WALNUT HILLS KROGER

EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

FOOD ACCESS

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BACKGROUND

The lack of convenient and healthy food options in urban centers is an issue that academics, politicians and regular citizens have sought to address. The debate about these ‘food deserts’ has been present in Cincinnati for a number of years as the Kroger Company, headquartered in Cincinnati, has closed older stores within the city. Many fear that the Kroger location in Cincinnati’s Walnut Hills neighborhood will meet the same fate as some of Kroger’s other closed Cincinnati urban locations in Roselawn and Westwood. Kroger is currently renovating and expanding their Corryville store, a store in close proximity to the store in Walnut Hills. The neighbors and neighborhood activists in Walnut Hills fear that their neighborhood grocery will be shut down once the renovation to the Corryville location is finished.

The Kroger store in Walnut Hills has been open since 1983 and has operated at a loss every year except for 1984. There was concern in 2008 that the store would be shut down however Kroger decided to extend its lease on the land. Kroger also spent approximately $250,000 making improvements to the interior of the store and changing the management with a goal of making the store profitable. The Walnut Hills Redevelopment Corporation has also taken up the challenge of making the store profitable. Their ‘Buy 25’ initiative asks that area shoppers come to the Walnut Hills Kroger twice a month and spend at least twenty five dollars during each of those visits.

This report has been prepared by a group of students in the University of Cincinnati’s Masters in Community Planning Program as part of their second year planning workshop. The report focuses on the existing conditions of the Walnut Hills store, the area around it, general issues with food deserts and providing food in urban neighborhoods. The end goal of the project is to provide a set of recommendations to the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation that will help the food access situation in Walnut Hills. The final report will provide a set of recommendations based on two scenarios. The first set of recommendations will encourage Kroger to keep their store in Walnut Hills and hopefully make the location more profitable so that the speculation of closure does not continue. The second set of recommendations address the reality that Kroger might close their store in Walnut Hills. It will be necessary to assess the resident’s access to food if the Kroger were to leave and provide recommendations for access to new food sources. At the back of this report is a work plan going forward for the UC students who will use the information in this report when determining their recommendations for the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation.
WALNUT HILLS KROGER
EXISTING CONDITIONS
REPORT

SEPTEMBER 26TH, 2012

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PLAN 7007 PLAN-MAKING
WORKSHOP
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THE WALNUT HILLS KROGER AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD AROUND IT

Section 1

Historical Timeline of Walnut Hills
Demographic Analysis of Walnut Hills
Recent Press About Walnut Hills
Site Description
Access to Food in Walnut Hills
Safety Analysis of the Walnut Hills Kroger
Actors and Decision Makers
The history of Walnut Hills plays the role in the current plight facing the Kroger location in the neighborhood. Walnut Hills has changed significantly in the last 200 years going from farm to bustling streetcar/incline suburb to declining inner city neighborhood struggling to revitalize itself. The Walnut Hills Kroger is located in an area that used to be known for substantial pedestrian and transportation traffic, Peebles Corner. Now a shadow of its former self the Walnut Hills Kroger leaving the area could be a blow to the revitalization efforts going on in Walnut Hills.

1804
The area is initially settled by James Kemper, as a 130 acre farm

1855
McMillan Street is completed between Auburn Ave and Walnut Hills

1868
Gilbert Ave is completed, connecting Walnut Hills to Downtown Cincinnati

1850, 1855, 1870
Walnut Hills is annexed into the City of Cincinnati in three stages

1883
The Peebles department store opens at the corner of East McMillan and Gilbert. The area around the store is still known as Peebles Corner and is still a hub for pedestrian and transit activity.

1890s
Streetcars are expanded to Walnut Hills, replacing horse drawn cable cars

1895
Walnut Hills High School opens on the corner of Ashland and Burdett

1897
100,000 people ride past Peebles Corner daily via electric streetcars

1900
Eden Park is dedicated, bordering Walnut Hills to the south
1906
The Walnut Hills Library Branch is opened via the generosity of Andrew Carnegie

1920s
Cincinnati’s Little Italy is in its hay day south of McMillan and west of Gilbert

1930
The construction of Columbia Parkway is the first major express way built that diverts traffic from Peebles Corner

1931
The Paramount theater is constructed at the corner of East McMillan and Gilbert

1965
The Walnut Hills Area Council is formed by residents, they establish the Victory Neighborhood Services Agency aimed at providing health and welfare services for those in need in the neighborhood.

1973
The Symmes Neighborhood Block Club is established to address concerns of citizens in the deteriorating neighborhood, especially those related to the construction of I 71.

1974
I-71 is extended from Eden Ave to Dana Ave cutting through Walnut Hills

1983
Kroger opens their ‘Centennial’ store in Walnut Hills

2007
The YMCA closes the Williams YMCA branch in East Walnut Hills. The Melrose YMCA in Walnut Hills is kept open after being reviewed for potential closure

2008
Humana constructs new office building in Walnut Hills on the western side of Eden Park bringing 1,200 jobs and a boutique hotel to the site
This section explains socio-economic characteristics of the study area. Characteristics of socio-economic data are analyzed based on the population, age, race, income, housing, and family structure characteristics. The demographic analysis is based on the census tracts 19, 20, 36, 37, and 267 in Cincinnati. It is important to acknowledge the demographic trends occurring in the area surrounding the Walnut Hills Kroger. The makeup of the area around the store impacts the future profitability of the store.

**Population**
The population of this area has been shrinking since the 1970s and is now 7,847 residents, according to the data from the U.S. Census Bureau (1970 - 2010). Compared to the population in 1970 the study area population fell 53% in 2010.

**Age**
The working age population (from 18 to 65 years) is 5,247 (census data, 2010) and is 66.9% of the total population. This number is higher than that of the City of Cincinnati (67.1%). But the absolute number has declined, because of the population decline.

**Race**
In the study area 69.8% of the population is black, 26.2% white, and 4% other races. The census data shows the percentage of white and other races in this area started to increase since 1990 from 22.8% in 1990 to 30.2% in 2010.

**Income**
The median family income has increased dramatically, from $20,915 in 2000 to $40,557 in 2010. However, the Median Family Income in census tract 20 (East Walnut Hills) was $56,513, higher than the Median Family Income in Walnut Hills (census tract 19, 36, 37 and 267). Also, in 2010, there were 33% of families living below the poverty level.

**Housing Occupancy**
Vacant housing has been on the rise since 1990, but the owner occupancy is starting to pick up from 13.2% in 1980 to 18.2% in 2010.

**Single Parents**
According to the census data in 2000, there were 846 single parent families with children under 18 years in this area, and 92% of them with a female head.

**Note:**
In order to obtain the most accurate analysis of Walnut Hills and the areas immediately around the Kroger census tract 20 was included even though it is partially located in East Walnut Hills.
# Census Data 1970 - 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>16,718</td>
<td>11,861</td>
<td>10,546</td>
<td>9,426</td>
<td>7,847</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>9,190.40</td>
<td>6,983.00</td>
<td>6,250.30</td>
<td>5,586.60</td>
<td>4,676.40</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>29.30%</td>
<td>21.70%</td>
<td>22.30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26.20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>70.40%</td>
<td>77.80%</td>
<td>77.10%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>69.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupied</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner Occupied</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter Occupied</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Family Income</td>
<td>$8,317</td>
<td>$10,827</td>
<td>$21,526</td>
<td>$20,915</td>
<td>$40,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>92.4%</td>
<td>87.2%</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poverty</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Poverty Level</td>
<td>24%(814)</td>
<td>32.5%(756)</td>
<td>33.6%(700)</td>
<td>28.9%(511)</td>
<td>33.0% (451)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Single Parent with Children Under 18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Male Head</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Female Head</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total study area: 1.7 sq. miles; including census tracts: 19, 20, 36, 37, 267
At least since 2008, the potential closing of Walnut Hills Kroger has been public information with many newspaper articles, blogs, and other publications written about the subject in recent years. In 2008, a motion was filed by City Council member Laketa Cole that the city’s administration work with the Kroger Company to keep a grocery store in Walnut Hills and that the City provide financial assistance if deemed appropriate. The city subsequently issued a report detailing the issues associated with the store – including insufficient sales per cart and high rent and security costs – leading to the store’s lack of profitability. The report recommended that the city not subsidize a store that isn’t profitable, but identified food deserts as an issue to be addressed in the next comprehensive plan.

