

Feasibility of Grocery Cooperatives for Improving Food Access in High- Deprivation Urban Communities: A Case Study of the Altgeld Gardens Neighborhood; Chicago, IL



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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of Masters of Science
April 11, 2012

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Executive Summary

Alternative solutions to food access, like grocery cooperatives, can bring healthy foods to a food-insecure neighborhood while also uniquely reinforcing community infrastructure and providing resources to residents. This project highlights the initial steps of a feasibility analysis for a cooperative grocery model in the context of the historically disenfranchised Altgeld Gardens public housing community on Chicago's far south side, describes how other urban neighborhoods might use this case study to inform their own undertaking of food access solution analyses, and informs some directives for future action toward alternative food access solutions based on the results of this study, both in the particular case of Altgeld Gardens as well as in the broader field of urban food access.

Introduction

Like many problems planners face, the issue of food access in urban communities cannot be solved simply or easily. While some would approach the situation by claiming that areas where it is difficult to find healthy foods should just attract and build more supermarkets, a singular solution like this is unreasonable because many of these low-access communities are disenfranchised, marginalized urban areas. Food access, especially in these neighborhoods, represents more than just mere existence of purchasing locations—pricing, value (both economic and nutritional), knowledge and education, and the cultural capital intertwined with how we buy and consume our food all play a role in access that cannot be captured in a mainstream grocery location alone. Alternative solutions, such as grocery cooperatives, can bring healthy food selection to a neighborhood while also reinforcing community infrastructure and providing additional valuable resources to residents. This report highlights some initial steps of a feasibility analysis for a cooperative grocery model in the context of the Altgeld Gardens neighborhood on Chicago's far south side, a geographically isolated, majority African American public housing community. It also more broadly describes how advocates in other urban neighborhoods might use this case study to inform their own undertaking of alternative food access solution analyses, specifically highlighting useful techniques and potential barriers common to high-deprivation communities like Altgeld Gardens. Finally, a summary of overall findings informs some directives for future action toward better food access, both in the particular case of Altgeld Gardens as well as in the broader field of urban food systems.

An Overview of Urban Food Access

There is an immediate connotation with the institution of the supermarket when discussing food access. This focus on supermarkets has spread from common perception and achieved

prominence in both study and practice of food access. Further research and experience, however, indicates that this focus may not be the most effective for amplifying access in urban contexts. Supermarkets have indeed made an enormous impact on the way that Americans buy food, but they are not the only way to provide food access, and they present a number of inherent problems for the low-food-access community.

First, supermarkets, while clearly key in the general American retail infrastructure, have also consistently and systematically failed poor and minority-dominated urban communities. Disinvestment of mainstream stores in these areas has brought about a myriad of socio-economic problems, and the new retail structure anchored by chain establishments can drive out needed small businesses, including grocery outlets (Neumark et al. 2007, Davis et al. 2009). Supermarkets also tend to centralize food access in a community. They demand a large footprint and a high traffic location for their store format, and they create a 'hub' of food sales and sales competition. In the context of a dense urban fabric where many residents rely (either by choice or by necessity) upon methods of transport other than a personal automobile, these kinds of centralizations in the resource layout can be more detrimental than positive for food access (Short et al. 2007). Furthermore, supermarkets, and especially large chain stores, standardize their product selection over regions, providing a predictable product mix and pricing scheme due to large-scale purchasing. The supermarket is perceived as a consistent, inexpensive option, and resulting standardized pricing may indeed ameliorate some of the discrimination that can occur in retail in lower-income communities (Alwitt and Donley 1997). Unfortunately, this centralized governance also means that these stores are typically unable to provide a community-relevant perspective to grocery sales. Smaller, locally-based options can more easily consider neighborhood context in their product selection, and even potentially offering services, like classes or meeting space, as needed by their local context (Tamis 2009).

Because of the problems with supermarket-centrism in an urban context, I have chosen to avoid using the 'food desert' metaphor in this study, even though many references do make use of it. I have instead focused on *alternative access methods*, i.e., non-supermarket food procurement options. Although the supermarket is a visible and useful part of food access, it does not offer the only solution, and other methods of access may fit the urban context more readily.

Why Cooperatives?

There are many alternative options for food access to complement large store shopping in an urban food environment. Smaller neighborhood corner stores and bodegas play a key role in cities, but there are also grocery delivery services, gardens, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) membership, bartering or trade, food buying clubs, and, of course, grocery cooperatives.



Figure 2. Altgeld residents and Growing Power staff construct the hoop house on the urban farm plot. (Photo credit: WBEZ)

The International Cooperative Association's broad definition of a cooperative is "an autonomous, voluntary association meeting common economic, social, and cultural needs through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise" (ICA 2010). Grocery cooperative models vary widely in their implementation formats. What is common among all cooperative business structures is this collective ownership by member parties, usually performed via purchased shares in the business entity (UWCC 2012b). The business is run democratically, with members having a direct say or representative vote regarding cooperative actions.



Figure 4. A rehabilitated block of Altgeld rowhouses. (Photo credit: David Schalliol)

As a result of this community-based structure, cooperatives can be especially well-suited for food-insecure areas. As noted previously, food access is not solely a function of distance from a supermarket. Many other factors, like education and food knowledge, human-scale connections with food, and the cultural appropriateness of available food resources, also play an important role in how people access food. Co-ops can choose a product mix that serves their customers, keep pricing fair and lower prices for staple items, provide educational

opportunities like cooking courses or new product demonstrations, and even offer resources (such as meeting space or donated food) to groups and organizations. A common complaint about grocery stores, especially in food-insecure areas, is that they do not represent or connect with the community's needs (Block 2008). Because cooperatives are based in the community, they are less likely to be perceived as invaders. Lowered associated risks may even lead to decreased insurance risk expenses for cooperatives and the ability to reduce product pricing due to lower overhead (Rose 1970: 961). On a more abstract level, community ownership of an important asset provides empowerment, a sentiment often absent from marginalized neighborhoods. Flexibility, both of location and of sales, is another of the grocery cooperative's positives. Supermarkets' large buildings may allow for a large product selection, but also constrain reasonable and available locations for building, especially in an urban context. While some co-ops are large, they must operate on a human scale because of the direct involvement of members. This means that they are able to tailor their actions to the needs of the community. Flexibility is especially key to neighborhoods where access is critical. (For more in-



Figure 3. The PCR offices in Altgeld Gardens. (Photo credit: David Schalliol)

depth information on the flexible models in place at existing cooperatives, see the Appendix.)

