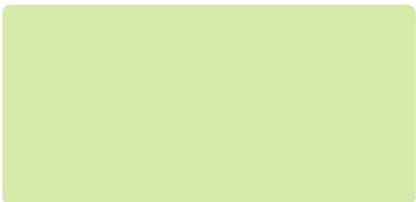
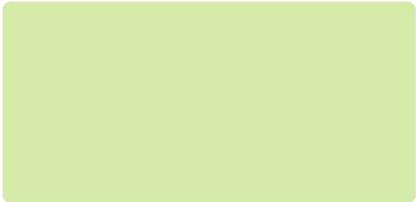
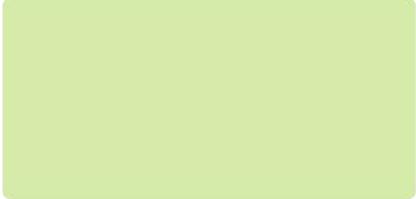
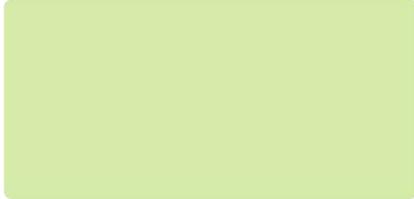




LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

Technical Assistance Program



Local Foods, Local Places
Community Action Plan
for Holyoke,
Massachusetts
November 2017



For more information about Local Foods, Local Places visit:

<https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places>

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Community Story

Holyoke is a city of just over 40,000 people in western Massachusetts, situated along the Connecticut River. Originally part of neighboring Springfield, Holyoke was officially incorporated in 1850 and holds the distinction of being the first planned industrial community in the United States.¹ Starting in the mid-19th century and continuing into the early part of the 20th century, Holyoke's natural water resources and advantageous geography along the river attracted significant investment and industry, primarily textile and paper manufacturing. It earned the moniker "The Paper City" as it grew to become one of the world's largest stationary and writing paper production centers. The ready availability of waterpower even enabled Holyoke to support its own electric utility company independent of America's major regional electric companies. Each of the city's approximate 25 mill buildings was more or less designed to house its own power plant in the form of water turbines, making Holyoke an engineering innovation center at the time.

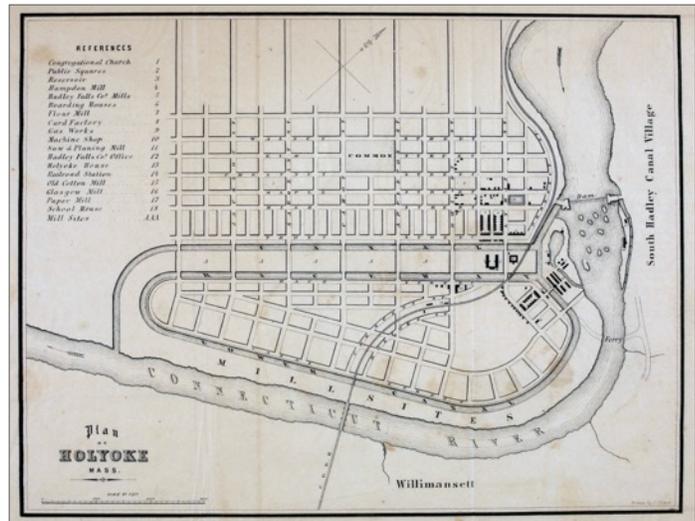


Figure 1 - The original grid plan for the downtown area of the City of Holyoke when it was a planned industrial community of the Hadley Falls Company under the patronage of the Boston Associates. Source: Public domain

But like so many mill towns across the United States, the Great Depression began challenging times, and the latter part of the 20th century brought a decline in manufacturing, mill closings, and diminished employment opportunity to Holyoke.

Given this history, it is not surprising that Holyoke was named one of the Commonwealth's original Gateway Cities in 2007. The Gateway City designation was initiated to recognize midsize urban centers anchoring the regional economy. These communities, which were once home to industry and good jobs, represented a "gateway" to the American dream for residents. Following the decline of manufacturing, these places have lacked the resources to rebuild and to reposition themselves resulting in stubborn social and economic challenges, yet these cities retain many assets with unrealized potential. These assets include existing infrastructure and strong connections to transportation networks, museums, hospitals, universities and other major institutions, disproportionately young and underutilized workers, and an authentic urban fabric.²

Changing social and economic forces open new opportunities for cities like Holyoke to leverage dormant or underutilized assets. In the last decade, efforts to restart Holyoke's economic engine have included about a dozen projects in various stages of planning downtown. They include a \$5 million renovation of the Cubit Building as seen during part of the workshop. City officials estimate that developers have spent or disclosed plans to spend \$112 million for construction and rehabilitation projects downtown

¹ City of Holyoke. <http://www.holyoke.org/about/history/>. Accessed Sep. 20, 2017.