While the city decided not to take action, this case, the Walnut Hills neighborhood, and the issue of grocery stores leaving urban neighborhoods in the city at large, have garnered a lot of attention. In 2009, the Niehoff Urban Studio proposed broad recommendations for the neighborhood to promote revitalization. The recommendations included creating a thriving business district around Peebles Corner, creating a market similar to Findlay Market in Kroger’s parking lot, developing office districts near the highway ramps, and developing green industry. While these recommendations seem to create a pie-in-the-sky vision for the neighborhood that is out of reach, a more rooted vision is currently being implemented as the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation is focusing its efforts on business development along the E McMillan corridor, acquiring land and renovating property with the hopes of spurring revitalization. The continued presence of Kroger as an employer and center of activity for the neighborhood is a key part to these revitalization efforts.

Similar efforts have been effectively implemented in the adjacent East Walnut Hills. There has been a resurgence of retail stores in and around the De Sales Crossing development at the corner of Madison and Woodburn (Urban Cincy 2012). These stores are successful in no small part to the influx of affluent residents to the neighborhood. While these new residents have supported the retail stores at De Sales Crossing, Kroger has had much difficulty in attracting them to their Walnut Hills location.

In a Cincinnati Enquirer article from August 5th of this year, the Buy $25 program implemented by the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation is highlighted as a way to attract new customers to the Kroger and hopefully ensure its long-term presence in the neighborhood (Baverman & Bernard-Kuhn 2012). Similar stores have recently closed in Westwood (Baverman 2012) and Roselawn (Baverman 2010) due to a great majority of nearby residents shopping at other groceries including other Kroger locations. Buy $25 is a way for residents to shop, give feedback, and make recommendations for new products. As indicated by the name of the article – “Can They Save This Store?” – the writers question this program’s ability to create enough of an impact to save the store.

Note:
Individual article summaries attached as an Appendix
SITE DESCRIPTION

The Kroger in Walnut Hills has operated at a loss every year since 1985. The fact that the store is still open shows Kroger’s commitment to providing food options to Cincinnati communities. The site design of the Kroger, both on the exterior and interior pose problems for the store and could be one of the reasons that the store has struggled financially. It will be important to address site design issues in the final set of recommendations if the store is to move towards profitability.

The site design of the Walnut Hills Kroger is a major roadblock to profitability for the store. The store is tucked in off of East McMillan and Reading roads behind the historic, but currently vacant Paramount Theater.

The store has two entrances, neither of which are especially visible. The first entrance is off of Reading Road which has a significant amount of pedestrian, car and bus traffic. There is the bus stop on Reading in front of the old theater. However the Kroger is barely visible from the street because its line of sight is blocked by the theater. A potential customer would have to drive down a significant amount of empty parking lot before getting close to the entrance to the Kroger. The second entrance is off of East McMillan (a one way street going east) that requires a sharp turn and then a drive past a number of concrete poles before accessing the main parking lot. The spots closest to the entrance essentially require a U turn after driving past the concrete poles. Neither entrance to the store is well designed and the signage for both is poor.

Loitering goes on outside of the store, mostly on the sidewalk near E McMillan. This frequent loitering contributes to consumers’ concerns about safety (valid or invalid, those concerns exist and are a deterrent). The loitering seems to happen at all hours that the store is open from our limited number of observations. The parking lot has some litter in it, although not significantly more than some other profitable stores such as Norwood or Spring Grove. The store does not have any exterior seasonal displays on the concourse near the entrance. There are signs that ask for consumers to keep the store clean and that request no loitering posted on the exterior of the store.

The interior of the store is surprisingly clean and well organized. Apparently the product selection, freshness and display has improved since the new manager and Buy 25 initiative have started. However the product selection does impact consumers who wish to make large comprehensive shopping trips to the store but might not be able to find all of the items that they desire. Many of the displays and the shelving looks older than in some of the other Kroger stores in Cincinnati. Many of the featured products in the end caps and displays are Kroger brand products that are often displayed in the boxes/packages in which they were shipped. That display method seems to diverge from some of the other Kroger stores in Cincinnati.
ACCESS TO FOOD IN WALNUT HILLS

Analysis of Convenience Stores

Since 2008, there is a growing concern about the Walnut Hills Kroger shutting down. Despite some shortcomings with the variety of food selection, the store is an asset to the neighborhood providing many affordable and healthy food choices when compared to other food retailers in the neighborhood. Without this Kroger, the other food retailers in the neighborhood would be a likely option for many residents. In order to analyze the ability of these food retailers to provide healthy food options, we executed field work observations to identify what types of food they carried.

A listing of food retailers in the neighborhood was provided by Sagar Shah, doctoral candidate in the School of Planning at the University of Cincinnati. For our purposes we examined food retailers with the North American Industry Classification System classes of: 1) supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores, 2) convenience stores, and 3) other gasoline stations. For our purposes, we consider all of the observed food retailers to be convenience stores. Through our observation, we found the list to be incomplete and inaccurate due to the nature of convenience stores as quick to open and quick to close. However, we did observe six of the convenience stores in the neighborhood for food selection and whether they accepted EBT (food stamps).

As seen in the table, five out of the six observed convenience stores accept EBT, indicating that people with low-income are able to purchase food at these stores. Kroger also accepts EBT. The real question here lies in the food available at these convenience stores. Observations indicate that only 3 stores offer more than just snacks, drinks, non-perishable food items, and household goods. CVS stocked milk; Dairy Market stocked bread, milk, and eggs; and Dollar Mall stocked all of that as well as some meats and deli items.

In comparison with a full-service grocery store such as Kroger, the selection at the convenience stores was low. For example, at the Dollar Mall, they sold only 1-2 types each of meats, deli items, bread, milk, and eggs. So while a few of the
stores carried grocery items above typical convenience store goods, the selection was lacking. Furthermore, none of the observed convenience stores offered produce of any kind.

If the Walnut Hills Kroger were to shut down, the options for food within the neighborhood are not adequate in maintaining access to healthy and affordable food.

**Analysis of Transportation Options to Nearby Grocery Stores**

Should the Walnut Hills Kroger close, residents of the neighborhood would preserve an acceptable level of access to healthy and affordable food through driving and taking Metro to nearby groceries. There are 4 Kroger grocery stores within 4 miles of the Walnut Hills Kroger – in Over the Rhine, Corryville, Norwood, and Hyde Park. Due to proximity, ease of transportation options, and attractiveness of the stores, we identified the Corryville, Norwood, and Hyde Park Krogers as the most likely stores for residents of Walnut Hills.

**map of vehicle accessibility**

The American Community Survey (2005-2009) estimated that 61.5% of residents in Walnut Hills have access to a vehicle. Therefore, all of these residents also have access to other grocery store options in the area including the three selected stores. However, 38.5% of residents do not have access to a vehicle, including 62.7% in census tract 37 (see Appendix 2 – Vehicle Access map). Therefore, access to public transportation in Walnut Hills is critical to examining access to food.

As a preliminary analysis of accessibility to public transportation, we analyzed the walkability to bus stops allow bus routes that go through Walnut Hills and connect to either the Corryville, Norwood, or Hyde Park Krogers. We used straight line distances of ¼ mile and ½ mile to estimate walkability. Only a few small areas are outside of the ¼ mile walkability range to bus stops along routes 1, 4, 11, 24, and 31 (see Appendix 2 – Transit Access map). Therefore, almost all of Walnut Hills is within a walkable distance of a transit stop that goes to a nearby grocery store.

