

Community Food Security Assessment for District 1 of Saint Paul, Minnesota



Conducted on behalf of the District 1 Community Council

Heidi Evans

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I. Summary

This report is a preliminary analysis of community food security for District 1 of Saint Paul, Minnesota. The study was conducted by the District 1 Community Council in response to concerns from residents about the availability of local foods and fresh produce, as well as more general food access issues for low-income and minority residents. This report is loosely based on the format of the US Department of Agriculture's Community Food Security Assessment toolkit.

A food-secure community has been defined as one in which all people "have access to a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through non-emergency (or conventional) food sources at all times."¹ Research has shown that in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, peripheral neighborhoods on the city borders are at a greater risk for food insecurity than the more densely populated metro centers.²

District 1, located along the southeastern border of Saint Paul, shows many indications of food insecurity. The area has experienced rapid demographic change and high turnover of residents and businesses in recent years. Neighborhood school statistics show high rates of poverty and transience among students. The available food and recreation services do not meet the needs of new residents, many of whom are immigrants from East Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. With the exception of one Cub Foods supermarket, grocery stores are not competitively priced. The district is not well served by public transit, and there are no local food production or distribution sites. Almost all commercial areas in the district are oriented toward I-94, with an emphasis on fast food and automobile dependency rather than community health. These concerns are amplified by the rising costs of food and fuel in 2008.

¹ D. Biehler et al., *Getting Food on the Table: An Action Guide to Local Food Policy* (Community Food Security Coalition, 1999).

² Joel Larson, *Food Security in Urban America: A Model Based on Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota* (Macalester College, 2006).

II. Framework for Community Food Security

According to a USDA publication, 11 percent of all households in the United States are affected by food insecurity, and 4 percent of all households experience disrupted eating patterns due to a lack of money or resources.³ Federal and state-sponsored food assistance programs provide some alleviation of hunger (see below), and many non-profit organizations have been created to work on particular issues of hunger and nutrition. The community food security framework,

Food Support and WIC

The federal government has attempted to address hunger issues through food aid programs such as Food Support and WIC. Food Support is available to families with a gross monthly income of 130 percent or less (or a net monthly income of 100 percent or less) of the federal poverty level. WIC (the Women, Infants and Children supplemental nutrition program) provides food aid to pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five. Health needs (including a health screening), household income, and family size are factors in determining eligibility for WIC; however, the qualifying income level is higher than for other food support programs. Unlike Food Support, WIC specifies foods that may be purchased, which include juice, milk, cheese, eggs, cereal, beans, peanut butter, and infant formula, and carrots and tuna for nursing mothers.

For more information about WIC, visit the Minnesota Department of Health website at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/wic/wicfoods/index.html.

however, is a relatively new concept that takes a holistic approach to improving access to healthy foods within a neighborhood. This framework seeks to address the availability and affordability of food resources in conjunction with other community problems that may influence the sustainability of the food system.

Successful actions to increase food security generally support the economic development of the community while incorporating environmental and multicultural perspectives. Community food security draws upon the fields of public health, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture.⁴ Positive actions may include setting up a CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) share program, expanding community gardening space within the neighborhood, or organizing a food cooperative or farmers' market in the area.

The indicators of food insecurity that are discussed in this report have been drawn from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service's community assessment model. The model contains six assessment components: general community characteristics, community food resources, household food security, food resource accessibility, food availability and affordability, and community food production resources. The use of this model provides a

basis for comparison with other communities in Saint Paul and around the US.

One of the six components listed above, household food security, is not discussed in this report. Household food security refers to how individual families experience hunger or the inability to buy food at certain times (for instance, if they depend on a monthly food assistance stipend).

³ Mark Nord et al., *Household Food Security in the United States, 2006*, Economic Research Report No. 49, US Dept. of Agriculture, 2007.

⁴ Hugh Joseph, *Community Food Security: A Guide to Concept, Design, and Implementation*.

Household food insecurity usually affects only some of the residents in a community, and it may affect only some of the individuals within a family. For instance, a parent may skip meals and experience occasional hunger in order to provide full meals for his or her children. The scope of this study was not big enough to assess how individual residents or households experience food insecurity, so this component has been omitted for the present.

One component of food security which has not been integrated into the USDA model is the nutritional value of foods and how this varies by price. Shoppers who are on a limited budget often choose energy-dense foods, which have a long shelf-life and contain the most calories per dollar. This means a family can be food-insecure even when all family members are getting sufficient calories, as is evidenced by the prevalence of obesity and diet-related diseases in the United States. While this report does not discuss nutrition in depth, it is an important factor to bear in mind when considering what resources are available and how food assistance program participants might choose to shop.

III. General Community Characteristics

A. Location and Neighborhoods

District 1 is one of 17 planning districts within the city limits of Saint Paul, and is located along the southeast border of the city. Its boundaries are McKnight Road on the east, Minnehaha Avenue on the north, the Mississippi River on the south and southeast up to Warner Road, and Birmingham on the west. Much of the district is residential, and it is divided into four historically distinct neighborhoods. Eastview is located in the northwest corner; Conway in the northeast, near the SunRay Center; Battle Creek between I-94 and Lower Afton Road; and Highwood Hills in the triangle formed by Lower Afton, McKnight, and the Mississippi River.

The layout of streets, homes, and shopping centers in District 1 make it visually and culturally more suburban than much of Saint Paul, particularly in terms of car-oriented development. The main business districts are located along the I-94 corridor, on Suburban Avenue, to the south of the highway, and Old Hudson Road, to the north. The SunRay Center, which contains large parking lots, faces I-94 rather than the Conway neighborhood. Suburban Avenue has recently been given a mixed-use traditional neighborhood zoning designation, but its fast food restaurants and drive-throughs still promote car transit.

Residents of District 1 have a longer average commute time than most Saint Paul workers (24.1 minutes compared to a city average of 21.1 minutes).⁵ The distance of travel from the southeastern edge of the city to downtown Saint Paul or Minneapolis makes the commute more costly, either in fuel and/or in time spent in the car or on the bus. Several bus routes connect the SunRay Center with downtown Saint Paul, but outlying neighborhoods such as Highwood Hills are not well served by public transit. The low-density housing layout and hilly terrain of the district make it difficult to walk or bike.

