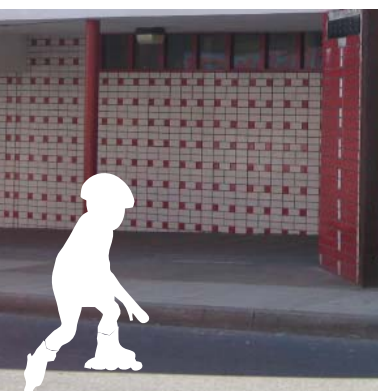




# Northeast Market "Healthy Food Hub" Strategy

April 2011





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# Introduction

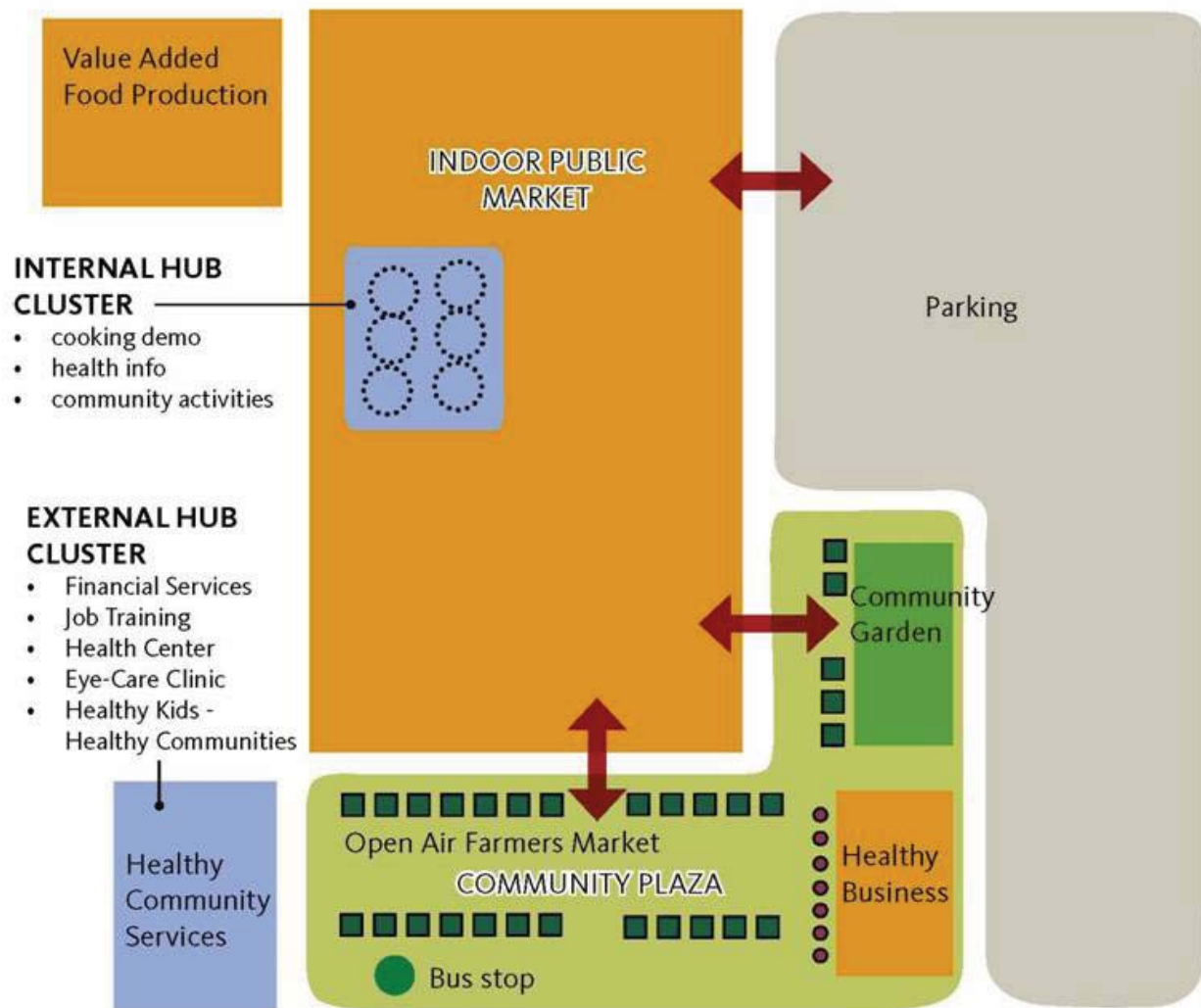
Northeast Market, like all the historic Baltimore neighborhood markets, was once a bustling center of its commercial district and a center of community life. While it has lost much of that feel and function, it is still a viable and busy public market. Beyond re-establishing and enhancing its traditional role, however, there is an opportunity for Northeast Market to more strategically address the growing obesity epidemic in the City, in part fueled by lack of access to fresh food products.