In a 2008 study, Jack Goodman found that the weekday peak period for grocery shopping was from 3:00pm to 6:00pm and the weekend peak period was from 10:00am to 2:00pm. To analyze transit accessibility further, we examined the targeted bus route schedules during these times, evaluating route frequency and travel time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Route(s)</th>
<th>Route Frequency</th>
<th>Route Frequency</th>
<th>Travel Time</th>
<th>Distance from Bus Stop to Destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WH Peebles Corner</td>
<td>Hyde Park Kroger</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>22 min</td>
<td>0.5 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WH Peebles Corner</td>
<td>Hyde Park Kroger</td>
<td>11 to 51</td>
<td>36 min</td>
<td>60 min</td>
<td>28 min*</td>
<td>0.1 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WH Peebles Corner</td>
<td>Norwood Kroger</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12 min</td>
<td>22 min</td>
<td>19 min</td>
<td>0.1 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WH Peebles Corner</td>
<td>Corryville Kroger</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16 min</td>
<td>40 min</td>
<td>8 min</td>
<td>0.1 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WH Park &amp; McMillen</td>
<td>Corryville Kroger</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>60 min</td>
<td>10 min</td>
<td>0 mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WH MLK &amp; Gilbert</td>
<td>Corryville Kroger</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>48 min</td>
<td>13 min</td>
<td>0 mi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* weekday peak: 3pm-9pm  
** Saturday peak: 10am-2pm  
*** Eric Ave-Hyde Park Route

As the table indicates, five of the six routes run at least every 30 minutes on weekdays while only two of the routes run that often on Saturdays. Travel times are all under 30 minutes. Due to greater frequency, the bus routes are more accessible on weekdays. However, with all routes running at least every 60 minutes on Saturdays, acceptable accessibility is still maintained. Nonetheless, having to travel outside of the neighborhood to go to the grocery will inevitably take more time for residents than going to the Walnut Hills Kroger.

Our analysis of transportation accessibility to nearby stores demonstrates that if the Walnut Hills Kroger closes, residents will maintain access to healthy and affordable food through neighborhood convenience stores (mostly for non-perishable goods) but mainly through driving and taking Metro to nearby Krogers in Corryville, Norwood, and Hyde Park. However, this additional necessary transportation would cost residents more money in gas and bus fare and more time travelling to and from the grocery store.

Furthermore, residents who are unable to take public transportation, such as people with disabilities, people unable to pay bus fare, and others unable to access the bus system, should also be considered. With no grocery store in Walnut Hills, this would create another barrier to these residents accessing affordable and healthy food.
SAFETY ANALYSIS OF THE WALNUT HILLS KROGER

Introduction

The idea of being safe does not just apply to areas in which people desire to live, it also applies to areas where people choose to work or spend their leisure time. Neighborhoods that experience blight and decline over time tend to generate a fear of crime and a sense of lack of safety. Blighted neighborhood and crime directly correlate with one another causing neighborhoods businesses to experience lower patronage. Physical design also has a pivotal role in crime prevention. Research shows that building design affects whether or not criminals decide to commit a crime. Criminals are more concerned with the risk of being caught than by the rewards they might gain if they commit a crime. So the design of the built environment can help to prevent crime.

Walnut Hills has a long history of both building design followed by blight and decline. Since its bustling days of the first half of the 20th century, Walnut Hills has lost many of its buildings, which are rich in architectural history along with population, and has seen a significant increase in crime and blight. The changes to the neighborhood overtime have changed people’s perception of the neighborhood, thus stigmatizing local businesses in Walnut Hills. Assessing the Central Business District along with the area surrounding the Kroger is important to the redevelopment that is occurring and the changes that that need to occur to bring people back to the neighborhood Kroger.

Physical Design and Crime

As stated earlier, physical design has the ability prevent crimes. There is a set of design principals called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design that discuss what is needed in a building design in order to prevent crime from happening. The four principals of design are Natural Surveillance, Natural Access Control, Territorial Reinforcement, and Maintenance. While assessing the Kroger location we have noticed that several changes could be made in terms of design principals to prevent crime and bring confidence to patrons of the grocery store.

The Walnut Hills Kroger, located less than a mile from the Historical Landmark of Peeble’s Corner, is located to the east of the business district. Many of the buildings around the Walnut Hills Kroger are empty. The streets around the store are scattered with litter and loiterers and peddlers. The store has two points of entry; both of which have a lack of signage and can be confusing to any customer that is unfamiliar with the grocery store. Parking at the store can be a difficult task at times because of the narrow spaces that seem to comfortably accommodate at best the average size sedan. At night, the parking lot is dimly lit as well as the entrances and exits of the parking lot. The building itself has a better physical upkeep than the lot in which it sits on. The front of the Kroger lacks windows but the inside of the store has sufficient lighting.
Violent crimes in Walnut Hills

The FBI defines violent crimes as a crime against a person in which force is used or threatened to be used. Several criminal acts fall under the category of violent crimes. These are: Homicide, Completed and attempted rape, Sexual assault, Robbery, Simple assault, Kidnapping, Intimidation, Illegal abortion, Extortion, Cruelty towards child or spouse, and Assault with a vehicle.

The Trend

The trend of violent crime in Cincinnati is currently on a steady decline. The statistics on violent crimes citywide and Walnut Hills correlated with one another for the first three years. Both the city and the neighborhood saw a peak in violent crimes in 2008. After the peak, the number of violent crimes reported each year in Cincinnati decreased whereas the number of reported violent crimes increased each year in Walnut Hills after a significant drop in crime in 2009.

Of all the violent crimes reported in Walnut Hills between 2005 and 2011, 30 percent of the crimes occurred on the street, 29 percent of the crimes occurred in multi-family housing units, and 12 percent occurring in parking lots. Taking the locations of reported violent crimes into consideration, one can make the assumption that people may be afraid to visit, shop, or live in the Walnut Hills neighborhood because of fear of crime. Fear of crime refers to people being fearful of becoming a victim of a crime based on perception of an area. Since most of Walnut Hills’s violent crime occurred in the open, the local media has covered a lot of the criminal activity.
In October of 2011 the Cincinnati Police and SWAT Team raided a small convenience store called Frog Da Great’s located on the 700 block of East McMillan—located just one block away from the Walnut Hills Business District. The raid was a result of a seven month planning process to rid the neighborhood of gang activity that attributed to a spike in violent crimes in the neighborhood. As a result of the raid, eight arrests were made, three handguns, an unnamed amount of assorted drugs, along with ten thousand dollars in cash was confiscated (Price). Although the raid occurred in other places, the news mainly focused on the location in Walnut Hills leaving many to assume that it was the hotspot for most of the criminal and gang activity thus further stigmatizing the neighborhood.

The second location in which crimes were reported the most was in multi-family housing due to its large number of apartment complexes located within the neighborhood. Due to the location of the reported crime, one can assume that most of the crimes occurring in the multi-family housing is occurring in the victim’s home. This leads one to believe that a portion of these crimes are crimes occurring within the home. The US Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, over thirty percent of violent crimes reported to the police in the United States are committed by a family member (Drouse, Wolf Harlow and Lagan).

The four most common types of violent crimes reported during the six-year span were Felony Larceny-Theft, Simple Assault, Criminal Damaging, and knowingly committing an act of Domestic Violence. These crimes accounted for exactly 51 percent of the total violent crimes reported. Of the 51 percent, 44 percent of the most common violent crimes reported can happen to a person unknown to the offender. This fact may also be a major factor to the idea of fear of crime that may keep people away from the neighborhood.