B. Demographics.

The demographics of District 1 have changed rapidly over the past eighteen years with an influx of non-white residents. In 2000 there were a total of 20,063 people living in the district, and the overall growth of the area has been close to the average for Saint Paul. However, between 1990 and 2000 there was a sharp decrease in the white population, from 90 percent of all residents to 68 percent. Over this same time period, the Black and Asian populations of the district doubled more than three times, and the Latino population doubled twice. While precise data on current demographics will not be available until the 2010 Census, it is reasonable to assume that the trend toward greater ethnic and cultural diversity has continued.

Many of the new residents of District 1 are recent immigrants or refugees. In 2000, 11 percent of all residents had been born outside of the United States, and 6 percent had immigrated within the last 10 years.⁶ An East African community including many Somali refugees has formed in and around the Afton View and McKnight Village apartment complexes on southern McKnight Road. The Eastview neighborhood contains large Southeast Asian and Latino populations,

⁵ Wilder Research Center. www.communitydataworks.org

⁶ All demographic statistics taken from the Wilder Research Center. www.communitydataworks.org.

including many Hmong immigrants. These immigration trends are not surprising for Saint Paul and Minneapolis, but the rapid turnover in demographics within District 1 indicates that the district may be lacking in resources to meet the economic, cultural, and linguistic needs of new immigrants.

C. Poverty and Food Assistance.

In 2000, the average household income level for District 1 was \$40,414, compared to a city-wide average income of \$38,774.⁷ However, these figures do not convey the wide range of socioeconomic conditions found across census block groups. For instance, block group 374034, located in the southern part of the Highwood Hills neighborhood, had a median household income of \$75,218 while block group 374033, located between Upper Afton Road and Lower Afton Road on the eastern side, had a median household income of \$22,045.⁸ These disparities correspond to racial distribution. Block group 374034 is 89.7 percent white, whereas block group 374033 is 39.0 percent white and 41.4 percent black (this is the block group in which the Afton View and McKnight Village apartments are located). The next lowest median incomes are in block group 347022, at \$25,924, and block group 347013, at \$27,926. These block groups are located in the Conway and Eastview neighborhoods near I-94, and both have large African-American populations (16.8 percent and 12.4 percent, respectively). Block group 347013 also has a large Asian population (12.8 percent).⁹

In District 1 as a whole, there are an estimated 1,030 people receiving Food Support benefits.¹⁰ This number includes participants in the Minnesota Food Assistance Program, a state-sponsored program that provides benefits to non-citizens, who are prohibited from applying for federal food aid. It also includes participants in the Minnesota Family Investment Program. Enrollment in Food Support is not an exact measure of poverty, but it does provide some indication of how many people might experience some form of household food insecurity.

D. Youth and Poverty.

Research has shown that children are often disproportionately affected by poverty.¹¹ In District 1 in 2000, 21 percent of all children under the age of 18 were living on a household income below the poverty level, compared to 12 percent of total residents. Seventeen percent of families with children were below the poverty level, and poverty for families headed by single mothers was almost twice as high, at 33 percent.¹²

The child dependency ratio, when calculated by dividing the number of children (under 18) by the number of adults of working age (18-64), yields an interesting result for block group 374033 in the Highwood Hills neighborhood. In this block group, the ratio of children to adults is 82

⁷ Wilder Foundation, www.communitydataworks.org.

⁸ Map, *Race and Income Demographics*, Metropolitan Design Center, 2006. See Appendix A.

⁹ For complete income and demographic data by block group, see the Metropolitan Design Center map in Appendix A.

¹⁰ Determined via personal correspondence with Tom Risor, Ramsey County Dept. of Human Services, July, 2008.

¹¹ Gillian Lawrence, *Review of Community Food Security Literature and Future Directions for Addressing Community Food Insecurity in North Minneapolis*, 2007.

¹² Wilder Foundation, www.communitydataworks.org.

percent, or 82 children for every 100 adults. This is almost twice the average for the rest of the district and for Saint Paul as a whole. High numbers of dependent youth indicate that block group 374033 is particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and other problems associated with poverty. This is the same block group that has the lowest median household income in the district, and in which over 41 percent of the residents are African-American (most are Somali).

One indicator of childhood food insecurity is the percentage of children enrolled in the free or reduced school lunch program in public schools. In the Saint Paul school district, these numbers are published once a year along with the results of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) test. This test is taken in reading and math by students in grades three through eight; tenth-graders also take a reading test, and eleventh-graders take a math test. The results on the next page were compiled for schools located in District 1, and include the overall results for the students who took the tests in 2008.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment -- MATH						
	No. of passing scores	Percentage of test-takers				
		Passing scores	Low-income	Special ed.	Limited English	Mobile
<i>St. Paul city</i>	7870	46%	70%	15%	31%	7%
Battle Creek Magnet Elem.	224	71%	74%	9%	49%	4%
Battle Creek Middle	185	30%	83%	13%	44%	4%
Boys Totem Town	1	4%	100%	40%	16%	84%
Eastern Heights Elem.	76	53%	78%	33%	32%	17%
Harding Senior High	74	17%	81%	12%	25%	3%
Highwood Hills Elem.	76	56%	91%	15%	61%	10%
Sheridan Elem.	80	51%	71%	11%	33%	6%

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment -- READING						
	No. of passing scores	Percentage of total test-takers				
		Passing scores	Low-income	Special ed.	Limited English	Mobile
<i>St. Paul city</i>	9538	51%	72%	15%	40%	6%
Battle Creek Magnet Elem.	221	67%	74%	9%	51%	4%
Battle Creek Middle	222	36%	83%	14%	44%	4%
Boys Totem Town	3	13%	100%	54%	8%	88%
Eastern Heights Elem.	81	55%	78%	31%	35%	17%
Harding Senior High	216	43%	84%	11%	72%	3%
Highwood Hills Elem.	72	49%	92%	14%	64%	11%
Sheridan Elem.	103	65%	71%	11%	33%	6%

Data source: Star Tribune, "2008 School Test Results," http://ww2.startribune.com/dynamic/no_child/district.php.