² MASSInc. <https://massinc.org/our-work/policy-center/gateway-cities/about-the-gateway-cities/>. Accessed Sep. 20, 2017.

since the opening of the Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center, which incurred almost \$90 million in land, infrastructure, and building costs.² Still there is currently an estimated two million square feet of mill space available for reactivation and many, including the city administration, see potential growth from technology, hospitality, and the intoxicant industry stemming from the legalization of marijuana in Massachusetts.



Figure 2 – Nuestras Raíces headquarters in Holyoke.
Photo Credit: Holly Fowler

Today, Holyoke is part of the state’s second largest metropolitan area. It is also within the fertile Pioneer Valley, an important agricultural production area for New England, and sits at the juncture of key north-south and east-west transportation routes. It has a grid street pattern that is unique in New England and can accommodate high-rise buildings along canals that could be landscaped for recreational activities, which is already happening with the Canalwalk project. This new pedestrian and bicycle transportation network will connect major attractions within the city’s Innovation District, including City Hall, Holyoke Heritage State Park, the Holyoke Children’s Museum, businesses, artists’ studios, galleries, and the Green High Performance Computing Center.³

Thanks to important waves of immigration and migration, the city boasts the largest St. Patrick’s Day parade outside of New York City, offering hundreds of thousands of people the chance to experience Holyoke for at least one day of the year. Holyoke is also home to the largest community of Puerto Ricans in the United States outside of Puerto Rico proper, which has brought art, food, celebrations, and the creation of a new Puerto Rican cultural district to the city.



Figure 3 – The very first Nuestras Raíces community garden.
Photo Credit: Holly Fowler

Holyoke hopes to build on these and other existing assets to revive a walkable and attractive downtown, to celebrate its diverse people and culture, and to improve healthy food access throughout the city. Part of its success lies in organizations like Nuestras Raíces. Since 1992, Nuestras Raíces has been an important part of the community fabric of Holyoke. A grassroots urban agriculture organization, its mission is to create healthy environments, to celebrate “agri-culture,” to harness collective energy, to advance the vision of a just and sustainable future. The founding members of Nuestras Raíces were all migrating farmers from Puerto Rico with strong agricultural

² The Boston Globe. “What’s happened with our gateway cities?” <http://sponsored.bostonglobe.com/rocklandtrust/gateway-cities/>. Nov. 1, 2016.

³ City of Holyoke. “Canal Walk.” <https://holyokeredevelopment.com/canalwalk>. Accessed Sep. 20, 2017.

backgrounds who found themselves in a city with limited opportunity. They identified an abandoned lot in South Holyoke that was full of trash, needles, and illicit activity at the time and came together to clean it and to tend to it, turning it into the city’s first community garden. This transformation of place inspired other community gardens throughout the city that would eventually join the Nuestras Raíces network.

Nuestras Raíces today has a network of 12 community gardens with more than 100 member families, an environmental program that addresses issues affecting the Holyoke community, a Youth Program, and a 30-acre inner-city farm that focuses on food systems, economic development, and agriculture. Nuestras Raíces has also been a founding member of the Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council, whose goal is to promote community empowerment through social change, and ENERGIA LLC, a socially responsible energy efficiency company that provides energy efficiency upgrades for residential and commercial properties.⁴

Continuing its tradition of community organization, in 2016, Nuestras Raíces requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places technical assistance program to develop an action plan to grow the city’s food economy, to increase access to healthy food, and to include food production, food businesses, and food culture in the planned redevelopment of the city. The city’s goals are compatible with the program, which aims to create:

- More economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.
- Better access to healthy, local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- Revitalized downtowns, main streets, and neighborhoods.

The Local Foods, Local Places program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the Delta Regional Authority.

Holyoke was one of 24 communities across the United States selected to participate in the program in 2017. Nuestras Raíces formed a

LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Neftalí Durán, Nuestra Comida Program Manager, Nuestras Raíces

Dorian Gregory, Southwestern New England Loan Outreach Officer, Cooperative Fund of New England

Ana Jaramillo, Child and Adolescent Health and Wellness Coordinator, Holyoke Health Center

Warren Leigh, Chair of Hospitality & Culinary Arts Program, Holyoke Community College

Margaret Nugent, Director of Career and Technical Education – Dean Technical, Holyoke Public Schools

Debbie Oppermann, Economic Development & Planning Office/Mass in Motion Coordinator, City of Holyoke

Elizabeth Wills-O’Glivie, Chair, Springfield Food Policy Council

Figure 4 – Local Foods, Local Places steering committee in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

⁴ Nuestras Raíces. “Our History.” <http://nuestras-raices.org/en/our-history/>. Accessed Sep. 20, 2017.

Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Workshop

Local Foods, Local Places steering committee to help the technical assistance team consisting of expert consultants and federal partners prepare for a workshop in Holyoke. The steering committee members listed in Figure 4 helped the technical assistance team hone in on a set of five goals for the workshop that are the framework for this action plan. The five goals are:

- Increase capacity and collaboration to develop food-related activities between Holyoke organizations and with other communities, specifically Springfield and Chicopee.
- Improve healthy food access (physical, economic, cultural appropriateness, and knowledge, skills, and resources to prepare food) for residents of Holyoke.
- Increase production of food within the city of Holyoke.
- Increase opportunities for farmers, growers, and food businesses to market their products.
- Grow downtown Holyoke as a place and a destination where current and future residents want to and can live, work, eat, shop, and host community-building activities.

The Local Foods, Local Places steering committee aims to formalize its continued collaboration and involve many other local leaders and organizations as it implements this action plan. The remainder of this report and appendices document the engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly, the action plan and next steps for achieving the community's goals.

Engagement

The technical assistance engagement process for Local Foods, Local Places has three phases, illustrated in Figure 5 below. The assessment phase consists of three preparation conference calls with the steering committee to establish the workshop goals, agenda, logistics, and stakeholder invitation lists. The convening phase includes the effort's capstone event—a two-day workshop in the community. The next steps phase includes three follow up conference calls as well as process reporting and documentation.

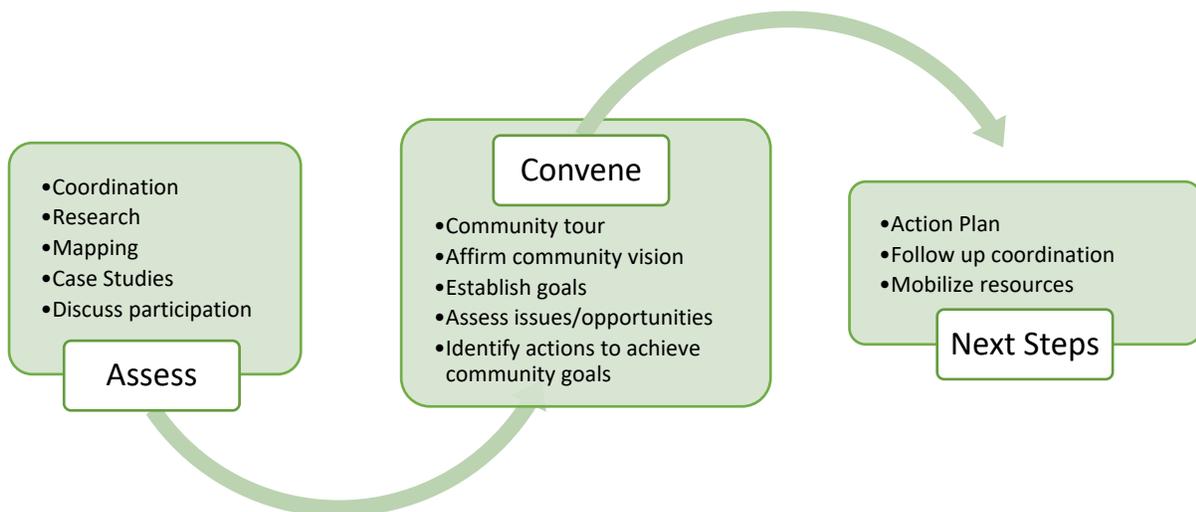


Figure 5 – Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Process Diagram.

The Holyoke workshop occurred on August 15 and 16, 2017. It began with a welcome lunch with the steering committee members; technical assistance team; and regional, state, and federal partners. Lunch was followed by a tour of the community. The evening community meeting and entire workshop was hosted at Holyoke Community College's Picknelly Adult & Family Education Center in downtown Holyoke.

The second day entailed in-depth discussions with participants representing a wide range of perspectives from across the community and an action-planning session. The community meeting and all-day working session were well attended by key stakeholder groups, residents, local leaders, and potential funders. The workshop sign-in sheets are provided in **Appendix B**.

