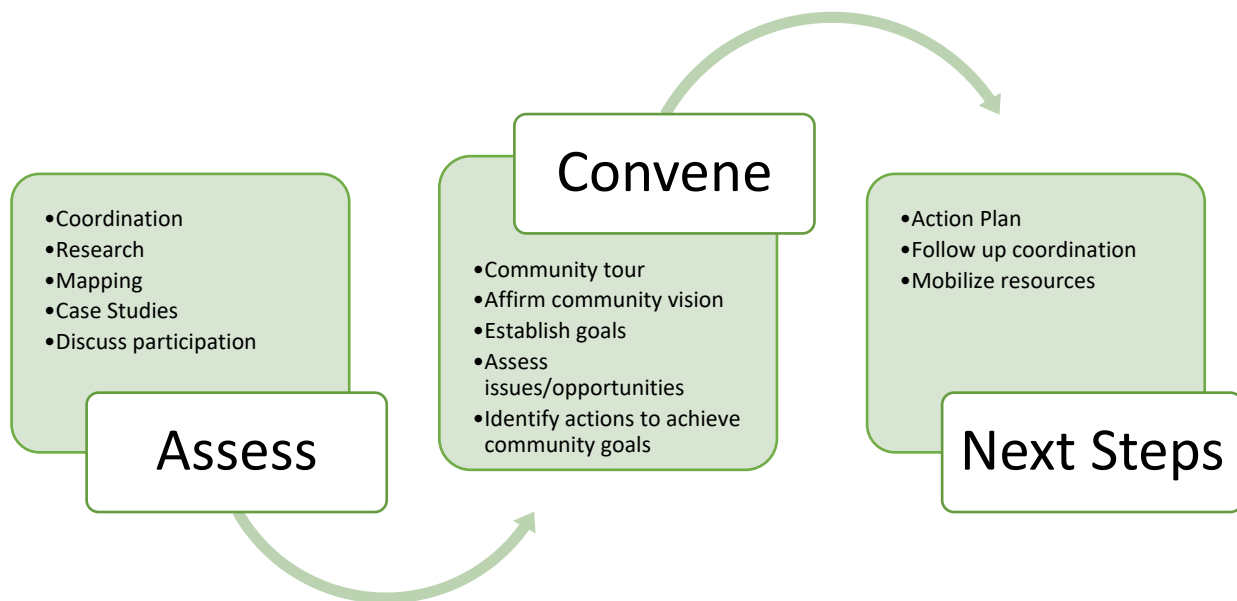
² <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places>

LFLP Steering Committee was created to help plan the workshop and guide the community’s initial steps to implement the resulting action plan. 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 catalytic approach to community development already underway in Winder, Georgia.

Engagement

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

The community workshop was held on April 25th and 26th, 2016, and included a small lunch gathering with the Steering Committee members and regional, state, and federal partners; a tour of the community; an evening community meeting at the Winder Community Center (Day 1); and an action-planning session, also at the Winder Community Center (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.



Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Process Diagram

Community Tour

The LFLP Steering Committee organized lunch on April 25th with key stakeholders at the Winder Community Center to introduce the project and the local leadership committee, consultants, and federal agency representatives. Following the luncheon, the Steering Committee led a tour of key places and projects in Winder area including downtown, the Glenwood Neighborhood, other properties owned by the Winder Housing Authority, and the new Wimberly Center for Community Development. The tour

provided an overview of challenges and opportunities, and allowed for informal discussions about the local food system and place-making efforts (see photos in Appendix H).

Vision and Values

The first night of the workshop was attended by over 30 Winder residents and regional partners representing state and federal agencies, including Georgia State Representative Terry England, Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black, and a representative for Congressman Jody Hice's office. Michelle Yawn, Executive Director of the Winder Housing Authority 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 down three challenges and three opportunities for building the local food system and adapting the school building into the Wimberly Center. Those ideas are summarized in the box to the left and presented in Appendix B—Workshop Feedback.