The results for the entire Saint Paul school district place the number of low-income students at 70 to 72 percent, up from a reported 65 percent in the 2002-2003 school year.¹³ Assuming that the students who took the 2008 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment are statistically representative of the larger school population, every school in District 1 has an higher incidence of low-income students than the school district average. Excluding Boys Totem Town, which draws from outside District 1, the school with the highest incidence of poverty is Highwood Hills Elementary, which is the neighborhood school for block group 374033 with the large Somali population. Battle Creek Middle School and Harding High, the only public middle and high schools in District 1, also show very high levels of poverty.

Another point of interest is the high rate of mobility among students in District 1. At Eastern Heights Elementary, 17 percent of third through fifth graders who took the MCA had not been enrolled in that school at the beginning of the school year. High levels of transience can signify the lack of a stable home environment, especially considering the high levels of poverty in these schools. Frequent moving also indicates a variance in the amount of family income spent on housing, which may correspond to a smaller food budget.

E. Civic Involvement and Community-Building.

High mobility and turnover also correspond to lower levels of participation in the community and in civic institutions. In recent years, two of the four neighborhood recreation centers—in the Eastview and Highwood Hills neighborhoods—have closed. Community centers promote community involvement and are especially important for youth because they provide free after-school activities, athletic facilities, and gathering spaces. The closing of the two recreation centers makes it more difficult for residents of the Eastview and Highwood Hills neighborhoods to become involved in their communities, and also indicates that many youth no longer have access to recreational facilities. This has been confirmed via personal communication with volunteers in the Somali community near the Highwood Hills Recreation Center.¹⁴

¹³ Community Data Works, Wilder Foundation. <http://www.communitydataworks.org>

¹⁴ Personal communication, Betsy Leach, community organizer.

IV. Community Food Resources

District 1 contains two supermarkets, six small convenience stores, one specialty meat market, a Walgreens, and a Target.¹⁵ The supermarkets, Cub Foods and Byerly's, are visible from I-94, as are the BP and Speedway SuperAmerica convenience stores. Jimmy's Food Market, Minni Market, and Holiday are located in the Eastview neighborhood north of I-94, while McKnight Superette is located in the southern part of the district on McKnight Road. The district also contains 31 restaurants. Of these, almost all are chain fast food restaurants, and almost all are located in the Suburban Avenue and Old Hudson Road business districts, which run parallel to I-94.

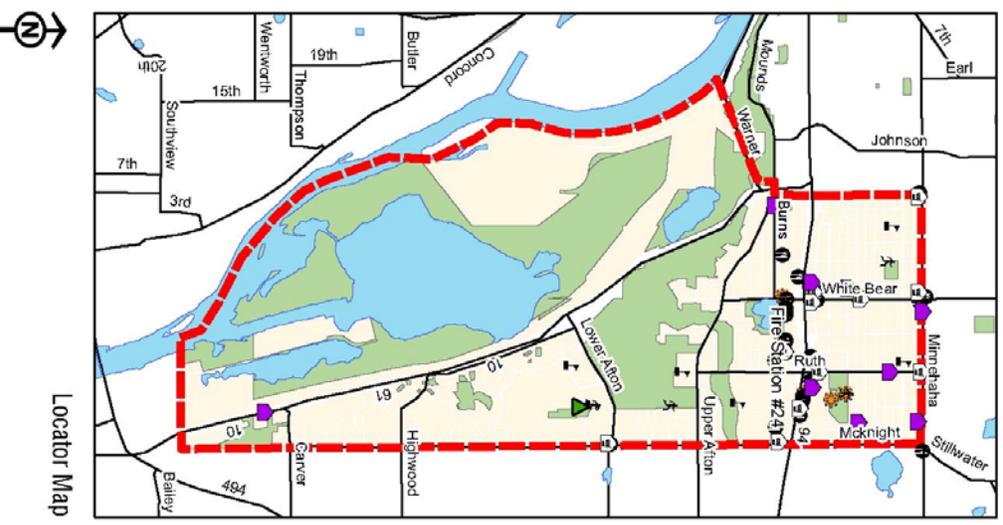
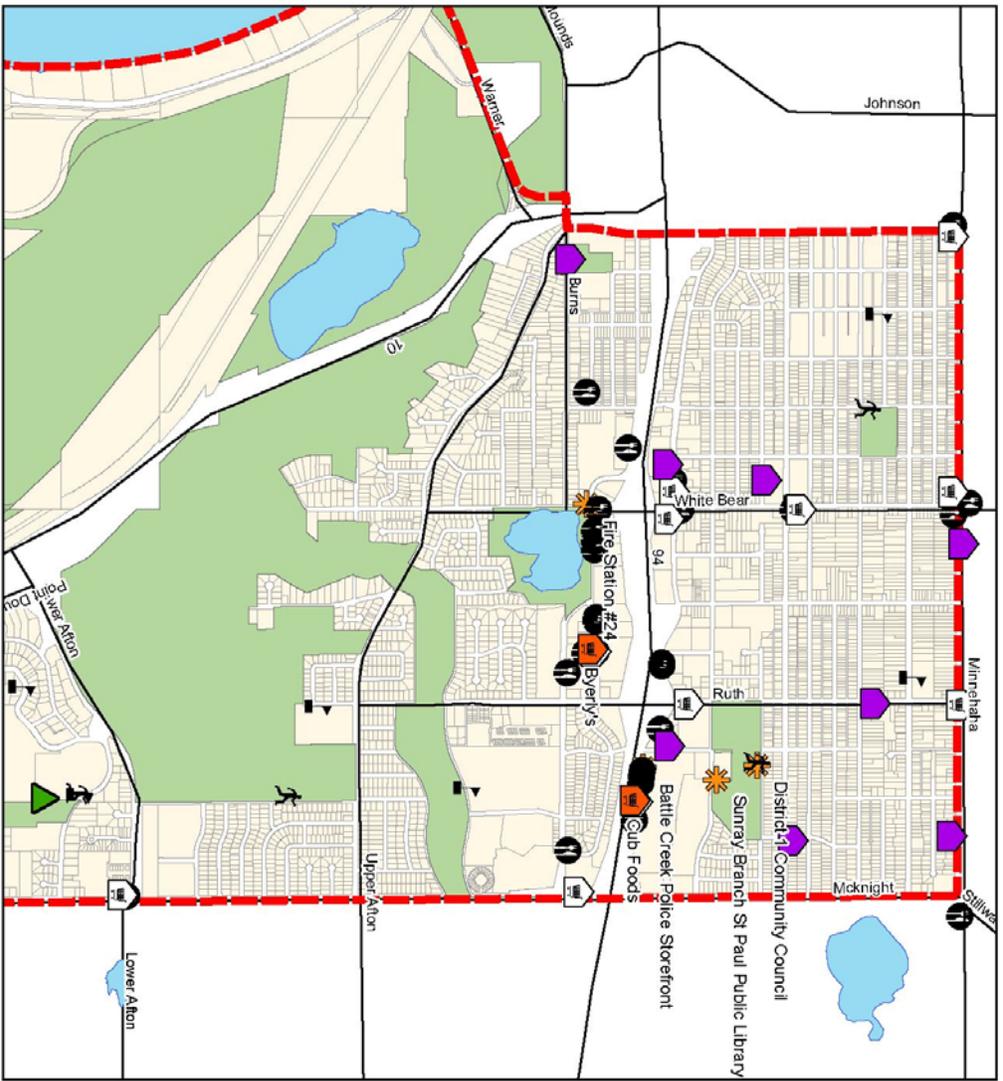
District 1 has one community garden near Boys Totem Town in Highwood Hills. The garden contains 40 plots and charges \$35 a year to gardeners for land and water use. No commercial food production or processing resources exist within the district. The closest farmers' market is in downtown St. Paul.