**Conclusion**

Crime and the fear of being victimized is a major concern for visiting the Walnut Hills Kroger. Not only does the building design and blight cause for concern but violent crimes occurring in public space also creates a fear of crime causing people to be afraid to visit the area. The Walnut Hills Kroger is stigmatized by the blight in the area. The interior of the store is drastically different from the exterior and the surrounding area. To change the perception of this store, we will explore several types of site design that will incorporate the four principals of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design. Changing the exterior of the store and its surrounding area may not immediately change the perception of crime and blight for the neighborhood as a whole, but it has the ability to change the negative perception that people may have about the store and shop there more often.
In the case of the Walnut Hills Kroger, there are many interested parties that have a stake in and impact decisions about the future of the grocery. Given that the presence of a grocery is a tremendous asset to neighborhood, neighborhood-based groups like the Walnut Hills Area Council, Walnut Hills Business Association, and Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation are interested in keeping the store in the neighborhood indefinitely. Naturally, the residents of the neighborhood are also key actors in this case as they are the primary customers of Kroger and directly benefit from its presence in their neighborhood. Kroger is also a key stakeholder. The company’s interest is in being financially feasible but also in maintaining a broad presence throughout the Cincinnati metropolitan area. Here are the stakeholders along with brief descriptions and key actors in each group:

**Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation** – Kevin Wright, Executive Director & Andrew Stahlke

A small community development corporation focused on comprehensive redevelopment of the Walnut Hills neighborhood, with a particular focus on the redevelopment of the business district surrounding Peebles Corner along E McMillan. This business district includes Kroger.

**Walnut Hills Area Council** – Clarence Taylor, President

This neighborhood group serves as the voice for the community and comprises of 9 officers. Their interest is in serving the best interests of the residents of the neighborhood.

Walnut Hills Business Association – Tim MacConnell, Chair A group of neighborhood business leaders with the goal of creating a thriving business community.

**Kroger** – Mike Graves, Manager

This is a large urban grocery store that has reportedly been losing money nearly every month since it opened in 1983. Kroger leases the building and the surrounding parking lot. Because of this lack of physical investment in property, the company does not have a lot of incentive to stay in this building. From observations and anecdotal evidence, Kroger seems to mainly serve low-income and long-time residents of the area.
Kroge – Brendon Cull, Government Relations

Brendon Cull is the Government Relations head for the Kroger Company. He used to work for Mayor Charlie Luken and should have valuable insight into the value of the store to the neighborhood and how Kroger’s corporate decision makers view this issue.

Residents of Walnut Hills

The residents of Walnut Hills are predominantly African American and low-income. In the south part of the neighborhood, there is a significantly higher percentage of whites; this area also has a significantly higher median income. Through observations and anecdotal evidence, the low-income residents tend to shop at the neighborhood Kroger while the higher-income residents (including residents from the nearby East Walnut Hills) tend to shop for groceries elsewhere.

Walnut Hills Food Access Team

We are a group of University of Cincinnati Masters of Community Planning students in the Plan-Making Workshop course. Our purpose is to assist the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation in developing a plan for the future of Kroger in the neighborhood.
II THE PЛIGHT OF SUSTAINING FOOD OPTIONS IN URBAN AREAS

Section II
CHAPITERS
FOOD DESERTS
DESCRIPTIONS OF OTHER LOCAL GROCERY STORES
URBAN GROCERY CASE STUDIES
General Definitions

The definition of a food desert varies across academic, institutional, and local perspectives. Primarily, food deserts are broadly defined by a lack of food access. PolicyLink, a national research and action institute, defines food access as areas where, nutritious, affordable, and high quality food is available; supermarkets are accessible, and transportation is adequate. Additionally, PolicyLink explains that when food access is equitable in communities, residents are at lower risk for obesity and other diet-related chronic diseases (PolicyLink).

General definitions of food deserts are derived in this report from two federal agencies, and one definition from academic literature. These definitions were chosen based on their consistencies, and general scope. The United States Department of Agriculture defines food deserts as, “areas where people have limited access to a variety of healthy and affordable food” (Dutko, Ver Ploeg and Farrigan). This broad definition has been applied by the USDA to map the location of food deserts throughout US Census tracts. In August 2012, the USDA’s Economic Research Service, “identified approximately 6,500 food desert tracts in the United States based on 2000 Census and 2006 data on locations of supermarkets, supercenters, and large grocery stores” (Dutko, Ver Ploeg and Farrigan). By locating food deserts, the USDA additionally has illustrated common socioeconomic and demographic characteristics that, “distinguish food desert tracts from other low-income tracts.” These characteristics are not limited to urban locations, but are also consistent with rural food deserts. Principally, poorer areas are more prone to be food deserts, “but other factors, such as vehicle availability and use of public transportation” are attributed to identifying food deserts (Dutko, Ver Ploeg and Farrigan). Further, poorer areas are more likely to be food deserts regardless of being urban or rural locations. Moreover, when a higher percentage of minority residents inhabit a particular area, the likelihood of the existence of a food desert increases (Dutko, Ver Ploeg and Farrigan). The USDA definition is a useful all-encompassing definition, but must be compared to other general definitions, and explored in a local context.

Another federal agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has defined food deserts in a similar manner as the USDA: Food deserts are areas that lack access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). The CDC definition is based on similar concepts as the USDA definition, but defines in the context of food deserts’ correlation to overall public health. Common themes emerge between the CDC and USDA definitions: access, affordability, and health. Understanding that the CDC and USDA are both federal agencies, consistencies between their definitions are not surprising, and accommodate different audiences. Lastly, the CDC cites the USDA throughout their website’s feature on food deserts, so it is apparent that the two definitions are analogous.
While reviewing literature, an article by Branden Born in the Journal of Urbanism has also classified food deserts in a similar manner as the two federal agencies. In the article entitled, “Beyond Bodegas: Affordable Groceries Through an Innovative Store Format,” food deserts are defined as, “places constrained by topography, inconvenient transportation routes, and long distances to grocery stores” (Born). This definition is related to the USDA definition due to the association of food accessibility and transportation. However, Born’s definition does not mention the other common themes of affordability, freshness, and nutrition value listed by the USDA and CDC.

Acknowledging that different agencies, or individuals, uniquely define food deserts, it must be understood that the general concept of food deserts is related to the fundamental themes mention above. Affordability, quality (freshness), nutritional value, and physical accessibility (transportation) of food are the key components to assessing if an area is a food desert. However, these broad-based definitions should be further investigated in a local context. General definitions may slight the true existence of a food desert if simply proximity to a grocery store is mapped. Further investigation in a local context goes beyond the general assumptions that full-service grocery stores meet all the above mentioned themes of sufficient food access.

Local Definitions

Of the 52 neighborhoods in Cincinnati, there are currently eight neighborhoods that are considered a food desert as it is defined by the USDA. Although each of these neighborhoods met the general USDA definition, each neighborhood has a unique challenge with food access. The Cincinnati neighborhoods that have been certified as a food desert are Avondale, Winton Hills, Bond Hill, Evanston, Camp Washington, South Fairmount, and the West End. Several of these neighborhoods weren’t always a food desert. Avondale and Bond Hill once had Kroger stores located in their communities. Since the closing of these stores Bond Hill and Avondale residents, like the other neighborhoods listed above, are now traveling outside of their communities to access a grocery store.