According to the Baltimore City Health Department, the City lost 15% of its supermarkets in the early 2000's, many of them in low-income neighborhoods. In 2007, about 68% of Baltimore adults were overweight or obese, and nearly 36% reported being told they have high blood pressure. High blood pressure and obesity are risk factors for stroke, diabetes and heart disease and the highest rates for these diseases can be found in Baltimore's food deserts. In light of these challenges Baltimore is eager to remedy the correlated issues of rising obesity and rising health care costs stemming from diet and exercise related conditions and diseases and the Northeast Market, along with the City's five

other public markets, is well positioned to lead this effort.

The focus of much of government and foundation investments to address food access in neighborhoods has been to support the development of more grocery stores in underserved communities. While this strategy is not without merit, a traditional grocery store is far from being an answer and, indeed, may not lead to improved health or community outcomes. However, public markets, such as the Northeast Market, represent a core asset that can be developed and expanded as an alternative, or complementary, strategy to building grocery stores. Public markets, especially farmers markets, have proven to have significant potential for increasing neighborhood access to fruit and vegetables, and are becoming common even in poorer communities. These findings suggest an opportunity – to build on the strengths of the Northeast Market – and develop a community gathering space which focuses on healthy eating and living - also known as a Healthy Food Hub.





Healthy Food Hub - Large Public Market Concept



# About Healthy Food Hubs

The concept of a Healthy Food Hub expands the notion of a stand-alone public market to encompass a wide mix of uses, business relationships, and activities that make the Hub a community gathering place and a destination that can serve as an economic development catalyst for Baltimore.

Healthy Food Hubs can provide opportunities for low-income communities with limited food access to buy fresh, healthy, and affordable food, locally sourced, on a year-round basis, while providing “one stop shopping” to make it easy for people to access health services, clinics, Federal nutrition assistance sign-up, business incubation, cooking classes, and a variety of other mutually supportive local activities. They can be designed with public gathering spaces, and connected to transit stops and not just provide parking for cars.

Over time these Healthy Food Hubs can evolve, gradually incorporating related retail, community businesses, a variety of social and community services, as well as general community uses and activities.





# Healthy Food Hub Workshop

In March, 2011, at the request of the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition, Inc (HEBCAC) and the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI), PPS facilitated a workshop with neighborhood stakeholders to strategize ways in which the Northeast Market can develop into a Healthy Food Hub. Participants worked together to develop an overall concept for the market, including identifying existing and potential Healthy Food Hub uses in the market and its surrounding neighborhood. The following section outlines ways in which the Northeast Market can build on their existing Healthy Food Hub efforts, as well as work with the neighborhood to become a focal point of health and wellness for the entire community.

## EXISTING HEALTHY FOOD HUB COMPONENTS AT THE NORTHEAST MARKET

The Northeast Market needs to implement a variety of efforts and activities to become a Healthy Food Hub for East Baltimore residents, but it is not starting from scratch. There are existing healthy components to the market which workshop participants identified and these can be used as a foundation for future efforts.

### *Products*

- One experienced produce vendor (Richardson's) featuring farm raised produce and poultry, their cooking greens are especially popular.
- Some vendors (Michael's) are selling prepared food/ready to eat items that are healthy, including wraps and two salad bars.
- There are two fresh fish vendors.





## Services & Programs

- Health information is distributed to market customers three to four times a month. Local partners such as the Baltimore City Health Department, Johns Hopkins University (JHU), Charm City, and community-based environmental justice groups also provide health check-ups at the market.
- Some vendors accept SNAP (food stamps).



## Atmosphere & Physical Space

- There is a lot of security at the Market.
- The market is an active, public gathering space. It is especially busy during the lunchtime hours and is



often full of people.

- Public transportation is available for customers nearby – the Charm City Circulator's Green Route is coming soon and will have stops near the market at JHU.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATING A HEALTHY FOOD HUB AT THE NORTHEAST MARKET

Building off of the Market's assets workshop participants identified a variety of Healthy Food Hub components that could be implemented at Northeast Market.