There are no food assistance or emergency food distribution offices located within District 1. Food Support participants must pick up EBT cards from the Ramsey County Department of Human Services office in downtown St. Paul. WIC is a program of the Public Health Department of Ramsey County, which is also located in the city center. Merrick Community Services Food Shelf, the food pantry closest to District 1, is located about halfway between the SunRay Center and downtown Saint Paul in Dayton's Bluff (District 4). However, this site is only open from 9 am to 1 pm daily, which may pose a barrier to families in need who work during daytime hours.

The food asset map on the next page was created to show the locations of grocery stores and restaurants in relation to schools, churches, recreation centers, and other community resources.¹⁶ A population density map has been included for comparison.

¹⁵ As of November, 2008, construction had begun on an Aldi's grocery which will be located at the intersection of Ruth Street and Suburban Avenue. It has not been included in this list.

¹⁶ The Eastview and Highwood Hills Recreation Centers have been placed on this map, even though both are currently closed to the public.

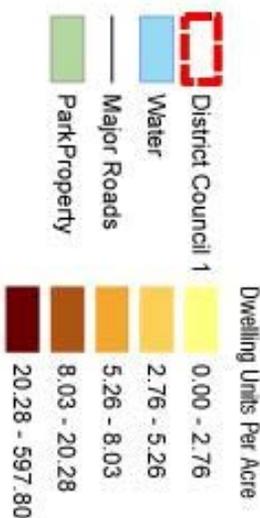
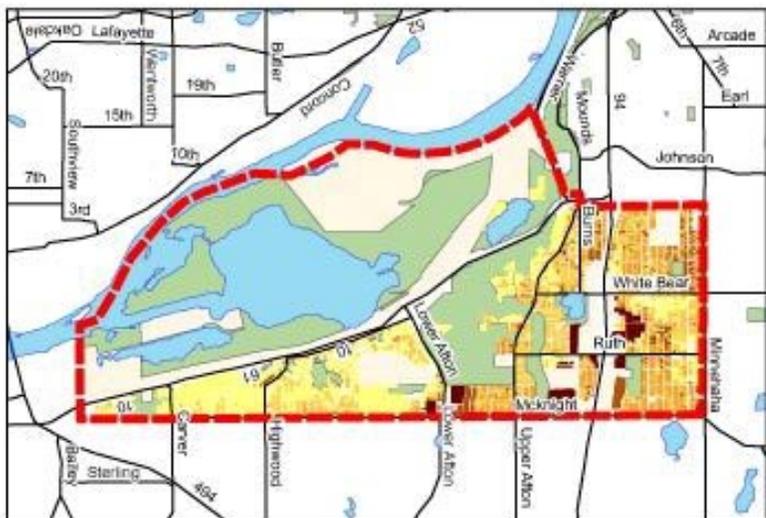
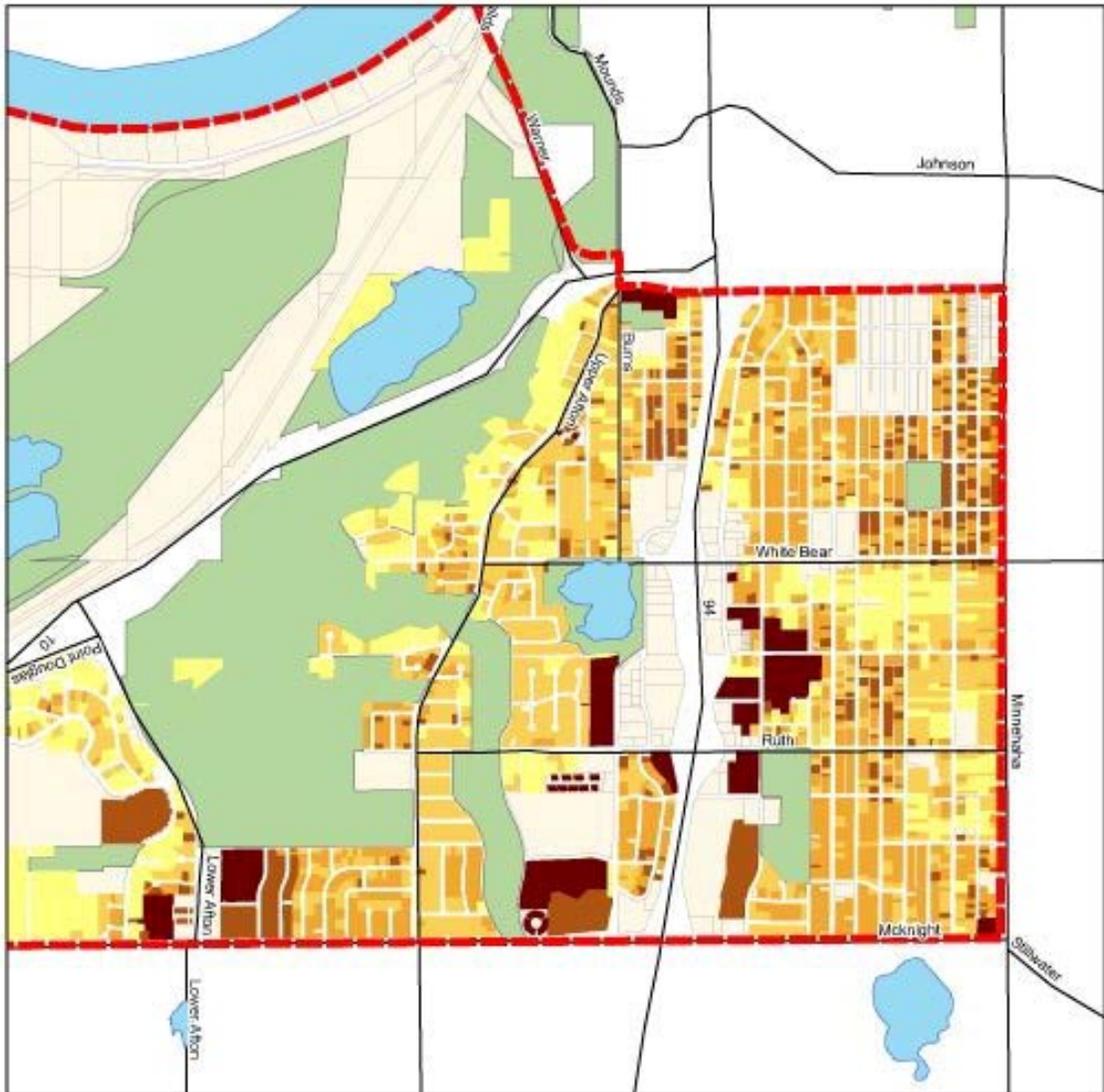