Cooperatives in low-access neighborhoods may experience trouble with funding, visibility, and cultural stigma. These are valid concerns and will be addressed to some extent later in this report. Nevertheless, with planning, community education, committed membership, and with mindfulness of these potential problems, there is no reason not to consider grocery cooperatives as a potential solution for amplifying food access in high-deprivation communities.

Presently, Chicago has only one storefront grocery cooperative, Dill Pickle Food Co-Op, in the Logan Square neighborhood on Chicago's northwest side. The Chicago Food Cooperative also operates as a food-buying club with a cooperative structure, but it has no physical storefront. Formerly, the racially-diverse Hyde Park neighborhood on the mid-south side was also home to three storefront grocery cooperatives (Hyde Park Co-Ops) but they ceased operation at the end of 2008.



Figure 5. Abandoned Altgeld-Murray rowhouses. (Photo credit: David Schalliol)

Altgeld Gardens Community Description

(for a more in-depth historical account of Altgeld Gardens, see the Appendix)

Altgeld Gardens is located on the extreme southern edge of the City of Chicago. Residential development is generally bounded by Indiana Avenue to the west, the Bishop Ford freeway (I-94) to the east, 130th Street to the north, and 134th Street to the south. It is bordered by the Chicago neighborhoods of West Pullman and Roseland to the northwest, and the suburban communities of Dolton and Riverdale to the south. Directly north of the development is a Metropolitan Water Reclamation District wastewater treatment plant, and a non-profit recycling center and a city landfill are also just outside of Altgeld. The Beaubien Forest Preserve



Figure 6. This memorial wall inside Altgeld Gardens is inscribed with names of residents who have died due to violent crime. (Photo credit: WBEZ)

is directly east of the development, but slightly further east is Lake Calumet and the former Calumet Steel complex. The industrial surroundings contribute to the ongoing environmental justice and isolation issues in the Altgeld community. (See an overview map of the neighborhood in the Appendix following this report.)

Altgeld Gardens, like many other public housing developments, deviates from the city's rectilinear street grid. Four external entrances provide entry into the web of streets within the development. This

schematic makes navigation within the housing project difficult, and also makes walking to places outside of the development less efficient. Street layout problems are exacerbated by a lack of frequent public transit options, with only one Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus route operating within the housing development itself.

On 130th Street, along the northern edge of Altgeld, is Rosebud Farm Stand (also called Rosebud Farms), a small regional-chain grocery store. Although it is a full-service grocery store, many residents have complaints about the customer service and item quality and pricing. In addition, Rosebud Farms does not accept WIC (Women, Infants, Children) federal food benefits, presumably out of concern over government non-reimbursement of their higher prices, despite the majority of Altgeld residents that rely on such services (Johnson 2011). An “Occupy the Hood” protest, citing these and other concerns, was held in front of Rosebud Farms by People for Community Recovery in November of 2011 (Johnson 2011). There are also two liquor and convenience stores on the margins of Altgeld.

<i>Altgeld Gardens Demographic Statistics, 2010 (Census Tract 5401.01, Cook County)</i>	
Total Population: 3,109	Total Households: 1,055
40.6% age 0-19	59.2% female-headed households
Median age: 25.3 years (19.9 ♂, 29.9 ♀)	Median annual household income: \$13,277
98.8% African-American, 0.1% White, 0.1% Asian	42.5% of households earn <\$10,000/year
60.5% receiving SNAP benefits (food stamps)	45.4% reported unemployment

Table 1. Demographic statistics for Altgeld Gardens from the 2010 Census/American Community Survey.

The Feasibility of an Altgeld Gardens Grocery Cooperative

University of Wisconsin’s Center for Cooperatives cites conducting a feasibility study as a key first step in establishing a cooperative, including a market analysis, concrete needs assessment, revenue projections, and sources of financing (UWCC 2012a). Because market analyses and revenue projections require expertise and time outside of the scope of this project, I undertook a version of the remaining two components of the study, as well as an initial community stakeholder search and analysis.

This portion of this report is meant to assist any future work done on developing such a cooperative, as well as other alternative food access solutions, both in the Altgeld Gardens neighborhood and in high-deprivation communities outside of Altgeld, and even outside of Chicago.

Stakeholders and Community Resources

The first step in my analysis, and the one which took by far the most time and effort, was to begin navigating and documenting the stakeholder network in and around Altgeld Gardens. Unearthing these networks is difficult even for those familiar with a community, and it becomes considerably more challenging as an outsider. However, these connections also proved crucial to a full understanding of the project’s context and will indubitably be critical for any future

work on food access in greater Altgeld Gardens. Further discussion of the implications and defense of using project time to complete stakeholder analyses is part of my later section on lessons from feasibility studies.

These data were gathered using a modified snowball sampling technique, in which each subsequent contact person was asked about further contacts for follow-up. If this project is used as a basis for future work, it is assumed that those involved with the project will also take sufficient time to familiarize themselves personally with the community.

A full listing of essential stakeholders can be found in the Appendix to this report. Three of the resources and connections that may be of use to someone undertaking food access work in or around Altgeld are:

- **Growing Power, Inc.: Erika Allen**

Growing Power was founded by Will Allen in Milwaukee and now also has an outpost in Chicago (which Erika runs), including a 2.5 acre urban farm and farmers market in the Altgeld development founded in 2010. Growing Power is an important resource in the community because of their high-profile involvement with food access. While there has been some feedback from residents concerned about tensions between those employed by GP and those who are not, the organization is generally perceived as a positive presence in the neighborhood.

- **Resource Center**

The Resource Center is a large non-profit recycling and environmental advocacy center located just outside of Altgeld Gardens. Although similar in form to the “fringe” industrial uses surrounding Altgeld, they do provide recycling buyback services to residents, and make an effort to hire from within the community. Additionally, the Resource Center runs a program to redistribute unwanted food to those in need, and manages an urban farm, City Farm, on Chicago’s west side, and so brings food expertise to the table.

- **Fernwood United Methodist Church: Reverend Al Sampson**

Fernwood UMC is among dozens of churches in Chicago actively working to augment or replace much-needed social services in their communities. In some cases, churches are the only trusted points of service in a neighborhood, so they are key stakeholders to identify and connect with. Fernwood is particularly unique because of the leadership of Rev. Al Sampson, an activist minister who has made justice through food one of his primary missions. He procures produce from minority-owned farms outside of the city to bring back and sells it at farmer’s markets in church parking lots in food-insecure South Side neighborhoods, effectively keeping the community’s food dollars circulating locally instead of outside. Fernwood UMC, and the larger minority-owned farm support project (named George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S.) are headquartered in nearby Roseland, but their services benefit many communities, including Altgeld Gardens (Gray 2010).