## Products



- Healthy, fresh food such as produce, meat/poultry and fish should take up a larger percentage of the Market's available floor space and vendors selling healthy items should be given prime locations in the Market that are visible to all customers:
  - Actively work to attract new, permanent vendors who would feature healthy, fresh foods. This will not only

- provide more healthy options for shoppers, but encourage competitive pricing between vendors.
- Healthy, fresh foods should be displayed in a more attractive and bountiful manner to attract and entice customers to purchase them. (Design assistance to vendors selling healthy fresh foods could help make these stalls more compelling to customers.)
- Attract a plant/flower vendor who would sell seeds for people to grow vegetables at home.



- Incorporate more farmers and small scale fresh food producers in the market:
  - Operate a weekly farmers market outside the Market. Vendors could include regional farmers, a growers' cooperative and local community gardeners.
  - Provide temporary day stalls featuring healthy, fresh food inside for use by small scale

producers/farmers. Day stalls allow vendors to take advantage of the Market as a business opportunity and increase the amount of healthy foods available without having to commit to a full schedule. Temporary stalls could be located inside the market or outside the Market at key entrances, or vendors should also be able to use or share a vacant stall on a day-rental basis.



- Work with prepared food vendors:
  - Encourage existing prepared food vendors to add healthier items to their menus and add another salad bar to the Market.
  - Encourage prepared food vendors to buy healthy, fresh items, such as vegetables for a salad bar, from other Market vendors.
  - Extend the City's Healthy Menu Program to the Market so vendors who feature healthier food items can take



advantage of professionally designed signage and menus highlighting these items.

- o The quality and freshness of foods used in the preparation of prepared foods should be improved.

## Programming

- Increase the amount and frequency of health programming at the Market. To expand the programming space, redesign the central seating area to be more flexible and/or use vacant stalls to host local health clinics, nutritionists, chefs, etc.



- WIC registration, classes and on-going programming should be offered at the Market so clients can learn about healthy food and have access to it in one location.
- Implement a marketing campaign for the Market which brands it as a place for healthy food in the neighborhood.
- Encourage organizations that host health programming at the Market to interact with the wider community which is not already shopping at the Market. Find out what the community is interested in learning and buying and encourage them to visit the Market.

## Services

- SNAP incentive coupons should be available for Market customers to purchase more fresh produce.
- The Market should implement a recycling program for vendors and customers.
- Start a gleaning program at the Market so fresh food can be donated to nearby food banks and pantries at the end of the market day.





## Atmosphere & Physical Space

- Remove the stationary tables and chairs which currently limit the amount of programming which can occur in the Market; build a temporary or permanent space for cooking and food preparation demonstrations and education.



- Display a community bulletin board so customers and neighborhood partners can post information about health and wellness-related workshops, programs, and other community notices.
- The Market should be thoroughly cleaned and a plan for on-going maintenance should be

implemented.

- Improve the common space lighting in the Market.
- Plant trees, bushes, and flowers around the perimeter of the Market.

## Stall Design



- Start a vendor training program at the Market to help all vendors display their items attractively, improve lighting, and create better signage and menus that highlight healthier items; training could also emphasize the importance of stall cleanliness.
- Provide technical assistance to vendors who are operating, or opening, a stall to sell healthy foods.

## HEALTHY COMPONENTS WITHIN THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD

There are a variety of efforts underway in East Baltimore to address public health issues. Institutional partners such as JHU, HEBCAC and the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and grassroots groups such as Amazing Grace Food Ministry and community gardeners are working to revitalize their neighborhood and encourage healthy living. Workshop participants identified the following components that are on-going in the neighborhood.

### *Institutions*

- The Baltimore City Health Department's Virtual Supermarket Program has a pick-up location at the Orleans Central Library on Orleans Street and North Central Avenue.
- JHU's Center for a Livable Future is addressing food access issues in the community and through a variety of methods, including a Community Food Assessment and Food System Mapping project.
- JHU has a CSA pick-up site within several blocks of the Northeast Market.
- The Tench Tilghman Elementary School is nearby and hosts an annual health fair.
- The Eastern District Health Center, the neighborhood's local WIC center, is located several blocks from the Market, but there is no known connection to the market.

### *Community Services*

- Amazing Grace Food Ministry offers a variety of community health services including, a health outreach program, stress management, and a food pantry, organized like a grocery store for clients, which is serviced by the Maryland Food Bank.
- Moveable Feast – a "Meals on Wheels" type program for persons with cancer or HIV/AIDS.
- There are two nearby food pantries.
- The neighborhood's Healthy Start program is located on North Chester Street, across from the Northeast Market.
- The East Monument Street Merchants Association has two events annually devoted to health issues.



- The Men's Center is located a couple of blocks from the Market and offers parenting and life skills, health education, job placement assistance and food giveaways to clients.