One of the major issues with food access is transportation. Each of the neighborhoods that are classified as a food desert has census tracts that are mostly low-income families and elderly people who are mostly reliant on public transportation. In a 2011 article in the Cincinnati Enquirer, reporter Kristy Ramsey told the story of a father named Owen Smith who took a seven mile round trip on a bicycle with a duffel bag from the neighborhood of Avondale to St. Bernard to purchase fresh produce for his children. Owens, who rode his bicycle to get fresh produce regardless of the inclement weather, carried his duffel bag that could weigh up to 75 pounds to provide his children with fresh produce(Ramsey).
Like other residents of these neighborhoods, access to viable transportation for grocery shopping poses as a problem. Without depending on family and friends or expensive cab rides, many of the residents cannot carry groceries on public transportation. For convenience, residents of local food deserts often rely on fast food chains and convenience stores. Heavily relying on fast food restaurants and convenience stores can have negative effects on people’s health. Although fast food restaurants offer healthier options, the majority of their menus consist of sugary and high fat foods. Convenience stores located in these neighborhoods rarely sell a vast selection of fresh produce. Most of these stores offer snacks, soda, candy and the occasional canned food item. Overall, relying on non-nutritious methods of eating can lead to several diseases such as diabetes and obesity. Having access to fresh produce can significantly improve one’s health. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, a healthy diet has many benefits especially for children. Fresh fruits and vegetables give children the necessary vitamins and nutrients to concentrate in school and most importantly grow and combat illnesses (Fruits & Vegetables Galore: Helping Kids Eat More).

If the Walnut Hills Kroger is closed, it will suffer a similar fate as the other neighborhoods without a grocery store. Like the other neighborhoods, Walnut Hills has a large population of elderly residents and single parent households. Although the nearest Kroger is located less than three miles away in Corryville, the Walnut Hills Kroger serves a specific neighborhood in which many of its residents walk to get groceries. If this Kroger closes and no other grocer locates in this space, there is concern as to how residents would transport food from the grocery store to their home. Relying on public transportation will be a difficult task for the elderly population and parents with children. The Walnut Hills Kroger location is valuable to the community. Residents rely on the closeness of the location to access their food without the trouble of transportation. This neighborhood store is not only important to the very fabric of the neighborhood, it is also important to the development of a healthier community.
General definitions Notes:

Places constrained by topography, inconvenient transportation routes, and long distances to grocery stores (Born).

USDA defines food deserts as, “areas where people have limited access to a variety of healthy and affordable food” (Dutko, Ver Ploeg and Farrigan). In August 2012, the USDA’s Economic Research Service, “identified approximately 6,500 food desert tracts in the United States based on 2000 Census and 2006 data on locations of supermarkets, supercenters, and large grocery stores” (Dutko, Ver Ploeg and Farrigan).

Characteristics (socioeconomic and demographic) that distinguish food desert tracts from other low-income tracts:

• Areas with higher levels of poverty are more likely to be food deserts, but for other factors, such as vehicle availability and use of public transportation, the association with food desert status varies across very dense urban areas, less dense urban areas, and rural areas.
• Areas with higher poverty rates are more likely to be food deserts regardless of rural or urban designation. This result is especially true in very dense urban areas where other population characteristics such as racial composition and unemployment rates are not predictors of food desert status because they tend to be similar across tracts.
• In all but very dense urban areas, the higher the percentage of minority population, the more likely the area is to be a food desert.
• Residents in the Northeast are less likely to live far from a store than their counterparts in other regions of the country with similar income levels.
• Rural areas experiencing population growth are less likely to be food deserts.

CDC: Food Deserts Explained

“Food deserts are areas that lack access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lowfat milk, and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
9

DESCRIPTIONS OF OTHER LOCAL GROCERY STORES

Kroger is currently renovating and expanding their store in Corryville. Many believe that the Corryville store renovation is the final change that Kroger needed to make to close the unprofitable Walnut Hills store. Kroger operates a number of stores within the City of Cincinnati that are profitable in neighborhoods not unlike Walnut Hills. What are the differences between those stores and the Walnut Hills store that might influence their success? Below are a few descriptions of some Kroger stores in close proximity to the Walnut Hills location. These were written up after site visits to each store.

Hyde Park Kroger

It is a reasonable assumption that this store is where a significant amount of Walnut Hills Kroger potential shoppers make their larger grocery purchases. The store is the largest Kroger in the City of Cincinnati and not only has an extremely comprehensive selection of products but has other amenities such as a bakery, bank, pharmacy/health clinic, and liquor store. The store has an attractive cart placement area with historical photographs of Hyde Park. There are always seasonal displays around both entrances to the store and the parking lot is devoid of loitering. The store is on a bus line. The bus stop is a decent distance (approximately 100 yards) from the store which sometimes leads to grocery carts being left near the bus stop at the edge of the parking lot.

Over-the-Rhine Kroger

An extremely small store in the heart of some of Cincinnati’s most dense urban streetscape. The store is offset from the road and looks awkward amongst the 19th century buildings surrounding it. The product selection is less than the Walnut Hills Kroger but that could largely be due to the size of the store. Much like the Walnut Hills location many of the featured products seem to be Kroger Brand. The location has a significant amount of loitering and trash in and around the parking lot. When initially attempting to go to the OTR Kroger it was closed at 6:15 PM on a Sunday.

Norwood Kroger

The Norwood Kroger is another location relatively close to Walnut Hills that could potentially be taking business away from the Walnut Hills Kroger. It was redone in 2008 and is much larger than the Walnut Hills Kroger. There are displays outside of the store and a similar display of historical photographs near the cart pick up. There is some litter in the lot but the store does have numerous pedestrian and car entrances. There is a bus stop in front of the store which connects to Walnut Hills (the #4).
Spring Grove Kroger (near Winton Hills, Northside and Clifton)

Similar in size to the Norwood Kroger the Spring Grove Kroger is a slightly older store. It is in between a few larger neighborhoods in the City and also is in close proximity to I 75. The parking lot is large but had more litter in it than expected. The store layout is somewhat different than the Walnut Hills, Norwood or Hyde Park Kroger stores featuring larger open spaces with displays.
Introduction

The scarcity of fresh foods and urban grocery stores in low-income, urban neighborhoods in America is a mounting concern. Considering the relatively inelastic demand for food, coupled with the idea of a “grocery gap” has led to critical investigation of the challenges of investing in urban groceries (Bom). In these neighborhoods, families tend to pay more for food proportionate to their income, and their communities tend to have less (or absence of) grocery stores. When stores exist, they are often smaller in square footage—an issue known as the “grocery gap” (Bom).

Smaller, grocery stores may therefore be the principal option for fresh food accessibility in urban neighborhoods. Urban grocery models, while subjective in definition, are generally under 20,000 square feet (Newberg). The Urban Land Institute additionally describes urban grocery models as having an over 40-percent reduction in parking spaces compared to suburban models. For example, less than 3 parking spaces are constructed per 1,000 square feet of retail space (an average of 2.3 spaces per 1,000 square feet) (Newberg). Denser parking lots create more walkable, urban spaces.

While there is an increasing trend to develop grocery stores within mixed-use developments, older, dilapidated groceries in urban neighborhoods are becoming threatened by disinvestment. The disinvestment of urban grocery stores can be attributed to, “concerns related to the attractiveness of markets, costs associated with urban store operation, and regulatory contexts” (Pthukuchi). Existing stores, such as the case of the Walnut Hills Kroger, face market pressures to shut down in addition to a lack of investment. The sustainability of the Walnut Hills Kroger is unlikely if a do-nothing approach is taken. An investigation of grassroots methods to sustain the store, including successful urban grocery examples is necessary. Additionally, financing mechanisms and an examination of stores which have faced similar situations may give guidance to how to approach creating a plan for the store’s future.

Several examples of successful urban grocers can be found throughout the United States, and are discussed in this report. These examples include: Brown’s Family ShopRite Stores, The Honeybee Market, and The Bull City Urban Market. Financing mechanisms discussed which may provide direction to reverse the effects of disinvestment in the Walnut Hills Kroger, include: the Fresh Food Financing Imitative and the New Jersey Urban Transit Hub Tax Credit Program. Lastly, two former and future urban grocery stores are studied to help understand alternative consequences that may evolve if Walnut Hills Kroger closes and/or is razed for a new urban grocery development.
Notable Examples

Brown’s Family ShopRite Stores—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Jeffrey Brown, Chief Executive Office of Brown’s Superstores, and his non-profit UpLift Solutions, Inc. has developed an innovative strategy to revitalize urban grocery stores in American cities. Ten Brown’s Family ShopRite Stores are located in the City of Philadelphia, which emphasize “entrepreneurial solutions” to the food access problem facing urban communities (UpLift Solutions, Inc., 2012). Brown’s focus is centered on staff development and training in his Brown’s Family ShopRite stores. According to UpLift Solutions, a particular understanding of staff commute times to work (a predictor of punctuality), customer service training, and overall workforce development are the underpinnings to a successful urban grocer. This customer-centric approach to an urban grocery model is not limited to Brown’s Family ShopRite’s staff. Within any Brown’s Family ShopRite store, it is apparent that attention to the neighborhood demographic is extremely evident.