Financial Considerations

The financial elements included in this feasibility study were start-up funding options and provision for member buy-in. While market analyses, real estate costs, and other studies with quantitative data support should be included in a subsequent phase of this project, the scope of this portion of the work did not allow for this depth of data collection and analysis.

Since cooperatives generally follow a plan of 50% member equity, 50% outside loan funding for start-up, both of these financial assets are important to consider when analyzing feasibility. In the recent past, cooperatives attempting to deal with mainstream banks for start-up financing have experienced resistance. This is partially due to unfamiliarity with the cooperative structure and partially due to present market conditions and overall hesitance to loan. Banking issues stalled a previous cooperative pilot for the neighborhood of Austin, another food-insecure Chicago community (Block 2012). However, there are many other options outside of mainstream banking for start-up loans. Credit unions are more supportive of cooperatives because they follow similar business principles (UWCC 2012a). There are also regional and national organizations that exist solely to support cooperatives and have grant and loan funds available for small-business startups, like the National Cooperative Bank's grant programs (NCB 2012) and the Cooperative Development Foundation's co-op-centric small business loans (CDF 2012). In the policy realm, fresh food funding programs have been successfully deployed in California and Pennsylvania, working to provide financial resources to small stores so that they can provide nutritious foods within their neighborhoods. Illinois passed a similar bill in their state legislature in 2010, so the capacity exists for similar funding (Illinois General Assembly 2010, Flournoy 2011). However, little action has been taken since the passage of the bill, and the language of the bill focuses on supermarkets instead of small stores, so further action would be needed in order to leverage this opportunity. Grants from health advocacy foundations, like the Kellogg Foundation or the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, or even federal economic development money, could also be used for start-up funds, provided appropriate timing and receipt of award.

The next step to a start-up, and possibly the most problematic in this case, is obtaining enough member-driven initial capital. This involves convincing a critical mass of members to invest in the prospective cooperative before it is actually operational. In a neighborhood like Altgeld Gardens where over 50% of the population lives below the poverty level, asking for an investment of this type and scale might seem improper at best. Because of the need for income diversity (as well as the development's land-locked geography), a food store might do well to locate slightly outside of the boundaries of the development itself. If the greater Far South Side perceived the cooperative as serving the region at large, it would also be easier to generate a broader member base. There are also various options employed by existing cooperatives for lessening the burden of membership fees on low-income members. Case studies of existing cooperative models may be found in the Appendix.

Concrete Needs

The most pressing concrete need to include in analysis at this stage is land. One option may be the planned development at the 115th/Michigan intersection, just north of Altgeld Gardens.

Although this area is not immediately adjacent to Altgeld, it is easily accessible via the #34 bus route, which also runs within the housing development. In 2010, a retail development on a vacant parcel at this intersection was announced, including an Aldi discount grocer. The groundbreaking has since occurred, but because of market conditions, the development has not progressed (Gray 2010). The lot has been zoned for a Planned Unit Development (PUD) with specific recommendations for a grocery store. (See Zoning Map, figure A-2, in the Appendix, for zoning details.) Although the developer could not be reached during the course of this project, it would be useful, in future work, to find out if Aldi is indeed still committed to the space. If not, there is potential for a cooperative to negotiate with the developer for a location within this development.

Looking outside of this parcel, the intersection of 115th and Michigan is also supported by the Roseland/Michigan TIF, and has been targeted by the city for economic redevelopment. Both streets carry a higher volume of traffic and host CTA bus routes, so the area is accessible to the broader region as well as to Altgeld. There are also a number of vacant lots and properties surrounding the area (see figure A-3 for a graphic representation of these properties within .5 mile of the target intersection.) Cook County (where Chicago is located) has a uniquely progressive vacant building ordinance, and is considering utilizing this ordinance to turn zero-revenue locations into redevelopment opportunities. There is even a proposal for land banking of these parcels (Gainer 2012). Using otherwise vacant buildings or land around 115th and Michigan to provide better food access for Altgeld Gardens would be a creative solution that would also benefit the broader community.

Of course, the most ideal situation would be land or building availability directly adjacent to Altgeld Gardens. Because turnover of corner store tenancy is quite frequent, it would be worthwhile for subsequent phases of this project to keep track of the status of the two local convenience and liquor stores. A cooperative model could operate from a very small footprint, and replacing a liquor or convenience store with a full-service option would be beneficial to the immediate food access of Altgeld residents.

Also worth considering is the potential for a unique and culturally supportive product mix for sale at the cooperative. Growing Power, Resource Center/City Farm, and Carver F.A.R.M.S. are already present and involved with bringing local produce supplies to the greater Altgeld area. A grocery cooperative or other smaller food store could provide the farmers with a consistent market for their products, unlike a temporary market setup, where sales may fluctuate based on factors like weather and successful promotion of the event. These farmers uniquely understand the food needs and desires of far-South Chicago residents. Local demand for African-American products, including melons, okra, greens, and crowder peas, is high, but these are difficult items to locate in typical grocery stores, and are not necessarily produced by many small farmers in the region, either. However, Carver F.A.R.M.S. farmers specifically focus on culturally significant products, knowing that their goods are in demand in the neighborhoods where they sell (Gray 2010). Having a consistent local connection to in-demand items is an ideal situation for all parties involved, as it is supporting the livelihoods of these farmers and providing culturally appropriate foods.

Lessons From Altgeld Gardens: Performing Feasibility Studies in High-Deprivation Communities

Stakeholder Analysis for Community Connections

The overview of key stakeholders and resources in Altgeld Gardens demonstrates that many major players have a presence in an otherwise marginalized area. Despite systematic disenfranchisement, social infrastructure is highly present. This is especially vital to a major project like a food access initiative. Also, many of these connections are not accessible or even visible from the outside. Work like this potential undertaking in Altgeld Gardens inherently requires a deep knowledge of the community context. The residents have been failed many times by well-meaning advocates who were not aware of all of the tumultuous history and deep-seated community connections, and the neighborhood as a whole is wary of outside help since too many times it has been paternalistic or draconian (or just uninformed) in nature. Knowledge of the community by experience and subsequent access to its social-cultural capital are important and non-separable components of conducting a feasibility study (or any study) in a high-deprivation community. Simply put: the footwork required is worth the time.