District Council 1 Food Security Project
 COMMUNITY ASSETS november 2008

data gathered by Heidi Evans
 map prepared by U-PLAN

District Council 1 Food Security Project

POPULATION DENSITY november 2008



data gathered by Heidi Evans
map prepared by U-PLAN

V. Community Food Resource Accessibility

One food access issue concerns the authorization of food stores to accept EBT cards. In District 1, only 6 stores are currently authorized to accept EBT cards and WIC vouchers. Not all of these stores carry basic staple foods (for price and availability comparisons, please see page 16).

Another important food access issue relates to public transit routes and frequency. District 1 is directly connected to downtown Saint Paul via only three regular bus lines, the 63 and 70 and the 74, which travels north on White Bear Avenue before heading downtown. The 63 bus runs most frequently, on average every 12 to 15 minutes during the day and every 30 to 60 minutes on weekends. However, most 63 bus routes terminate at the SunRay Transit Center. Only the 63K, which runs much less frequently, continues south on McKnight Road to Lower Afton Road and Londin Lane, where the McKnight Somali community is located. The 63K does not run at all in the late morning, between 9 am and 1 pm. Somali women have been observed walking along the highway to reach Cub Foods due to insufficient transit.

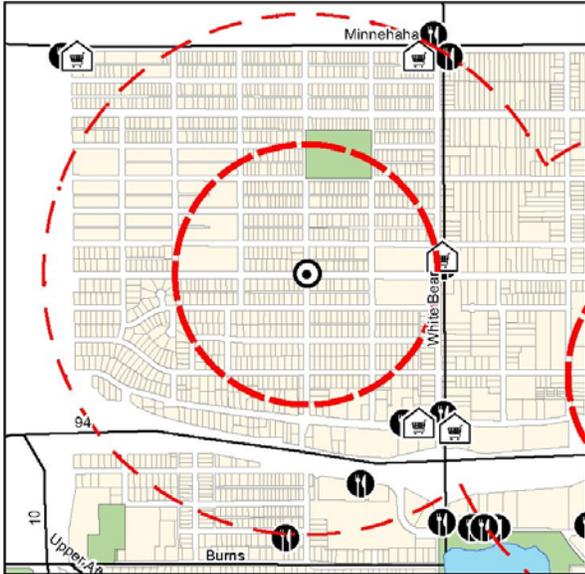
To assess distance as a barrier to access, three intersections in different neighborhoods of District 1 were chosen to serve as case studies for a mapping project. The selected intersections were 3rd Street and Kennard Street in the Eastview neighborhood, Ruth and Wilson in the Conway neighborhood near high-density housing, and McKnight Road and Londin Lane, between the Afton View and McKnight Village apartment complexes. These intersections represent low-income areas that have a high minority concentration.

The map on the following page shows each of these three intersections and its proximity to grocery stores and restaurants within a ¼ mile and ½ mile radius. One half mile was judged to be the furthest distance an average resident would be willing to walk to reach a store. In reality, few people are willing to walk more than a quarter mile while carrying groceries.

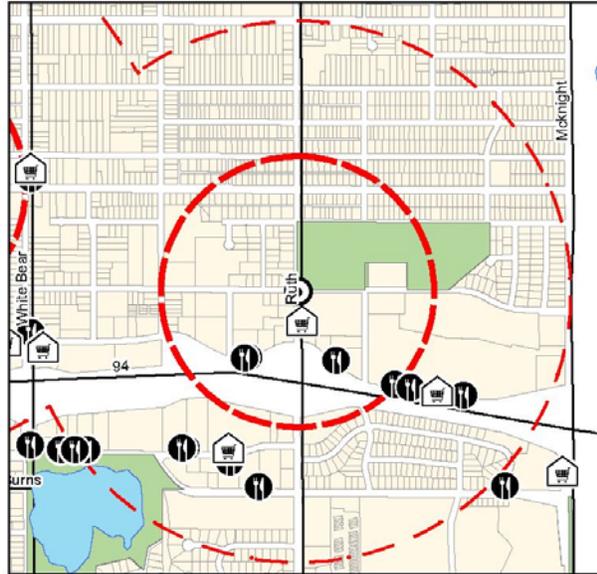
The intersection of 3rd Street and Kennard was chosen to represent a concentration of Southeast Asian residents, most of whom live in single family homes. A resident who lives at this intersection would be within walking distance of Jimmy's Food Market, a convenience store which is approximately ¼ mile away.