The themes shared during the opportunities and challenges discussion revealed many of the group's aspirations for a healthier community, economic growth, self-sufficiency, strengthening community collaborations and connections, and investing in existing neighborhoods. It was against this forward-thinking backdrop of values and visions for the future that the remainder of the workshop was built upon. 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 to creating the action plan, the second day of the workshop included presentations of case studies by the consultant team covering best practices for adaptive reuse of community buildings like schools,

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges:

- **Organizational-**
 - Lack of a food “champion”
 - Sustaining momentum
 - Finding funding
- **Engagement-**
 - Community outreach is difficult in this neighborhood
 - Lack of community “buy in”
 - Lack of neighborhood pride
- **Project-Specific-**
 - Transportation
 - Connecting to downtown
 - Cost to maintain building
 - Ongoing maintenance

Opportunities:

- **General-**
 - Attract people to nearby downtown
 - Connect better to Ft. Yargo State Park
 - Invest in existing neighborhoods through adaptive reuse
- **Wimberly Center-**
 - Housing combined with services
 - Community gardens and outdoor classrooms
 - Model for other communities
 - Consolidate services and avoid duplication
 - Resource awareness – let people know what's already available

Workshop Participants' summarized thoughts on the challenges and opportunities present in the local food system and downtown revitalization efforts.

commercial kitchens, mobile markets, urban farms, and other food system-related technical information (presentations available in Appendix H).

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 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.

GOAL 1: Provide for a robust community engagement process to ensure the needs of residents are being met through the Wimberly Center's programming.

Workshop participants noted that they are unsure of who is currently speaking for the neighborhood and how the needs of that community are being effectively communicated. They also expressed concern about issues of miscommunication in the neighborhood where incorrect information is being spread and residents end up confused and upset. There is currently overlap in the provision of food-related services to residents in Winder and Barrow County and many organizations are unaware that there are other groups serving similar functions to their own group. Finally, workshop participants noted that they were unsure of who the Wimberly Center was intended to serve and what its overall purpose is, particularly if it is intended as a neighborhood, city, or county-wide resource. The following actions are designed to address these issues and concerns.

- **Action 1.1:** Conduct a survey focused on food-related needs in the neighborhood.
- **Action 1.2:** Develop and implement a volunteer "block captain" program in the Glenwood Neighborhood to provide information to residents and promote local food-related efforts.
- **Action 1.3:** Convene an association of food-related community groups in Barrow County.
- **Action 1.4:** Clarify the purpose of the Wimberly Center through marketing and effective messaging.

GOAL 2: Enhance transportation options and physical connections to, from, and between the Wimberly Center, downtown Winder, and surrounding neighborhoods to support a catalytic positive impact on the Glenwood Neighborhood.

There are currently both real and perceived barriers preventing robust and safe connections between downtown Winder and the Glenwood Neighborhood. While the Wimberly Center is geographically close to downtown, the layout of streets and neighborhoods creates spatial boundaries that do not presently support an intuitive flow of movement between the two areas. In order to effectively connect downtown and the Glenwood Neighborhood for non-automobile users, it is important to understand the current state of pedestrian infrastructure in the area. Additionally, many of the residents who will be served by the Wimberly Center are low-income and struggle to bear the burden of high transportation costs. The following actions are designed to address these issues and concerns.

- **Action 2.1:** Install wayfinding signs to direct people between downtown Winder points of interest and the Wimberly Center.
- **Action 2.2:** Conduct a walkability assessment or audit to assess sidewalks in downtown Winder and in the Glenwood Neighborhood.

- **Action 2.3:** Make sidewalk and crossing improvements within and between downtown Winder and the Glenwood Neighborhood to improve safety and walkability.
- **Action 2.4:** Investigate the feasibility of establishing a non-profit bike cooperative located in the Wimberly Center.

GOAL 3: Complete the programming for the interior space of the Wimberly Center, with a special focus on the provision of food and nutrition related services.

In order to de-institutionalize the former school and make it feel more like a welcoming neighborhood asset, the Center's unique identity will need to be developed and supported. The choice of certain anchor tenants will set the "direction" of the Center and determine overall building usage, staff hours, resources needed, and other factors that influence the rest of the Center's programming.

Community food and nutrition services will be one of many program areas coordinated at the Wimberly Center. An assessment of the existing kitchen and food preparation/service spaces will help determine the potential for future food and nutrition programming for the Center. A dedicated food and nutrition advisory committee can help to coordinate the programming and uses for the kitchen and other food-related spaces in the center. Additionally, a business plan will help to estimate the costs of operating and maintaining the kitchen and identify sources of funding. The following actions are designed to address these areas of need.