Creativity Wins

Approaching food access efforts simplistically will not likely improve true access. This is why the scope of this project emphasizes alternative food access models not only for the greater Altgeld Gardens area, but also in the broader field of food access. However: creativity brings solutions, but it also means a greater burden of encouraging education and emphasizing participation for the planner. When a solution is outside of the mainstream, it may be more difficult to get community buy-in, especially in high-deprivation communities without even basic local resources. Creativity extends not only to making the plans, but also to fulfilling them and ensuring that they reach out to every part of the affected community.

Open Minds, Open Agendas

Although some would portray the entire south side of Chicago as homogenous, this could not be further from the truth. Even though many of the area's problems are common to the entire region, Chicago is truly a city of neighborhoods, and every neighborhood has its own specific characteristics. As planners, we cannot presume to know what a community needs without asking them, and we cannot forget that we also bring our own agendas to the table. Creative solutions and engaging community leaders are both a part of the agenda-navigation, but so is including building in this understanding as part of the planning process. In this case, this meant listening to residents tell how they used off-the-books cab services to get to a suburban grocery store, or how they desperately needed a local, well-stocked store that also accepted WIC vouchers, and then modifying the research agenda to address these concerns.

Conclusion

This project was intended to serve as a phase in a larger project of improving food access in Altgeld Gardens and the greater far south side of Chicago. It is my hope that a future group of advocates can use the collected background information, stakeholder analysis, and feasibility components and use them to perform real scoping activities in Altgeld Gardens. Ideally, these

would include true market analyses and retail performance projections, focus groups and stakeholder collaborations, and research into the potential of the 115th/Michigan development location. A cooperative may not be the best pioneer in changing the food landscape in Altgeld Gardens. I have no doubts that the community, with its indomitable social capital resources, could take on the challenge of starting grocery cooperative in this context. The logistics, as well as uncontrollable market factors, may be what could stand in the way.

I primarily produced this report as an example of how creative food systems planning can consider novel solutions for persistently food-insecure communities. Both anecdotal evidence and the research literature demonstrate that, while supermarkets may get all the credit and funding, solving the food access conundrum in high-deprivation urban areas will take more than a few new grocery stores. It is my hope that residents of neighborhoods like Altgeld Gardens can reap the benefits of an improved understanding of their food access, and that creative solutions can bring needed resources to those in need everywhere.

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Appendix: Maps

Altgeld Gardens

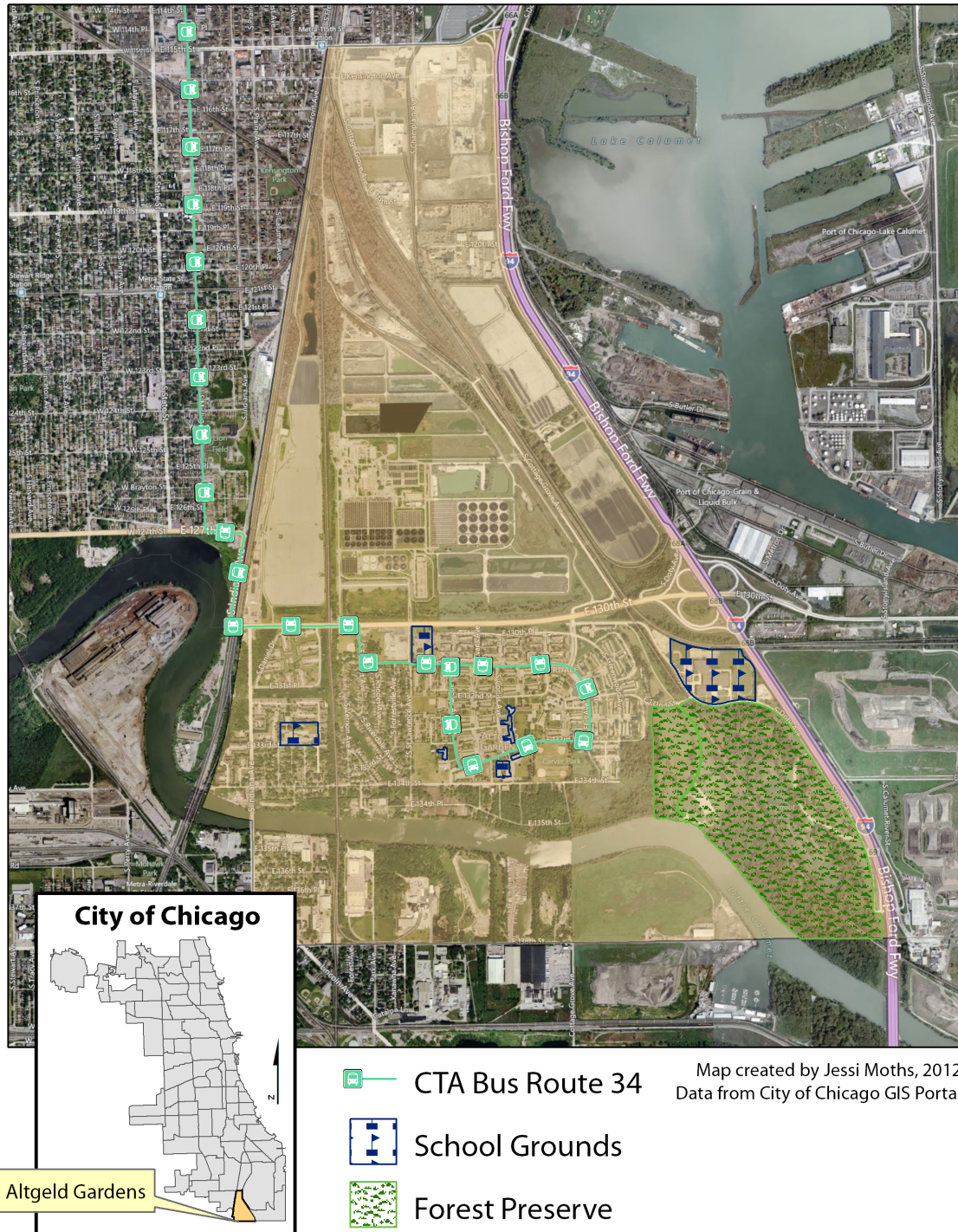


Figure A-1. Overview map of Altgeld Gardens (highlighted area), with key features indicated.