The Ruth Street and Wilson intersection was chosen to represent a large number of African Americans who live in apartment complexes in this area. This intersection is between ¼ and ½ mile from Cub Foods. Many Cub Foods shopping carts have been found abandoned near the apartment complexes, which verifies that residents of these building do in fact walk to Cub to do their shopping. This intersection is also very close to the SunRay Transit Center, which provides access to many bus routes.

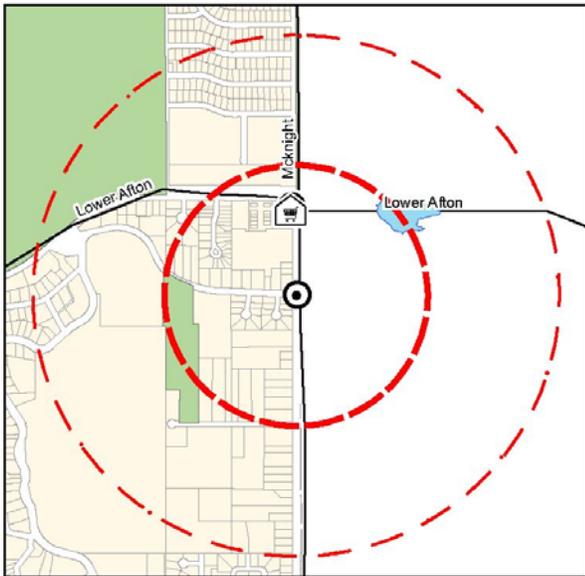
Finally, the intersection at McKnight Road and Londin Lane was chosen to represent the Somali community in the Afton View and McKnight Village apartments. This intersection has one convenience store within walking distance, the McKnight Superette.



E 3rd Street and N Kennard Street



N Ruth Street and E Wilson Avenue



N McKnight Road and Londin Lane

-  1/2 Mile Buffer
-  1/4 Mile Buffer
-  Supermarkets
-  Restaurants
-  Water
-  Major Roads
-  ParkProperty

District Council 1 Food Security Project

FOOD RESOURCES AT THREE LOCATIONS
november 2008

map prepared by U-PLAN
data gathered by Heidi Evans

VI. Food Store Survey Results

A. Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket Availability and Cost

The best way to assess the availability and cost of food, according to the USDA, the Community Food Security Coalition, and other governmental and non-governmental groups, is to conduct a food store survey. One template that is commonly used by community groups for food store surveys is the Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket. This model market basket served as the basis for the District 1 food store assessment.

The Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket

The USDA uses a series of *market baskets* to model the cost of a nutritious diet in four different price ranges. These are labeled from most to least expensive as the Liberal, Moderate-Cost, Low-Cost, and Thrifty Food Plans. Each plan is further divided into fifteen age-gender groups, based on nutritional recommendations.

The *Thrifty Food Plan (TFP)* serves as the basis for the calculation of federal Food Support allotments. The TFP Market Basket is meant to model a nutritious, minimal-cost weekly shopping trip for a family of four – two parents, ages 19-50, and two children, ages 6-8 and 9-11. The TFP Market Basket is developed based on consumer price indexes, nutritional guidelines, and actual consumption patterns among low-income families. In other words, the market basket tries to reconcile the gaps between price and nutrition and between nutrition and the foods people are accustomed to consuming. It is updated every few years, and currently consists of eighty-seven food items.

Groups who use the TFP Market Basket often modify it according to the specific demographics, shopping patterns, and needs of their communities. For instance, in the Minnesota Somali Community Food Assessment, the organization conducting the survey decided to focus on access to fruits and vegetables, and therefore calculated the cost of a market basket containing only produce at various stores.¹⁷ In the Contra Costa County food assessment in California, the Food and Nutrition Policy Consortium decided to include cultural foods that were common among residents in its market basket.¹⁸ For the District 1 survey, the market basket itself was not modified, but concerns about fresh produce and cultural foods have been taken into account in the following analysis.

A total of ten stores in District 1 were surveyed between the dates of July 17th and July 28th, 2008. The survey consisted of walking through each store, noting which foods from the list were unavailable, and writing down the cheapest cost per unit (pound, ounce, or individual item) for the foods that were available. The names of the stores that were surveyed appear in the following chart, ordered according to how large a percentage of the TFP Market Basket items

¹⁷ Andrea Leinberger-Jabari, "Minnesota Somali Community Food Assessment," Minnesota International Health Volunteers, 2008.

¹⁸ http://www.foodsecurity.org/cfa/survey_conracosta.pdf

they had in stock. The chart also indicates which stores accept food assistance benefits in the form of EBT cards and WIC vouchers.

Name	Store Type	No. of TFP items carried	% of total	Accepts EBT/WIC?
Cub Foods	Supermarket	87	100.0%	Yes
Byerly's	Supermarket	87	100.0%	Yes
McKnight Superette	Small grocery	65	74.7%	Yes
Jimmy's Food Market	Small grocery	64	73.6%	Yes
Minni Market	Small grocery	58	66.7%	Yes
Holiday	Convenience	39	44.8%	No
SuperAmerica	Convenience	34	39.1%	No
Walgreens	Other	31	35.6%	Yes
Big Steer Meats	Other	25	28.7%	No
BP	Convenience	11	12.6%	No

For purposes of comparison, the ten stores have been assigned categories based on the results of food item availability. Stores that carried between 90 and 100 percent of the TFP Market Basket items are marked as “Supermarkets;” stores that carried between 50 and 90 percent of the items are labeled “Small Groceries;” and stores that carried fewer than 50 percent of the items are designated as “Convenience” or “Other.”

Only the supermarkets were assessed using the full Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket model. For the month of June, the allotted food stamp amount based on the consumer price indexes for the cost of food was \$135.80 per week. The total Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket price for Byerly’s came to \$178.23, far outside of this price range, while Cub Foods came to \$137.89, just a few dollars short.

B. Modified Market Basket Cost Comparisons

Since none of the small groceries or convenience stores carried the full range of Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket items, it was impossible to compare them for cost using the full market basket. Instead, two modified market baskets were created. The first chart on the following page shows a miniature version of the market basket containing six common items, to give an indication of the differences in price among the stores.¹⁹ The second chart gives a comparison of prices and availability of WIC foods at stores that accept WIC vouchers.