- The Banner Neighborhoods program serves southeast Baltimore, which includes the area around Northeast Market. It is community-based non-profit which operates after-school programs for children including gardening and public health projects that help to create a positive frame of mind.

### *Urban Gardens*

- The Real Food Farm, a program of Civic Works, is an urban agricultural enterprise located on six acres in nearby Clifton Park. The farm aims to improve neighborhood access to fresh, healthy food; train residents in farming; educate Baltimore children on agriculture and healthy eating and protect the environment.
- A number of community gardens featuring fruits, vegetables and flowers are active within several blocks of the Northeast Market.

- Ashland has a number of green initiatives going on; they are planning gardens where children will be growing vegetables.
- The Oliver area is turning dumping grounds into gardens and planning a farmers market.

### *Grocery Stores*

- There is a grocery store featuring Hispanic/Latino produce nearby.
- Murray's grocery store is located nearby.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND HEALTHY COMPONENTS WITHIN THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD

While a great deal of planning and efforts to address public health issues have already been implemented in this neighborhood more could be done in conjunction with the Northeast Market, and better connections could be made between existing activities. Local organizations working to improve East Baltimore need to take advantage of the Market as a focal point of the community. More of the great work that is already being done in the area could be expanded through the Market and in turn influence the Market in its efforts to become a Healthy Food Hub. In addition, institutions and organizations working in this neighborhood, lead by HEBCAC, need to organize their efforts so that their collective work has greater impact. In addition to the great work already being accomplished workshop participants suggested a few other activities to elevate the health of the neighborhood:





### *Gardens and Urban Farms*

- Nearby vacant lots in the neighborhood could potentially be converted into urban gardens/farms.

### *Neighborhood Food Businesses*

- The nearby grocery store featuring Hispanic/Latino produce should work with the Amazing Grace garden to grow more Hispanic/Latino produce which could be featured in the store. The grocery store could also work with a neighborhood health partner to host cooking demonstrations on how to prepare Hispanic/Latino produce so the African-American population in the neighborhood could learn how to prepare these items.
- Nearby vacant buildings can be converted into a commercial kitchen for nutrition education and cooking classes.



### *Institutions*

- The new school being built nearby should be connected to larger health efforts and the Market.

# Implementation

1. HEBCAC in collaboration with BFPI should convene a group of area institutions, grassroots organizations and the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation to discuss ways in which their efforts could align and how the Northeast Market can be seen and utilized as a hub for healthy food access, health services and information for the neighborhood.
2. Conduct a healthy food assessment for the current vendors at Northeast Market that includes: conducting a Healthy Carryout Environment Checklist for each carryout vendor at Northeast Market, a review of the lease structures and payment fees for all vendors to determine long-term lease structures, and a presentation to the Board of the Baltimore Public Markets Corporation with a summary of findings. BFPI in collaboration with JHU's Center for a Livable Future are the leads.
3. Community involvement and support are instrumental in successfully creating a Healthy Food Hub and to increase the demand for residents to buy the healthier food choices. BFPI's Neighborhood Food Advocate Pilot with HEBCAC as the lead community organization will co-facilitate healthy food tours within Northeast Market and provide Advocates produce incentives for their participation.
4. Because there is currently no on-site manager for the market, it will be necessary to hire a program manager to work in conjunction with all of the involved parties, including the Baltimore Public Market Corporation.
5. With the support of BFPI and JHU's Center for a Livable Future, implementation plans will need to be developed, including a fundraising strategy, for the following steps:
  - a) Organize a seasonal farmers market outside of the Market, featuring Richardson's Farm, as well as other regional growers and community gardeners to increase the amount of healthy, fresh food available in the neighborhood.
  - b) Lease vacant stalls to healthy, fresh food vendors.
  - c) Lease vacant stalls on a shared/ temporary basis to small-scale growers and gardeners.



- d) Organize more health programming in the market, and utilize vacant space for cooking demonstrations, temporary health clinics and nutrition education.
- e) Incentivize current vendors to feature more healthy, fresh and prepared foods by offering them business development and micro-financing opportunities, such as small loans for display improvements and signage/menu design.
- f) Work with funders, such as Wholesome Wave, to institute a SNAP incentive program to encourage purchasing of fresh produce.
- g) Connect with local WIC and SNAP agencies to “market” the Market to their clients, and encourage these agencies to have a physical presence in the Market so customers can access these services in a friendly, convenient location.
- h) Plan and implement a marketing campaign branding the Northeast Market as a healthy shopping option and Healthy Food Hub for the neighborhood.