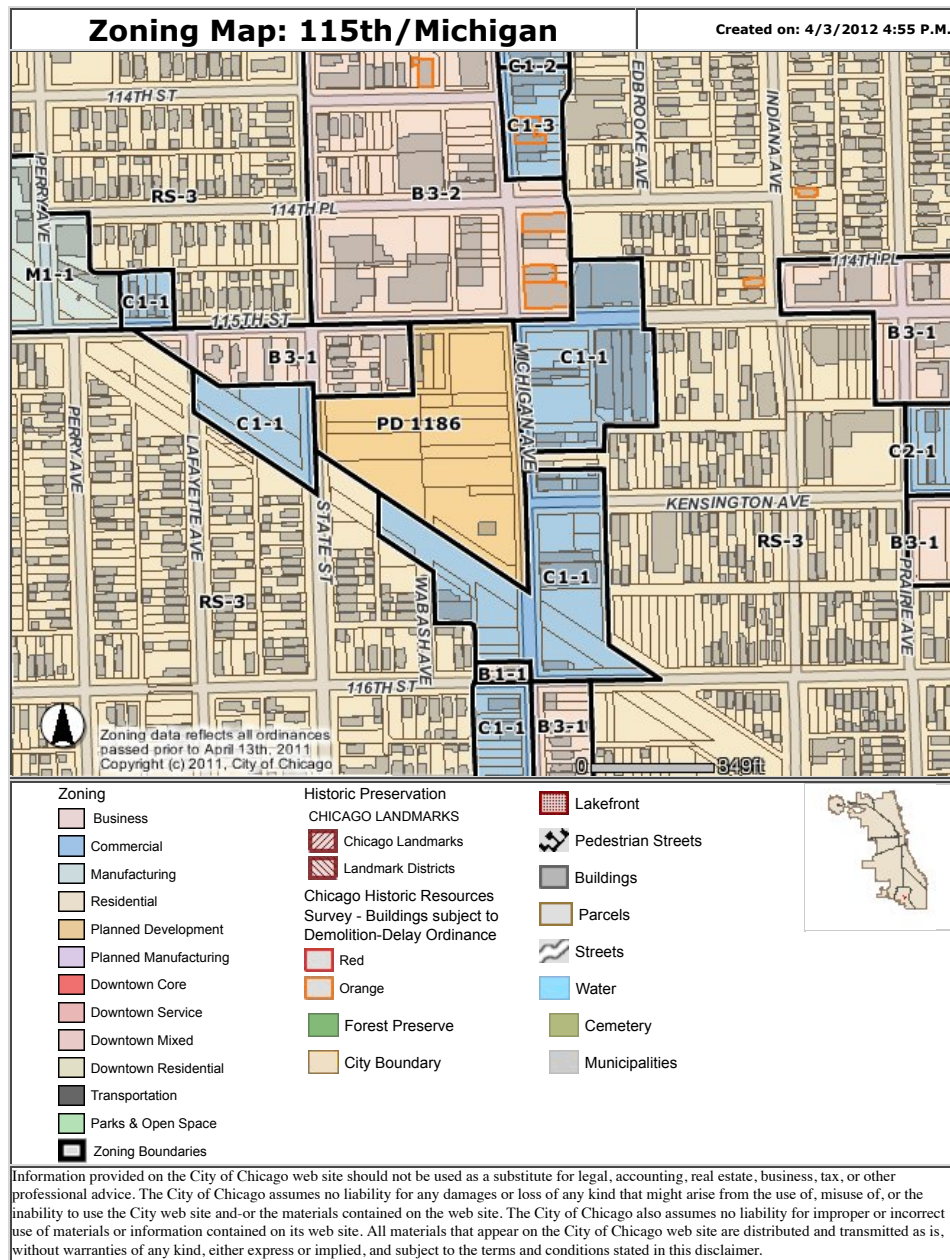


Figure A-2. Current zoning map for the intersection of 115th Street and Michigan Avenue, a potential food access development site. (Source: City of Chicago)