Customer-centrality can also be seen in Brown’s Family Brown’s Family ShopRite product mix and display. For example, in Brown’s Family ShopRite stores, a customer can easily locate ethnic products in specific departments. Examples of these unique departments include: Jamaican, Halal, and African foods. Jeffrey Brown’s team narrows down specific department and product types for each store on an individual basis. Neighborhood surveys are conducted to gain a thorough understanding of his core customers’ grocery needs.

Honeybee Market—Detroit, Michigan

Detroit Michigan presents a unique environment for the food retail industry. According to Assignment Detroit, there is not a single grocery chain store within city limits (Harrison). Instead, the variety of food retailers in Detroit stem from independent grocers who adequately provide basic foodstuffs that are easily accessible by pedestrians or via public transportation.

While groceries in Detroit are accessible, the city has had problem enticing larger retail chain grocers. According to a 2007 study conducted by Social Compact, a grocery void exists and Detroit, “could support 600,000 to one million additional square feet of grocery retail space” (Harrison). Assignment Detroit explains that Detroit’s local government is taking an active role to sustain its independent grocers, and provide incentives. One particular market, Honey Bee Market, has been in operation since 1965, and has recently expanded from 4,000 to 15,000 square feet (Harrison). The store expansion has led to higher property taxes, and Honeybee is currently working with the City of Detroit to obtain tax abatements.
The success of Honeybee Market can be credited to its customer-centric focus, similar to the model described by Brown’s Family ShopRite stores. Specifically, Honeybee focuses on its southwest side neighborhood, which has a significant Latino population. The Latino community surrounding Honeybee has commanded a large number of Latino products in the store, and according to co-owner Kenneth Koehler the store’s “longevity can be attributed to selling products that cater to this population” (Harrison). A high level of customer understanding is a quality which has allowed independent grocers to thrive in Detroit, and maintained an adequate amount of fresh food to its communities.

The Bull City Urban Market—Durham, North Carolina

Durham, North Carolina is often cited as a food-desert because of its sparse accessibility to fresh foods and produce (Koonce, 2012). However, the non-profit, Feed My Sheep, serves a diverse client base of families by providing options for fresh food access and technical assistance such as applying for food stamps and other governmental assistance. Different forms of assistance include: education and job retraining, a free kids supermarket, money orders, EBT, and Moneygram (Feed My Sheep, 2012). Feed My Sheep’s primary outlet of assistance is the Bull City Urban Market. According to Feed My Sheep, the Bull City Urban Market “is a combination Farmers’ Market and grocery store in which local farmers will provide fresh vegetables” (Feed My Sheep, 2012). In the future, Feed My Sheep plans to extend their services to providing housing, a cultural arts center, and a small business incubator.

Funding Mechanisms

Fresh Food Financing Initiative

A number of economic incentives have become available to finance new urban groceries. In particular, the Fresh Food Financing Initiative is a grant and loan program that is available to developers interested in developing urban groceries in underserved areas in Pennsylvania. This $85 million dollar public-private partnership “managed by The Reinvestment Fund, in partnership with The Food Trust and the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition, and has become a model for communities nationwide committed to combating obesity and improving food access” (The Food Trust, 2012). In total, this funding mechanism has established 88 fresh food retail projects in Pennsylvania that did not exist before, leveraging food accessibility to more than 500,000 residents, and providing over 5,000 jobs.
New Jersey Urban Transit Hub Tax Credit Program

The New Jersey Urban Transit Hub Tax Credit Program provides tax credits up to 100% of the total Capital investment provided by developers and owners in any of New Jersey’s nine designated transit hubs. It’s larger purpose to spur transit-oriented development and create walkable, urban communities. The program is administered by the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, a pseudo-governmental economic development agency. In Camden, New Jersey, the Haddon Avenue Transit Village Project has secured a letter of intent from the Fresh Grocer to develop a store in this particular transit hub site (New Jersey Economic Development Authority). According to the non-profit, New Jersey Future, the program is “aligning state incentives with the market opportunities afforded by transit-oriented development” (Strum). New Jersey Future also commends the program for its innovative land-use strategy and promotion of transit-oriented development geared towards Millennials and retirees. More recently, an increase to the tax credit cap by $250 million has allowed the State of New Jersey to continue this strategic development initiative.

Neighborhoods with Similar Situations

Rose Lawn Kroger, Cincinnati Ohio

In 2010, Kroger’s Roselawn store experienced a similar set of circumstances as the Walnut Hills Kroger, eventually resulting in its closure. Roselawn is a neighborhood in northeast Cincinnati, adjacent to the neighborhoods of Bond Hill, Hartwell, and Carthage. The Roselawn neighborhood store expanded 22,000 square feet, and its lease ended in July of 2010. A WCPO.com article from April 28, 2010 cites several known reason why this Kroger was closed, based on testimony from Lynn Marmer, group vice president for Corporate Communications, during that week’s Cincinnati City Council’s Quality of Life Committee. Primarily, the square footage in the Roselawn store underserved the company’s “current business model” (WCPO.com). Secondly, Kroger wanted to relocate the 87 Roselawn employees to other stores prior to the summer. Additionally, in 2009 the store lost over $1 million, and the newly renovated Norwood Kroger in Surrey Square had been undermining customer traffic to the smaller store. However, the article further asserts that City Council decision to demolish a large multi-family apartment complex in 2003 “pursued a policy of de-densification in that community which undermined the consumer base, not just for Kroger, but for any other retailer in the Bond Hill and Roselawn area” (WCPO.com, 2010). This affirmation was stated by Vice-Mayor Roxann Qualls, and opened a broader discussion about neighborhood grocery stores within the City limits.

Lynn Marmer also explained that when their business model changed, Kroger focused
its attention on variety and product selection, but also quantity and broader service options. However, Marmer also stated that when their business model changed, Kroger continued to operate smaller, urban stores to see if they would adapt to the change. Unfortunately, Roselawn presumably was not able to adapt, leading to a $1 million loss and also its closure. To mitigate the impact of the closure for customers who exclusively shopped at the Roselawn store, Kroger collaborated directly with Cincinnati Metro to distribute bus tokens to shoppers who presented proof of purchase above ten dollars (Baverman). Transportation to reach destinations providing fresh foods is of primary importance to lower income and senior Roselawn residents.

Councilmember Cecil Thomas has referenced the Walnut Hills Kroger in comparison to the Roselawn store. At the time of Roselawn’s closure in 2010, Thomas questioned the closure of the Walnut Hills store. WCPO stated at the time of the article, Kroger executives had no plans of closing the Walnut Hills store.

**Hill District Shop ‘n Save, Pittsburgh, PA**

In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Hill District neighborhood is adjacent to the Central Business District and Oakland neighborhoods. This particular neighborhood represents the negative effects of the 1950’s Urban Renewal programs. Residential homes were demolished, and replaced with retail and office structures. Additional space had been carved out to accommodate the expansion of several interstate and local highways. For years following Urban Renewal, the neighborhood became heavily populated by African-Americans and immigrants. With a scattered residential population, and high commercial vacancies, the Hill District neighborhood deteriorated. Most notably, the Hill District does not currently contain a full-service grocery store, and has been often termed a “food desert” (Williams).