¹⁹ Walgreens and Big Steer Meats were excluded from this comparison because neither carried all six of these basic food items, which were deemed necessary to be considered a grocery or convenience store.

Miniature Market Basket Price Comparisons

	Cub	Byerly's	McKnight	SuperAm	Jimmy's	Minni	Holiday	BP	Average
Bread, 1 lb	1.45	1.67	2.19	1.89	1.79	2.09	2.13	1.99	1.90
Flour, 5 lbs	1.23	2.65	2.40	2.09	2.59	4.19	3.29	4.98	2.93
Spaghetti, 1 lb	1.04	1.49	1.13	1.69	1.70	1.95	1.99	2.72	1.71
Milk, 1%*, 1 gal	3.10	3.79	4.39	3.99	3.69	3.50	4.49	3.99	3.87
Sugar, 2 lbs	0.92	1.14	1.12	1.40	1.60	1.80	2.29	2.98	1.65
Coffee, ground, 13 oz	3.38	3.12	2.66	3.49	4.19	4.52	5.99	4.49	3.98
Total	11.11	13.85	13.90	14.55	15.55	18.04	20.18	21.15	16.04

WIC Food Price Comparisons at WIC-Approved Stores

	Byerly's	Cub Foods	Jimmy's Mkt.	McKnight Superette	Minni Mkt.	Walgreens	Average
Juice, concentrate, 12-oz can	2.05	2.00	2.29	2.19	2.09	X	2.12
Milk, 1% , 1 gal	3.79	3.10	3.69	4.39	3.50	3.29	3.63
Milk, whole, 1 gal	4.59	3.10	3.99	4.59	3.50	3.39	3.86
Milk, evaporated, 12-oz can	1.25	1.09	1.39	1.39	1.89	X	1.40
Cheese, cheddar, 8 oz	2.10	2.35	3.49	2.99	3.29	2.19	2.73
Cheese, mozzarella, 8 oz	2.25	2.35	3.49	2.99	X	X	2.77
Eggs, 1 doz	2.00	1.59	1.89	1.99	2.19	X	1.93
Beans, dry, 1 lb	1.75	1.24	1.29	0.70	1.69	X	1.33
Peanut butter, 18 oz	1.93	1.86	3.09	2.49	2.95	3.00	2.55
Corn flakes, 18 oz	3.99	3.45	6.14	7.04	5.99	X	5.32
Honey Bunches of Oats, 18 oz	5.39	2.00	5.95	5.82	4.95	4.14	4.71
Carrots, fresh or canned, 1 lb	0.85	0.70	X	1.29	1.00	X	0.96
Tuna, 6-oz can	1.33	0.73	1.09	1.19	1.19	1.00	1.09

The total market basket prices from the miniature market basket range from just over 11 dollars to just over 21 dollars, a 53 percent increase from the lowest to the highest cost. This indicates a great deal of variance in pricing, with several general trends. Cub Foods is by far the cheapest shopping location, and both Cub and Byerly's tend to be far more competitively priced than the convenience stores. This is probably due to their location near the highway, their projected customer bases, and their size, which allows them to sell a wide variety of brands in bulk quantities. The small groceries, which offer a wider range of items (McKnight Superette, Jimmy's Food Market, and Minni Market), are on average less expensive than the convenience stores, which have less food in stock (SuperAmerica, Holiday, and BP). An employee at BP—the site of the most expensive market basket—remarked that the manager raises food prices so that he can afford to post competitive gas prices.²⁰

In the WIC comparison, it is worth noting that Walgreens, which accepts WIC vouchers, carries less than half of the foods that WIC participants are permitted to buy. Again, Cub Foods is consistently the most competitively priced store. Byerly's is competitively priced for some items, but not for others, which may be due to the fact that it markets itself as a gourmet grocery and does not carry generic brands in all product lines.

²⁰ Personal communication during store survey, July 26, 2008.

C. Critiques of the Thrifty Food Plan

The Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket has been useful in providing a survey list for this assessment. However, in determining whether District 1 prices are affordable for residents on Food Support, there are several important critiques of this model that must be discussed.

The Thrifty Food Plan is based on the assumptions that families will buy in the largest bulk quantity available for purchase. It further assumes that all foods will be prepared at home, and that no more than 5 percent of the food purchased will be discarded due to spoilage. The presence of large bulk quantities in supermarkets makes supermarket shopping appear to be far more cost-effective than shopping at a smaller grocery or convenience store. However, buying in bulk requires the careful rationing of Food Support benefits and the storage of bulk quantities, and most food stamp families cannot realistically shop in this way. Additionally, most working families cannot dedicate time to home-cooking all of their meals.

A second reason the Thrifty Food Plan is not an adequate indicator of the cost of food for low-income families is that the USDA bases its models on the national average cost of food.²¹ Food prices can vary greatly across the United States and between urban, suburban, and rural areas, especially at a time of rising food production and distribution costs.

Finally, the Food Support system requires families to spend 30 percent of their disposable income on food. The amount that arrives on an EBT card is only supplemental; therefore the allowance for June would be \$135.80 per week minus the amount the family is judged to be able to contribute. The average American family does not spend 30 percent of its income on food, so it may be unreasonable to expect this of Food Support participants.

District 1 residents pay higher transportation and rent costs on average than residents of other Saint Paul districts. Car ownership rates are high: In Hamline-Midway, a district with denser development located between downtown Saint Paul and Minneapolis with greater access to public transit routes, 41.5 percent of renters do not own personal vehicles. In District 1, only 28.4 percent of renters live without cars. This indicates that poor families may spend a large percentage of their income on transportation costs. High housing costs are also apparent: In 1999, 15 percent of District 1 homeowners and 48 percent of renters were paying 30 percent or more of their income for housing.²² The median rent in District 1 was \$640 in 1999, compared to \$565 on average for Saint Paul.²³ These high costs of living further decrease the likelihood that a family on Food Support will be able to put 30 percent of its income toward the purchase of food.

Finally, the Thrifty Food Plan has been critiqued for not providing access to fresh local foods and culturally appropriate foods. These issues are discussed in the next section.