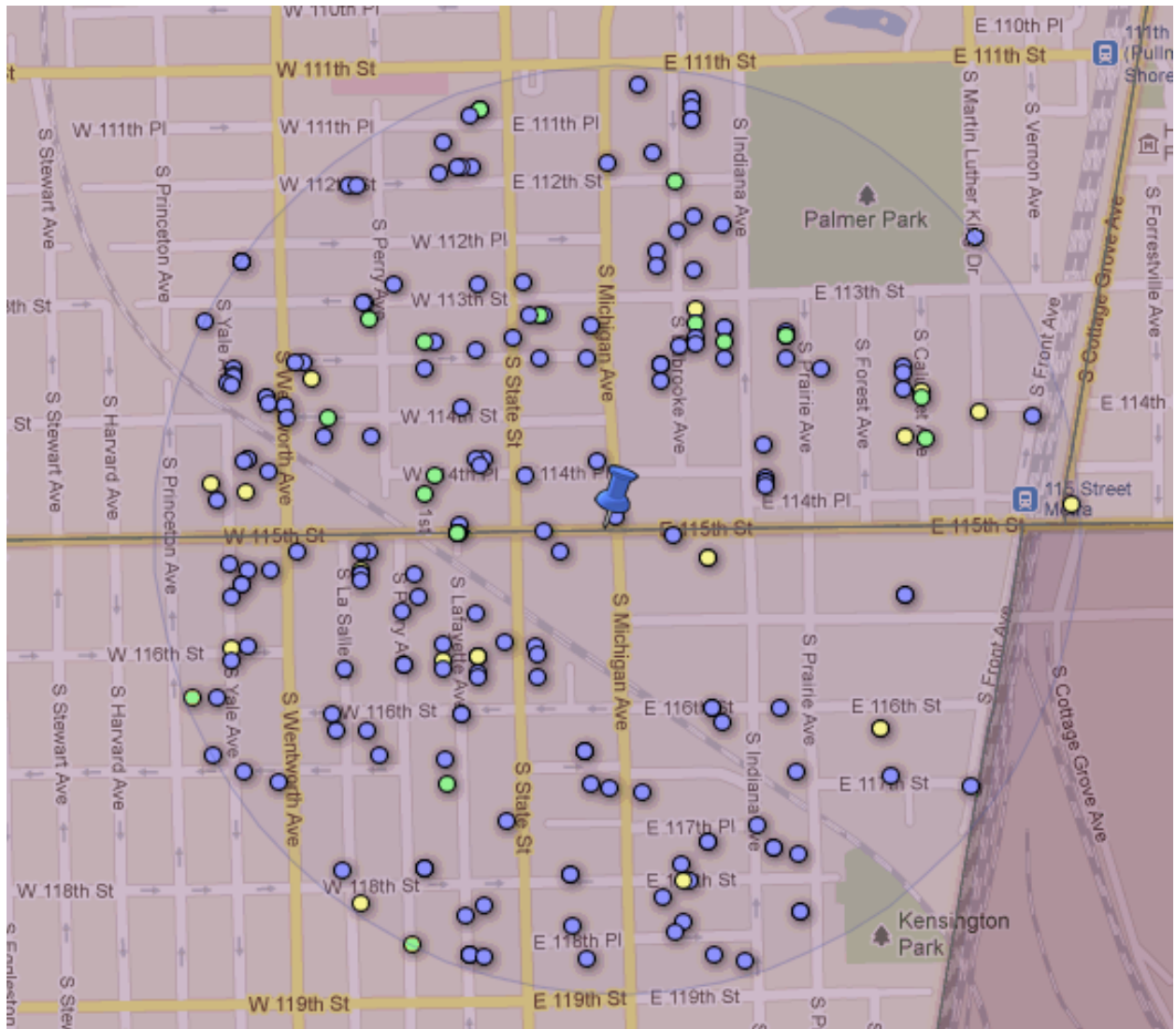


Figure A-3. A map of vacant properties within .5 mile of the intersection of 115th Street and Michigan Avenue, a potential food access development site. Each dot represents one vacant property. (Source: <http://www.chicagobuildings.com>)

Appendix: Interview Instruments

Over the course of this project, I conducted several interviews (in-person, over the telephone, and via e-mail) in order to better gain an idea of the scope of this project and to inform my ongoing research actions. Although these interviews were not intended to provide any kind of standardized data, I did use two sets of standard questions for my two primary contact groups: cooperative board members and greater Altgeld community members. These sets of questions follow for the purpose of informing future study. I found them to be helpful starting points for discussions about cooperatives as a food access solution and/or thinking about urban food access in general.

For Cooperative Board Members

1. What specific initiatives/programs does [co-op name] have to encourage customers and especially owners from across all income brackets to shop and join the co-op?
2. How are these initiatives/programs funded and/or supported?
 - a. Have they been around since [co-op name]'s earliest days, or did it take a while for [co-op name] to be able to dedicate time/money/effort to them?
3. Would a grocery co-op, in your opinion, be able to start up and survive if it had to rely on participation from a community of very diverse incomes, or does start-up require too much capital investment from community participants?
4. Do you feel that [co-op name] actively participates in increasing access to healthy/local/sustainable food for all [location] residents?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, do you think they should, and how would they do so in the future?

For Community Members

1. How do you see the future of Altgeld, especially in light of the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation? In one year, five years, ten years?
2. How do you perceive Altgeld residents accessing their food? Where do they go and how do they get there?
3. Besides "build a new chain grocery store nearby", how do you think food access in Altgeld and the surrounding communities should be improved?
 - a. Alternatively: what resources, other than a new chain grocery store in the community, would help Altgeld/Roseland/West Pullman residents access their food needs more effectively?

Appendix: History of Altgeld Gardens

Altgeld Gardens opened as a working-class housing project for industrial war service workers in 1945 (Hunt 2009: 3). Unlike many other Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) developments, its initial residents were nearly 100% African-American; but much like other public housing developments, the myriad problems associated with Chicago public housing did not begin until after the newness and wartime stability had passed. During the first few years at Altgeld, the community's location at the very southern fringe of the incorporated city was actually advantageous to the workers whose jobs were located in the southern industrial corridors. The still-new buildings were well-cared for by both residents and management staff, and Altgeld denizens report that they "had everything right (t)here" with regards to resources and services (Hunt 2009: 58, 63). The decline in Chicago's public housing developments began in earnest in the decades after the war, when a combination of CHA in-fighting over locations and funding allocation, federal austerity programs, declining infrastructure and maintenance of residential buildings, isolation of the housing projects themselves from Chicago's grid network, urban deindustrialization and net local job loss, and increased admission of unemployed and severely impoverished residents to CHA housing programs all combined to debase war-time successes (Hunt 2009: 4). With crime, poverty, and youth concentrations all on the rise, what few businesses continued to disappear, and isolated Altgeld suffered from subsequent loss of neighborhood services and a marked lack of nearby alternatives.

Due to changes in federal funding for public housing from project-based to block and community grant structures (e.g. HOPE VI), as well as the mandates set forth in the well-known anti-discrimination *Gautreaux* court case, the CHA has undertaken a number of restructuring efforts since the 1990s. These projects, more recently grouped under the title of the CHA's "Plan for Transformation", have included the closure demolition of many of the infamous projects (the Robert Taylor Homes and Cabrini-Green being two of the most high-profile), relocation of residents to scattered-site and private housing via Section 8 subsidized housing vouchers, aesthetic rehabilitation of aging housing structures, and newly-built mixed-income housing developments containing both subsidized and market-rate units (Hunt 2009: 279-280). Altgeld and its co-located expansion project, Murray Homes, are comprised of low-rise brick multi-family rowhouses with shared courtyard space in between buildings. The Plan for Transformation rehabilitated many of Altgeld's aging structures, but it also left some of them empty due to resident displacement. While some of these changes have ostensibly helped to make Altgeld Gardens a more pleasant place to live for the time being, it also has created uncertainty around its future. Although the CHA has not indicated that it plans to displace all of Altgeld's residents any time soon, similar actions taken at other large-scale projects came within only a few weeks of mandatory move-out and demolition.

There are two public elementary schools, one public early-childhood center, and two public middle schools within Altgeld, and the Carver Military Academy public magnet high school is just outside of the housing development. Most high-school aged students ride a school bus to attend Fenger High School in nearby Roseland, because of Carver's magnet status. However, the practice of busing Altgeld high school students to attend Fenger came into question after violence in 2009, and Carver began accepting a limited number of Altgeld transfer applicants

from Fenger (Mack et al. 2009). There is also a newer charter school, CICS Larry Hawkins, nearby. Although a Chicago Public Library branch used to operate within the housing development, it has remained closed for several years, and now the nearest branch is in the West Pullman neighborhood.

Altgeld Gardens has received national recognition recently for two reasons. First, now-President Barack Obama worked in the community as a grassroots activist pursuing environmental and social justice for several years before he began his political career. One of these associated community activist groups, People for Community Recovery (PCR), received widespread attention because of Obama's involvement. PCR was founded by Hazel Johnson in the early 1980s and is considered to be a part of the foundational movement in urban environmental justice (PCR 2012). Also, the 2009 violent death of high school honor student Derrion Albert made national headlines. Albert was an Altgeld resident returning home from Fenger High School, but he was caught up as a bystander in a feud between Altgeld and Roseland residents (Fenger is located in the neighboring Roseland neighborhood, and Altgeld students are bused there) and was savagely beaten to death by several other high schoolers. This incident provoked inquiries about how well Chicago Public Schools and the CHA were serving the youth of Altgeld by subjecting them to these conditions just to attend school, especially since a large public high school, Carver, is located just outside of Altgeld. Carver, however, was turned into a magnet military academy during the CPS Renaissance 2010 restructuring program. The Derrion Albert tragedy was horrifying and indicative of deeply entrenched problems, but it also brought Altgeld's deprivation from local services into the national spotlight, even garnering attention from US Secretary of Education (and former Chicago resident) Arne Duncan (Mack et al. 2009).