An attempt to leverage funding, a retail grocery tenant, and City-wide support for a Hill District neighborhood grocery store has seen plenty of hurdles since its original proposal in 2008 (Williams). A public-private partnership between the City’s Urban Redevelopment Authority, Hill House Economic Development Association, the Pittsburgh Penguins National Hockey League team, Rivers Casino, and grocer Shop ‘n Save has leveraged nearly $12 million dollars in financing, but still requires a gap of about four million dollars to fully finance the project. The proposed Shop ‘n Save is slated to open in the spring of 2013, and the store will measure nearly 30,000 square feet with an additional 3,000 square feet in supplementary retail space (Williams). Community backing for the grocery has been evident, with several letters of support from the Hill District community council, Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, the Penguins, and Hill District and City of Pittsburgh residents. Demand for an urban grocery store in the Hill District is obvious due to the neighborhood’s proximity to the Consol Energy
Center, home of the Pittsburgh Penguins, and uptown’s overall Strategic Plan centered on walkability and overall revitalization. The Hill District urban grocery project has seen multiple delays of its construction date and changes in perspective tenants, finally resulting in Shop ‘n Save. The main issue was not of community support, but the secured financing mentioned above. Without financing in place, construction cannot initiate. The risk of absent financing turned away prior prospective grocery tenants including Giant Eagle, ALDI’s, and Kuhn’s. Therefore, in this specific case example, the underlying issue was not of the necessity of the grocer, but of securing a tenant. This example illustrates the risk grocers must undertake to support an urban grocery store, and the amount of underwriting and persuading communities must engage in order to supply fresh foods (Jones).

Conclusions

A number of obstacles are apparent to maintain and develop urban grocery models, especially in lower-income neighborhoods. Local governments and public-private partnerships have come up with creative solutions and alternatives to guarantee fresh food options in American communities. Brown’s Family ShopRite stores affirms the idea that staff training and a focus on customer service is at the core of a successful business model. Additionally, non-chain urban groceries and convenience stores are also capable of providing adequate amounts of fresh foods in low-income areas. This success is modeled in markets such as the Honey Bee Market in Detroit Michigan—an area completely absent of large chain food retailers. Creative loan programs such as Pennsylvania’s Fresh Food Financing Initiative and New Jersey’s unique Urban Transit Hub Tax Credit program uniquely leverage public and private funds to secure grocery developments in their respective states. Lastly, other Cincinnati neighborhoods and cities have experienced similar issues currently facing the Walnut Hills neighborhood. Therefore, communities that want to support a neighborhood grocery store must extensively research and understand their neighborhood: the people, the economic climate, and the its trajectory in order to accurately assess the feasibility of either maintaining or developing a store. When the research eludes to a situation where a full-service grocer is needed, developers, community leaders, and residents must be resilient and seek out innovative measures to secure financing and tenants. Even once the development details are in place, management must work continuously to promote an environment where customers’ needs are met and adequate product selection and quality is maintained. These above mentioned measures are necessary to successfully operate an urban grocery, and are illustrated through the examples discussed.
Walnut Hills Food Access Team – Work Plan

Mission

The purpose of the Walnut Hills Food Access Team is to assist the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation in developing a viable plan to ensure access to affordable and healthy food for residents based on the future of their neighborhood Kroger.

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<th>Goals</th>
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| Assess the physical, social, and economic factors that impact the feasibility of the Kroger in Walnut Hills. | 1. Assess issues with the current site layout and design.  
  2. Identify redevelopment efforts in the surrounding area.  
  3. Solicit feedback from residents of the target area about their grocery shopping habits.  
  4. Analyze customer service strategy through interviews with Kroger manager & staff.  
  5. Compare WH Kroger’s quality of groceries (produce, organic/natural foods availability, & sell-by dates) to other area groceries | 1. Sept 10 – Oct 10  
  2. Sept 10 – Oct 10  
  3. Sept 19 – Oct 17  
  4. Sept 26 – Oct 10  
  5. Sept 26 – Oct 10 |
| Develop a plan addressing how to keep Kroger in the neighborhood.     | 1. Develop and begin to implement a strategy to increase the impact of Buy 25.  
  2. Work with Kroger to better market new products and expanded selection of produce and organic and natural foods choices.  
  3. Develop a strategy to create public spaces that are comfortable and secure for all.  
  2. Oct 3 – Oct 31  
  3. Oct 17 – Nov 2  
  4. Oct 17 – Nov 2 |
| Develop a plan addressing what to do if the Kroger closes and leaves the neighborhood. | 1. Identify existing strategies/practices for increasing access to food in neighborhoods that do not have a grocery.  
  3. Develop a site use plan for the vacant building and lot. | 1. Sept 26 – Oct 17  
  2. Oct 17 – Nov 2  
  3. Oct 17 – Nov 2 |

Important Dates

**Tuesday, September 25: Buy 25 at WH Kroger**
Wednesday, September 26: presentation of existing conditions and work plan

**Phase 2: Executing the Work Plan – October 1-November 9**
Tuesday, October 9: Buy 25 at WH Kroger  
Wednesday, October 17: midpoint presentation of project  
Tuesday, October 23: Buy 25 at WH Kroger  
Wednesday, November 7: presentation of executed work plan

**Phase 3: Presenting the Work – November 12-December 7**
Tuesday, November 13: Buy 25 at WH Kroger  
Wednesday, November 21: nearly completed materials due  
Tuesday, November 27: Buy 25 at WH Kroger  
Friday, December 7: final materials due  
Finals Week: FINAL PRESENTATION
Next Steps

Going forward

1. Research – Context: assessing the situation and issues

   (1) Survey of residents and customers (September 21-October 17)
       • Organize and analyze results

   (2) Create regional context map of full-service grocery stores in area around Walnut Hills (October 3-10)

   (3) Create map of all stores in neighborhood that sell groceries (October 3-10)

   (4) Detail development efforts in the neighborhood (October 3-10)
       • WHRF’s plan to redevelop areas around Peeble’s Corner
       • City of Cincinnati’s role

   (5) Analyze Walnut Hills Kroger as an urban and neighborhood grocery (October 3-17)
       • Detailed definition and description based on measurable criteria

   (6) Detailed definition and description of food access (October 3-17)

   (7) Analyze Walnut Hills as a food desert if Kroger were to leave (October 10-24)
       • Research vehicle accessibility in Walnut Hills

   (8) Interviews (October 10-24)
       • President of Walnut Hills Area Council
       • President of business association
       • Bill Fischer – Manager, Economic Development Department, City of Cincinnati
       • Renee Mahaffey-Harris – Executive Director of The Center for Closing the Health Gap

   (9) Comparison of WH Kroger’s quality of groceries (produce quality/selection, organic/natural selection) to other area groceries (October 17-24)
2. Plan for keeping Kroger in the neighborhood – how to make it viable?

(1) Work with Andrew and/or Kevin on developing ideas for expanding Buy 25 (October 3-24)
   • Emphasis on involving the neighborhood/residents/existing customers

(2) Detail issues with site layout and design (October 3-November 2)
   • Talk with Kevin, store managers, others if necessary
   • Develop recommendations and site plan to address these issues

3. Plan for increasing access if Kroger leaves

(1) Research other models in the city addressing food access (October 3-17)
   • talk to Sagar

(2) Assess feasibility of strategies used to increase access to food for neighborhood residents (October 17-24)

(3) Develop list and description of feasible strategies (October 24-November 2)
   • Present strategies to WHRF and community council to elicit feedback for final recommendations.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Appendix 1

Summaries of News and Publications regarding Walnut Hills Kroger

Motion filed by Councilwoman Laketa Cole and Subsequent Report issued by the City of Cincinnati City Manger’s Office concerning the Walnut Hills Kroger - Motion Filed March 18 2008, Council Approved the Motion April 30th 2008

The motion filed by Councilmember Cole moves that the city’s administration work with the Kroger Company to keep a grocery store in Walnut Hills and that the City provide financial assistance if deemed appropriate.

