

# **Food Access for Women in Seattle: Delridge Priorities**

## **Seattle Women's Commission and Councilmember Mike O'Brien**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Introduction**

Food Access is a significant problem for low-income women in Seattle. In 2011, a community member from Delridge approached a Commissioner with the Seattle Women's Commission (SWC) and shared her personal struggle with accessing healthy food in her neighborhood. Namely, she was grappling to find a way to bring a month's worth of Women Infant and Children (WIC) benefits - several heavy bags of groceries with a month's worth of dairy, formula, and other healthy food—home on public transportation with her children in tow. After this moving testimony, the SWC undertook this research project and reached out to Seattle City Councilmember Mike O'Brien and the Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment.

Women throughout this city, but especially in Delridge, face geographic, transportation, cultural, and cost barriers to finding healthy food for themselves and their families. Delridge is a neighborhood defined by a vibrant and diverse community of families and youth, great assets like the Community College, park and open space, and cultural resources, but unfortunately does not have any grocery stores along the 4-mile corridor, transit service is limited, and the neighborhood itself is framed on the East and West by two tall ridges making it hard to walk or bike to and from the neighborhood. Inaccessibility of healthy food has led to increased instances of adult obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in Delridge compared to the rest of the city.

This is not news for Seattle policymakers and advocacy organizations; countless studies and a myriad of programs have been implemented throughout Seattle neighborhoods. The Seattle City Council has adopted the Food Action Plan, which outlines strategies to improve existing policies and recommendations for the council to explore new approaches to address food access in Seattle. However, as community members have stated, these commitments and policies have not yet reached all food insecure households. The Seattle Women and Food Access research project determines additional barriers and prioritizes solutions to food access with low-income women and will inform how the City crafts and implements new policies for the Delridge neighborhood, with the potential of impacting other neighborhoods throughout the city.

#### **Project Goals**

Refine a specific, actionable 2014-2015 food access work plan for the Seattle Women's Commission, Seattle City Council, and the Food Action Plan Inter Departmental Team (representative from the Office of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Planning and Development, Human Services Department, and other city agencies) based on the expertise of impacted low-income women in Delridge. Apply the experiences of low-income women and the barriers they face to prioritize and delve deeper into food policies and interventions in Delridge.

Through 57 surveys and three focus-groups with a total of 40 women and youth in Delridge organized with community partners, the research team facilitated a conversation about where women get healthy food, how they get there, and the challenges they see and experience. Finally, through a voting exercise women prioritized the solutions and recommendations that would make it easier to get healthy food home.

## Top Priorities for Women in Delridge

- 1. Community Economic Opportunity:** In a city that is quickly becoming less affordable for working families, higher costs of housing and transportation have left little income for food and recent cuts to federal and state supplemental food programs have been cut significantly. Better jobs and more accessible food prices, according to residents, could help mitigate and remove barriers to accessing healthy food. Participants defined 'Community Economic Opportunity' as good jobs at a wide-range of skill-levels in or near the community for current residents; affordable high quality and organic produce; opportunities to build social capital through learning about growing and cooking healthy food; and potential for developing healthy food income-generating opportunities in like a Farm or Community Kitchen. Participants specified that better economic opportunities would increase access to healthy food for the neighborhood, but wanted to ensure that future economic development would not displace current residents.
- 2. Improved Transportation Options:** At two workshops, participants prioritized increasing the frequency of buses in Delridge, including the King County METRO operated 120, 128, and 50 especially at night. Greater frequency would reduce crowded bus conditions, which can make women feel vulnerable/ uncomfortable. There was some agreement that riding public transportation was unsafe. Participants felt that the buses brought riders to healthy food, but that the inconvenience of bringing dependents and heavy grocery items prevented participants from using public transportation for grocery shopping trips. Only youth felt that the cost of the bus was prohibitive, though few participants overall used public transit for grocery trips.
- 3. Permanent Affordable Healthy Food Retail:** Some participants believed a cooperative model would best suit the needs of the community. A cooperative grocery along the Delridge corridor is in development, set to open in August 2014 located centrally along the corridor. Other participants were less specific about the type of store, but indicated the importance of local ownership and that the best location would be near Home Depot or the Delridge Library.

## Recommendations

### *Community Planning:*

- Explore the development of a Food Hub in Delridge through the Department of Planning and Development's neighborhood planning process. A food hub model could house a farmers market with Fresh Bucks and Farmers Market Nutrition Program capacity; support existing produce growers; create opportunities for income generation and entrepreneurship, develop community social capital, and encourage healthy.
- Develop a framework for food systems Neighborhood Matching Funds for the Department of Neighborhoods to encourage new ventures and support ongoing programs.
- Support the Seattle Human Services Department 2014 food and meals RFI, which will fund innovative food security and access projects and programs in \$30,000 increments
- Identify additional opportunities to scale up or replicate successful existing programs operating locally or in other parts of the city.
- Support the creation of diverse employment opportunities for adult and youth residents in Delridge.

- Support the siting of an affordable grocery store through land-use planning and strategies partnerships with retailers.

#### *Transportation*

- Support the prevention of Metro's proposed bus cuts that severely impact transportation options in Delridge, focusing on revisions to lines 50 and 128 that would limit East/ West travel.
- Support the development of a Low-Income fare ensuring that youth also benefit from cost reductions.
- Increase frequency of buses in Delridge, especially at night.

#### *Women Infant and Children (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*

- Support the restoration of Federal and State cuts to supplemental food programs (SNAP/WIC), whenever possible.
- Support the expansion of the Fresh Bucks Program and explore expansion of the program for WIC recipients.
- Support efforts to update WIC vouchers to card-based system, which would increase WIC recipients' ability to spread purchases over entire month and make it easier for recipients to access benefit from the Fresh Bucks program.