- **Action 3.1:** Hire a programming coordinator for the Wimberly Center.
- **Action 3.2:** Consider potential tenants, their resource needs, and their space requirements.
- **Action 3.3:** Improve the aesthetics of the Wimberly Center to make it feel less "institutional."
- **Action 3.4:** Convene an advisory committee to oversee the development and implementation of food and nutrition-related programming for the Wimberly Center.
- **Action 3.5:** Conduct an inspection/ assessment of the existing kitchen with assistance from the health department.
- **Action 3.6:** Develop a business plan for the Wimberly Center kitchen.
- **Action 3.7:** Design and implement any required renovations to the Wimberly Center kitchen and other food service/preparation areas based on the desired programming model and financial plan.
- **Action 3.8:** Hire a kitchen manager or food and nutrition service coordinator for the Wimberly Center.

GOAL 4: Identify possible uses for exterior of the school site and other contiguous land controlled by the Winder Housing Authority.

A site design plan will help to round out plans for the whole building, resulting in the presentation and development of a complete and unified design concept. A design organized around food and active living can be a powerful tool to bring people together. In addition to providing social, aesthetic and environmental benefits, a community garden provides opportunities to educate neighborhood residents and users of the Wimberly Center on a variety of local foods concepts including: nutrition, growing at home, creating value-added products, supporting pollinator habitats, and more. The proposed actions will support these efforts plus also help generate some excitement about the new Center.

- **Action 4.1:** Develop a working site design concept/ master plan for the exterior of the Wimberly Center

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- **Action 4.2:** Plan and execute a “Community Work Day” to clean up the Wimberly Center site and to implement portions of the site design concept.
- **Action 4.3:** Design and install a community garden at the Wimberly Center.
- **Action 4.4:** Submit a play space idea to the KaBOOM! “Play Everywhere” Challenge.

GOAL 5: Build local, state, and federal partnerships and supportive collaborations to maximize the potential of the Wimberly Center.

Winder has many available resources at the private, local, county, state, and federal levels that can be leveraged to ensure the Center’s long-term sustainability and viability. Sustaining long-term support, interest, and financial viability of the Wimberly Center is of paramount importance. It will be important to have an organizational structure in place in order to prevent stagnation of the Center’s mission and to keep momentum moving forward over the life of the project. There are a number of existing organizations that may be interested in sponsoring or supporting the Center in order to help support a longer-term vision for the Center’s future. The following actions are designed to support this need.

- **Action 5.1:** Convene a Wimberly Center task force or working group to support and expand partnerships, and identify avenues for future growth.
- **Action 5.2:** Approach potential parties to determine interest in establishing or contributing to a foundation, and generally solicit donations for the Wimberly Center.

Implementation and Next Steps

Three post-workshop conference calls were held during May and June 2016, following the workshop. The calls were held with the LFLP Steering Committee and a few additional stakeholders who expressed interest at the workshop. They worked to refine the action plan and add clarifying language.

Additionally, in the time between the workshop and finalizing this report, Winder has already been tackling items on their action plan including:

- Submitted an application for the KaBOOM! “Play Everywhere” Challenge
- Coordinated a meeting with leadership from the Appalachian Regional Commission
- Partnered with the University of Georgia Leadership, Engagement, and Development (UGA LEAD) Summer Academy to begin planning and implementing a large-scale community garden at the Center
- Continued finalizing programming and tenants for the Wimberly Center
- Conducted health department assessment of kitchen to determine necessary renovations and investigate potential uses
- Coordinated and conducted a meeting with USDA to investigate potential funding opportunities
- Made decision to hire program manager for Wimberly Center
- Held meetings with developer for senior housing co-located with the Wimberly Center
- Identified a model for community food assessment

Appalachian Regional Commission Implementation Assistance

The ARC is making available to each of the LFLP communities in its service area some implementation funding assistance of up to \$20,000 per community. The funding is to be targeted towards specific actions identified in the workshop and post-workshop action planning effort. The community identified

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Action 3.6 (Develop a business and marketing plan for the Wimberly Center Community Kitchen) as a priority area for this funding assistance. The kitchen will need to be a self-sustainable area of programming for the Center. A business and marketing plan will help the Winder Housing Authority to define desired programming, estimate the costs of operating and maintaining the kitchen, and identify sources of funding.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Implementation Tables
- Appendix B – Workshop Feedback
- Appendix C – Community Data Profile
- Appendix D – Workshop Participants
- Appendix E – Funding Resources
- Appendix F – References
- Appendix G – Presentation Slides
- Appendix H – Workshop Photo Album