Report by the Cincinnati City Manger’s Office to the Vibrant Neighborhoods Council Committee ‘Walnut Hills Kroger Follow Up Report’ – June 10th 2008

This report is a follow up to the motion and subsequent action by Cincinnati City Council ordered on April 30th 2008 concerning the same subject. It highlights that the Walnut Hills Kroger has been struggling. The City of Cincinnati’s Community Development Department met with the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and Brookside Advisors (a national consultant on urban groceries). They point out that there is a national trend of urban grocery stores like the Walnut Hill’s Kroger closing due to insufficient sales per cart and relatively high rent and security costs. They also point out that the neighborhood conditions around the site are a deterrent to many market area customers.

The report also describes in detail some of the causes and characteristics of food deserts. To be profitable stores now need
a large (at least 40,000-45,000 sq ft worth of consumer space to be profitable. The Walnut Hills store is 31,000 square feet. The final recommendation of the report is that the city administration does not support a city subsidy for a store that isn’t profitable. The issue of food deserts does need to be addressed in the next comprehensive plan.

“Is East Walnut Hills the next big thing in Cincinnati?” - Urban Cincy – June 9th, 2011

East Walnut Hills has seen a resurgence of successful retail stores along the Madison Road and Woodburn Road corridors. This retail success can be attributed to the influx of affluent new residents to this smaller neighborhood adjacent to Obyronville, Clifton, and the larger Walnut Hills neighborhood. One particular residence, De Sales flats has leased out its entire building, has been able to demand high rents, and currently has a waiting list for new residents. The variety of eclectic shops creates a “destination” retail location which is helping to bring new customers to East Walnut Hills. One particular retailer, Café de Sales, has a unique story in itself. Originally called Mocha under former ownership, this independent coffee shop has gone from struggling to surging. When Café de Sales was on the brink of closure, a former Mocha employee took on ownership responsibilities, and through a grassroots effort of community members, reopened the shop under its current name in 2011. Community members revitalized the store from the ground-up including supplying new tables, supplies, and maintenance to the new store. East Walnut Hills has reinvigorated itself as one of the most desirable neighbors on the East Side, and through concentrated development efforts is attracting new residents and visitors.
“Community group holding events to keep Kroger store from closing” - WCPO.com- August 6th, 2012

Buy 25 is a community event attempting to attract former and new customers to the struggling Walnut Hills Kroger. The underlying goal is to help the store turn over a profit, due to its risk of closure. Largely through a grass-roots effort between Walnut Hills Urban Redevelopment Foundation, and other community members this initiative has gained momentum over the last few months. However, maintain the momentum of Buy 25 will be a challenge. Observations from the last Buy 25 event on September 11th included a lower turnout than previous events.

“Walnut Hills Revitalization Proposal” – Niehoff Urban Studio – Fall 2009

This proposal by the Neihoff Studio basically gives very general recommendations for the neighborhood to thrive with little useful statistics to back up the recommendations. This revitalization proposal identifies broad goals for certain areas of Walnut Hills including making E McMillan into a thriving small business district, creating a neighborhood market similar to Findlay Market in the parking lot of Kroger, developing office districts near the highway ramps and developing green industry.

The recommendation about E McMillan echoes Kevin Wright’s goal for the area, creating commercial developments on E McMillan on either side of Gilbert forming a business district around this intersection. Organizing an outdoor market is an interesting idea as well, particularly if Kroger leaves the neighborhood. This could be a way to maintain access to fresh produce and also build a sense of community in the absence of Kroger.

This blog entry, written in 2008, expresses the city’s concern for the loss of urban groceries and the resulting decrease in access to food. For our purposes this shows that the city has been aware of this issue, both city-wide and for Walnut Hills (it mentions that the WH Kroger may shut down in this blog entry) for at least 4 years. It also points out issues with security, particularly theft of food and shopping carts as significant losses to revenue. The city was reportedly interested in creating a Food Access Task Force to look into the of the “grocery gap” did this ever happen? Is this on the city’s radar now?

“Cincinnati police conduct gang roundup” – Cincinnati Enquirer -Oct 29, 2011

After seven months investigation, Cincinnati policy raided a gang in Walnut Hills, at October 28, 2011. According to the District 4 Commander Capt. Eliot Issae, this is “the most gang-specification charges field in a single raid in Cincinnati history”. 12 individuals will be charged with robbery, drug trafficking and murder. Also, policy will continue to stand in this neighborhood to protect this area. To celebrating the victory and express their gratitude for residents’ help, policy will host a party in Walnut Hills with residents soon.

“Police throw block party to celebrate gang roundup” – Cincinnati Enquirer – Nov 8, 2011

Policy held a block party, at Walnut Hills, November 7th evening, 2011. After raided a gang in the neighborhood, policy hosted this party to make people feel more comfortable with streets. Skyline, Kroger, CVS, Hampton Inn, and Cincinnati Zoo in this neighborhood donated the food. According to a policy officer, the event is the first time for them. At the beginning of this investigation, they also tried to persuade
gan members to abandon their crime lives by sending letters to them. However, 15 individuals still were charged with participating in a criminal gang. An elder believe all the other neighborhoods in Cincinnati could ask policy to do the same thing like Walnut Hills did.

“Can they save this store?” – Cincinnati Enquirer – August 5th, 2012

The Walnut Hills Kroger has lost over $5 million in the past four years. Kevin Wright is leading a new campaign to keep the store open. Buy $25 Tuesdays aims to bring 200 new patrons to spend $50 a month at the store on the second and fourth Tuesdays of every month. New patrons can shop, give feedback, and make recommendations for new products. Wright is seeking to win over the new condo & home owners with a healthier food selection and a cleaner neighborhood store. The Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation believes that the store needs to stay open to anchor the blighted business district that WHRF and the City are looking to rejuvenate with shops and restaurants. Kroger is redeveloping the Corryville store less than 2 miles away which could threaten the Walnut Hills Store. The store has only had one profitable year since its opening in 1983. The Roselawn and Westwood Kroger stores had similar trends and closed. The store only sees profit during EBT reloading times which makes it difficult to staff store when it is busy one time a month. Not many shoppers otherwise when the majority of patrons live on Food Assistance. In 2010, Kroger added 250K to the store to bring in self check-out lanes and to update the décor and façade. This urban grocery store does not have a store model that fits in with the dynamic and culture of the neighborhood. The Walnut Hills Kroger has added several new items by the request of the Buy $25 patrons organic food, various beers.
“Westwood Kroger to Close” – Cincinnati Enquirer – April 6th, 2012

Both Kroger locations in Westwood closed because of declining traffic and losses for a decade. Sixty percent of people who live around the Westwood store shop at other Kroger locations in the region. The grocer operates 9 stores within an 18 minute drive and has spent 60 million dollar renovating surrounding stores. The Westwood location that the article refers to closed simultaneously with the re-opening of the Ferguson Road store also in Westwood. The Delhi location will also be getting an 8million dollar upgrade. The article mentions similar implications for the Walnut Hills Kroger.

“Kroger closing Roselawn Store” – Cincinnati Enquirer – April 17th, 2012

The article mentions that the location lost more than $1 million dollars in 2009 and it shopper base has declined significantly in the last decade. 75% of the shopper base in the neighborhood already visits another nearby store including the recently updated store located in Norwood at Surrey Square. Kroger will not place restrictions on the store and site and is willing to negotiate with other grocer chains that want to occupy the space and use the equipment. The associates currently working at the location will be relocated to other stores.
Appendix 2

Maps

Base Map
Household Income by Tract
Vacancy Rate

[Map showing vacancy rate by block with color coding for different vacancy rates.]
The Kroger Locations in the City of Cincinnati

Legend
- Kroger Stores in Cincinnati

[Map showing locations of Kroger stores in Cincinnati]