In 2010, Growing Power, a food justice advocacy organization, built a small urban farm inside Altgeld Gardens. The farm employs several Altgeld residents and also provides youth education and work opportunities (Growing Power 2012). In conjunction with this effort, Growing Power held a weekly farmer's market during the summer of 2011, selling both the farm's own produce and other supplementary produce items purchased from wholesalers (mostly fruit).

One Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus, the #34 South Michigan route, serves Altgeld Gardens and runs between Altgeld's south-eastern edge and the 95th Street CTA Red Line train station. The CTA has considered a southward expansion of the Red Line to 130th Street for many years, which would connect far south communities, including Altgeld, directly to the much more efficient rail service toward the central business district. Starting in 2006, the CTA undertook the beginning phases of this project, and an Environmental Impact Statement is currently being composed, along with community input and alternatives assessments (CTA 2012). Chicago's commuter rail service, Metra, has stops in the neighboring south suburb of Dolton and several blocks north-west of Altgeld in West Pullman, but neither is easily reached by bus and are too distant for an every-day walk.

Altgeld Gardens is in Chicago's 9th Aldermanic ward, the 2nd Congressional District, the 5th Chicago Police district, and the Community Area (official Chicago neighborhood categorization) of Riverdale.

Food Access on Chicago's South Side

Chicago's infamous status as one of the most segregated metropolitan areas in the nation has significant socioeconomic consequences for the majority-minority neighborhoods mostly located on the city's west and south sides. Like many other systematically disadvantaged areas, the concurrent deindustrialization of the central city and centralization of consumer goods and services has led to a remarkable net loss of local jobs, such that most residents must travel extensively to work and to access resources, resulting in an overall loss of neighborhood revenue (Boston Consulting Group 1999, Alwitt and Donley 1997). More chain grocery stores have closed than have opened in the region since 2005, and community-centric, high-quality food purchasing options are virtually non-existent (Block 2008). The health impacts of these changes are just as dramatic: South Side neighborhoods exhibit some of the highest rates of diet-related diseases. These conditions unsurprisingly also correlate with some of the lowest rates of measured and reported food access in the city, and the highest imbalance of fast and convenience food to healthy options (Gallagher 2006). Altgeld Gardens' isolated location and socio-economic deprivation further exacerbates these region-wide trends.

Appendix: Preliminary Stakeholder Listing

Note: This list is not meant to be exhaustive, neither of my experience in the community nor the actual resources available. It is also not meant to substitute for personal investigation of the Altgeld Gardens community. Rather, it should serve to guide initial contact and identify key resources. Contact information is not included out of concerns for privacy, but all parties should be accessible within the context of community interaction.

- **People for Community Recovery (PCR): Cheryl Johnson**

PCR was founded in Altgeld Gardens in the early 1980s by Hazel Johnson, Cheryl Johnson's mother, to combat the pervasive environmental injustice within the greater Southland community. More recently, the group was involved in organizing the "Occupy the Hood" protest of the Rosebud Farms grocery store in Altgeld Gardens in November 2011. Although PCR's primary focus is on *environmental* and not *food* justice, their centralized and established presence in the community helps their actions to be well-respected.

- **Growing Power, Inc.: Erika Allen**

Growing Power was founded by Will Allen in Milwaukee and now also has an outpost in Chicago (which Erika runs), including a 2.5 acre urban farm and farmers market in the Altgeld development founded in 2010. Growing Power is an important resource in the community because of their high-profile involvement with food access. While there has been some feedback from residents concerned about tensions between those employed by GP and those who are not, the organization is generally perceived as a positive presence in the neighborhood.

- **Resource Center**

The Resource Center is a large non-profit recycling and environmental advocacy center located just outside of Altgeld Gardens. Although similar in form to the "fringe" industrial uses surrounding Altgeld, they do provide recycling buyback services to residents, and make an effort to hire from within the community. Additionally, the Resource Center runs a program to redistribute unwanted food to those in need, and manages an urban farm, City Farm, on Chicago's west side, and so brings food expertise to the table.

- **Fernwood United Methodist Church: Reverend Al Sampson**

Fernwood UMC is among dozens of churches in Chicago actively working to augment or replace much-needed social services in their communities. In some cases, churches are the only trusted points of service in a neighborhood, so they are key stakeholders to identify and connect with. Fernwood is particularly unique because of the leadership of Rev. Al Sampson, an activist minister who has made justice through food one of his primary missions. He procures produce from minority-owned farms outside of the city to bring back and sells it at farmer's markets in church parking lots in food-insecure South Side neighborhoods, effectively keeping the community's food dollars circulating locally instead of outside. Fernwood UMC, and the larger minority-owned farm support project (named George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S.) are headquartered in nearby Roseland, but their services benefit many communities, including Altgeld Gardens (Gray 2010).

- **Altgeld-Murray Health Clinic**
This health clinic is one of the only health resources available in the immediate area of Altgeld Gardens—even filling a prescription written at the clinic requires a 15-minute bus ride out of the neighborhood. In addition to performing low-to-no-cost essential medical services, Altgeld-Murray Health Clinic is an important public health advocacy partner in the neighborhood, providing education on everything from healthy eating to diabetes management.
- **Greater Roseland Community Development Corporation (CDC)**
CDCs exist to help promote positive development trends that lift up neighborhoods. In Chicago, CDCs are split into various regional corporations throughout the city. They can provide various services, including technical and funding-acquisition assistance, and occasionally are able to distribute funds of their own for development projects.
- **Chicago Housing Authority (CHA): Ms. Gertie Smith, facilities manager**
The CHA’s properties each have staff managers on-site, and Ms. Smith is Altgeld’s manager. Because the CHA is notoriously bureaucratic and difficult to deal with from the top-down, finding out about individual staff at a location may be the only way to include such a perspective in a stakeholder analysis.
- **East Lake Management and Development Corporation**
The CHA has recently contracted out management and operations of its properties to private corporations like East Lake. East Lake is based out of Chicago, but deals extensively with public, subsidized, and affordable housing management in several Midwestern states. Both the CHA and the private management companies are not generally considered explicit advocates of the residents of their communities, but they are nonetheless important to include in consideration of a project involving any public housing development.
- **Frederick A. Blum Neighborhood Assistance Center at Chicago State University: Professor Daniel Block, Director**
This connection is more about research, information, and technical assistance than neighborhood-internal resources, but can be the source of many further helpful connections.
- **Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) District 5: Patricia Walsh, Commander**
The same can be said about the Chicago Police Department and CAPS as is said about CHA and the private property management companies—there is a long and storied history of mismanagement and conflict between the police and public housing residents. However, restructuring of both the housing authority and police system and better collaboration between the two to include more citizen input in safety and crime affairs has helped matters some, and because CAPS employs community strategies, the program is a key resource for connecting with active residents when working in a community like Altgeld.
- **Local Advisory Council (LAC): Ms. Bernadette Williams, President**
Like CAPS, the Local Advisory Council (LAC) is an attempt by CHA to include participatory governance in their agency-level decision-making process. A LAC is likely to contain activists and influential members of the community who will be both informative