D. Availability of Fresh Produce and Culturally Appropriate Foods in Stores

²¹ Thrifty Food Plan Q&As.

http://extension.usu.edu/fsne/files/uploads/NEA%20Resources/Thrifty_Food_Plan_QA_.pdf

²² Census 2000

²³ Census 2000

While Cub Foods and Byerly's sell a wide range of fresh produce, including organic fruits and vegetables, the fresh produce offerings at the small groceries and convenience stores are limited. At the time of the survey, Jimmy's Food Market stocked bananas, onions, and bags of potatoes. Minni Market sold these same items with the addition of carrots, celery, iceberg lettuce, and tomatoes. The McKnight Superette offered a surprising range of fruits and vegetables, including melons, grapes, strawberries, papaya, peaches, pears, apples, bananas, avocados, kiwi, oranges, carrots, cucumber, iceberg lettuce, onions, squash, potatoes, mushrooms, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, green beans, and peas. However, some of the produce was wilted, and all of it was stacked in a back cooler without clear pricing.

An interesting trend emerged in the availability of culturally appropriate foods. Although Cub Foods and Byerly's were on average better prepared to meet cultural needs, given that they had the greatest product variety, the smaller neighborhood groceries seemed more receptive to the specific needs of their communities. The manager at Byerly's noted that his store often orders specialty items for customers, but said they do not make a special effort to serve any particular local ethnic group.²⁴ Given the location and shopping clientele of Byerly's, it is likely that most of the customers who order specialties do not reside in the immediate neighborhood.

The presence of ethnic foods was far more noticeable at the small grocery stores. Jimmy's Food Market carried a relatively large variety of Hispanic foods, and Minni Market also had a small Hispanic section. The McKnight Superette is owned and managed by an East African man and the majority of customers are Somali. Although it is a small convenience store, it contains East African foods that are not found anywhere else in the district, such as Halal meat and special flours and breads.

Foods Available at the McKnight Superette

Halal Meat – beef, chicken, turkey sausage

Grains – cous cous, basmati rice, white corn, gari (tapioca)

Legumes – dal, red lentils, red chori (cow peas), fava beans

Flours – plantain, yam, sorghum, ola ola (bean from Nigeria)

Breads – hambasha (flat bread), jabati

Dairy – ghee, puck (cream cheese spread)

Herbs – fresh cilantro, ginger, coriander, curry powder, cardamom, tamarind

²⁴ Personal communication during store survey, July 17, 2008.

VII. Recommendations for Community-Based Action

A. Farmers' Markets and Licensing Policy

In Minneapolis, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade policy and the “Steps to a Healthier Minneapolis” program have worked together to institute a mini farmers’ market project. These organizations asked the Minneapolis City Council to support a new licensing permit to lessen the start-up barriers for small markets. This new permit, designated the Local Produce Market Permit, allows groups of five or fewer local farmers to sell locally grown fruits, vegetables, flowers, and herbs in low-income neighborhoods for a one-time reduced start-up fee of \$154. In 2008, there were six mini farmers’ markets in operation in Minneapolis. A survey in 2006 found a 20 percent increase in vegetable consumption among patrons of these markets.²⁵

The Faith Alliance and Holy Apostles churches in District 1 have expressed interest in holding a weekly mini farmers’ market in their parking lots, if the new licensing rule were expanded to St. Paul. Under the Minneapolis permit stipulations, these sites would be required to designate a market ‘manager’ and provide on-site hand-washing and restroom facilities. They would also have the option of becoming certified to accept Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) coupons, which are issued to WIC and other food assistance participants. In Minneapolis, between one third and two thirds of sales at mini markets come from FMNP coupons. The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy has served as an umbrella organization for mini markets to obtain FMNP certification; however, individual vendors must also undergo a certification process.

B. Expansion of Community Gardening Space

According to Joe Reiter, the Totem Town garden coordinator, there was a waitlist of 15 people for the 40 Totem Town plots in 2008. Many of the current gardeners come from outside the district because there is high competition for gardening space in St. Paul. The gardeners at Totem Town include about 12 Asian families, but not many Somalis have been involved in the garden, even though the garden coordinators have allotted two plots free of charge to the McKnight Somali community, which is located nearby.²⁶ Urban gardens give immigrant families who come from farming livelihoods the chance to pass on cultural knowledge about growing food to their children. Expanding the gardening sites in District 1 and reaching out to immigrant communities via community gardening groups are important steps in assuring greater food security.

C. Schools and Youth Education

Given that food insecurity affects the health and developmental growth of children, it is important to involve youth in healthy eating programs. The St. Paul Public School system has made an effort to provide healthy foods like rice and couscous and to buy certain bulk produce

²⁵ The Minneapolis Mini Farmers’ Market Project Factsheet, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Aug. 2006, <http://www.iatp.org/iatp/factsheets.cfm?accountID=258&refID=103490>.

²⁶ Personal communication, Joe Reiter, Nov. 18, 2008.

items for its school lunches from local farmers.²⁷ The Community Design Center in Dayton's Bluff and the Youth Farm and Market Project on the West Side offer opportunities for youth to learn about food by helping in community gardens and greenhouses. Other programs are focused on specific ethnic populations: Minnesota International Health Volunteers in Minneapolis has designed a 10-week nutrition curriculum for teenage Somali girls. This curriculum could be offered as an after-school class at the Highwood Hills Recreation Center near the McKnight Somali community. The District 1 Council is exploring potential partnerships with Minnesota International Health Volunteers and the Community Design Center.

D. Transit Planning and Redevelopment

The nutritional value, affordability, and accessibility of food in District 1 must be taken into consideration when the district and the city make decisions concerning public transit and land use planning. There are currently some abandoned commercially zoned lots along Suburban Avenue, Old Hudson Road, and southern McKnight Road. The District 1 Council is attempting to work with local residents, including traditionally underrepresented groups and new immigrants, in each of these areas so that redevelopment can be shaped to fit the needs of the community. Various community members have suggested that a café, coffeeshop, or other food establishment with space for community gatherings would be a welcome development, both on Suburban Avenue and at McKnight and Lower Afton.²⁸

²⁷ Saint Paul Public Schools Nutrition Services, <http://www.sppscafe.org/>.

²⁸ Expressed at the District 1 Council monthly board meeting, Nov. 24, 2008.