resources as well as important routes for communication of information to the neighborhood at large.

- **Chicago 9th Aldermanic Ward: Anthony Beale, Alderman**

Aldermanic districts, or wards, are the local unit of government in Chicago, with each alderman representing his or her constituents on the City Council. They also are a resource for making action happen within a community. If you have lived in Chicago for any length of time, you pick up the common knowledge that if you want something done, you should ask your alderman. However, for a variety of reasons from scandal and fraud to sheer scope of expectations, aldermen tend to be distrusted when it comes to big projects. Alderman Beale, for instance, made public plans for a new development, located just north of Altgeld Gardens at 115th Street and Michigan Avenue, that would include an Aldi discount grocer. In the two years since the groundbreaking, however, no visible progress has been made on the project, and attempts to contact the ward office for more information or even the name of the developer were unsuccessful.

Appendix: Existing Cooperative Model Case Studies

Grocery cooperatives excel at changing their model to reflect the needs of the community. Flexibility would be key to any successful food venue in Altgeld Gardens, and would be especially essential to a cooperative, which requires a unique degree of community support and buy-in. In this section, I use the Willy Street Grocery Co-Op (WSGC) in Madison, WI, and the Dill Pickle Food Co-Op (DPFC) in the northwest neighborhood of Logan Square, Chicago, as two cases of flexible cooperative models. It should be noted that the examples of existing cooperatives from which I draw are imperfect comparisons for Altgeld Gardens. Few cooperatives currently exist within extremely low-income, isolated neighborhoods like Altgeld. However, Logan Square, where DPFC is located, is ethnically and economically diverse, with a high concentration of Latino/a residents and lower-income households, and the two locations of WSGC serve more than just their immediate neighborhood. Their models are worthwhile examples because they have been demonstrated to work for expanding accessibility.

Membership structures are one way in which cooperatives can be flexible. At WSGC, members can choose to pay a portion of their ownership dues each month, or pay them up-front, though there is no volunteer requirement or option. Self-certifying low-income members can also get further discounts (Olsen 2012). At DPFC, there is an installment pricing plan available to owners who desire to pay this way, and no proof of income is required. Once they have joined, members can also receive further discounts, up to 20%, by volunteering at the co-op. Volunteer hours help to keep overall payroll costs down (Monahan 2012).

Cooperatives can also choose to price their products however they feel appropriate. Both WSGC and DPFC have (or have had in the past) “staple product” programs wherein certain core items are value-priced (such as produce, eggs, dairy, and bulk items) so that more consumers feel that they are within their allowable price range (Olsen 2012, Monahan 2012). At WSGC, qualifying low-income shoppers can receive the membership-standard 10% discount without paying ownership fees through a program called Access Discounts. It also previously offered this 10% “courtesy” discount to anyone who requested it, regardless of income qualifications, but discontinued the program because it did not promote the other benefits of membership (Olsen 2012).

WSGC also does a particularly good job of supporting non-automobile customers, with ample bicycle parking, posted bus schedules inside the store, and even borrowable bicycle trailers to transport groceries home. Store delivery services or shuttle buses are also options to amplify accessibility, though they require much more infrastructural support by the cooperative to implement. However, considering the persistent access issues experienced by Altgeld residents, more aggressive access solutions may be key.

Of course, all of these flexible options also require that the co-op has the resources to implement them. As stated previously, neither Madison, WI, nor Logan Square in Chicago, can be directly compared to the demographics of Altgeld Gardens, and WSGC and DPFC are established businesses that have a diverse customer base and a good deal of community support. However, the cooperative board members also agreed that the creativity and powerful

collective effort of the co-op model helps it to succeed in a variety of contexts, and that even wealthy communities can fail to support a co-op if other factors do not align. Although opening a grocery cooperative in the greater Altgeld Gardens would take strong logistics and market cooperation, the creativity and resources of residents would also go a long way in supporting this effort.

Acknowledgments

The amount of gracious and informative assistance I have received over the course of this project has been monumental. I do not have enough space in this section to thank everyone individually, but if you have supported me in any way during the course of writing and presenting this report, please know that I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Working in Altgeld Gardens has been a treasured experience and has caused me to grow as a scholar. I can only hope that this work can be used in the future to advance the greater good.

To my co-op correspondents, Lynn Olson at Willy Street Grocery Co-Op in Madison and Kevin Monahan at Dill Pickle Food Co-Op in Logan Square, Chicago; your time has meant the world to me and your wonderful answers to my questions have kept me on track. Thank you for your service to the cooperative community and the business of food access!

To the welcoming community at Growing Power Chicago, especially Allyson Harmon, a million thanks for the email responses, shared connections, and great conversation. Keep fighting the good fight!

To the wonderful folks at the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, especially Diane Mayerfeld, Cris Carusi, and Michael Bell, bless you for giving me the opportunity to be a project assistant for these last few months. The support and available time to write have both been invaluable and I deeply appreciate all of the work that CIAS does.

To the Frederick Blum Neighborhood Assistance Center at Chicago State University, and especially Professor Daniel Block, thank you for taking the time to share your immense expertise with me, and thank you for the work you do supporting Chicago neighborhoods.

To URPL and my advisor, Alfonso Morales, thank you for giving me this project requirement and the tools to fulfill it, simultaneously the most harrowing and most rewarding experience of my life.

To Brigit (and the kittens), thank you for allowing me to make your couch a second home during Chicago fieldwork weekends, and for the shared efficiency of coffee shop work sessions. I seriously could not have done this without you.

And thank you to Todd, for unyielding support, even during sleepless nights and temporary bouts of insanity. I could not have asked for a better grad school fellow journeyman.