Community Tour

The steering committee led a tour of key places and projects in Holyoke to help establish the context for future workshop discussions. The first stop was the **headquarters of Nuestras Raíces**, which will celebrate its 25th anniversary on September 30th, 2017. In addition to staff offices, there is a greenhouse, outdoor seating, and a colorful mural painted on the building, portraying a bright city landscape and future. Just a block away is the **Jardin Comunitario La Finquita**, the first community garden in Holyoke established by the founding members of Nuestras Raíces. Peach trees, peppers, and other fruits sprout from 32 plots in what was



Figure 6 – A peek inside the new Holyoke Community Center MGM Culinary Arts Institute.

once a former parking lot. The property is owned by Providence Ministries for the Needy, which also operates the adjacent soup kitchen, Kate’s Kitchen. Land tenure is an enduring concern for farmers and gardeners, and Holyoke is no exception. All but one of Nuestras Raíces’ nearly 20 properties are owned by the city. Those who tend to and benefit from these spaces are eager to figure out how to protect them from land pressure that comes with economic growth. The community garden, while an important symbol of transformation, is not sufficient for addressing the broad food access challenges of Lower Holyoke. As the Nuestras Raíces program manager observed, “We can’t garden ourselves out of a food desert,” so other options need to exist.

Kate’s Kitchen serves a noontime, sit-down meal to 120-200 people per day each month, and that number is increasing according to Marvin Gonzales, who helps to manage the operation. Open since 1980 with a “no questions asked” policy, the kitchen’s model extends dignity and respect to those it serves. The kitchen now offers a brown bag supper on Wednesdays and staple items like produce, milk, and bread through a food recovery program. Volunteers also help guests with social services like application for SNAP benefits. Sharing the building is **foodWorks**, a training program that offers unemployed and underemployed individuals job and skills training in the culinary field. Since 2012, the program has produced 60 graduates, with an eighty percent placement rate. Individuals selected to participate do not have to pay a fee, but the cost to maintain the program is estimated at \$3500 per person per course cycle, which is funded by various foundations, the Western Massachusetts Food Bank, and Holyoke Rotary Club.

From foodWorks, the group walked to Holyoke’s historic Cubit Building, which is home to Holyoke Community College’s new culinary facility. The **Holyoke Community College MGM Culinary Arts Institute**, set to open in academic year 2017-18, will house five new kitchens, three classrooms, and a demonstration space for hospitality simulations. It will allow the institution to scale its offer of both for-

credit and noncredit courses, including new certifications and an associate's degree. While the New England outdoor growing season does not overlap significantly with the school year, procurement of local food is a new skill that will be taught at the school, and the group discussed efforts to source from nearby Red Fire Farm and the Wellspring Cooperative. The renovation of the Cubit Building is funded in part by investment from MGM, which is building a casino in neighboring Springfield, anticipated to create demand for food service workers in the region. Not many students in Holyoke can afford community college though, so a stipulation of the city's \$500,000 funding to Holyoke Community College is that 50 Holyoke students each year can enroll for free.



Figure 7 – A banner promoting the weekly farmers market hangs in Downtown Holyoke. Photo Credit: Holly Fowler (Northbound Ventures)

Crossing the canals from the Cubit, the tour passed by other anchors of Holyoke redevelopment efforts, the **Massachusetts Green High Performance Computing Center** and **Holyoke Creative Arts Center**. The Computing Center is a groundbreaking joint venture and valuable example of collaboration funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, private industry (including Cisco Systems), and five of the state's most research-intensive universities: Boston University, Harvard, MIT, Northeastern, and University of Massachusetts. Enabled by the hydro-power of the city, it is responsible for creating and training for high-tech jobs in the region. In 2014, the Holyoke Creative Arts Center moved to the historic Wauregan Building in downtown Holyoke to place the Center in Holyoke's growing art and innovation district.

Moving into downtown proper, the community tour stopped at the **United Church of Christ**, where *Nuestras Raíces* maintains free-to-pick planter boxes on the church grounds and then on to the **Holyoke Health Center**, passing by food businesses like Holyoke Hummus Cafe and under a street banner promoting the weekly farmers market. Occupying four buildings of downtown now, Holyoke Health Center is a Federally Qualified Community Health Center providing low-cost medical, dental, and pharmaceutical services in both English and Spanish to the Holyoke and surrounding communities for over 40 years. Holyoke Health Center employs 300 staff, services at least 50 percent of the community, and to date represents \$20 million in downtown investment. Other services and programs are co-located in the building for the convenience of clients and benefit of collaboration, including the Farm Workers' Program, Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program, and Let's Move Holyoke 5-2-1-0. Tax credits, federal loan guarantees, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 underpin funding of the Center. The Holyoke Health Center is a valuable asset within Holyoke and important partner in advancing food, nutrition, and health programming.

The final stop required a quick bus ride to the **Nuestras Raíces Farm**. Acquired 13 years ago, the organization rents the land from The Trustees of Reservations, the oldest regional land trust in the world. *Nuestras Raíces* grows on one of the six acres in production at the property and there are two community gardens with 1/8-acre plots rented for \$30 a month to primarily Puerto Rican farmers. The farm is the base for *Nuestras Raíces*' summer youth programs, community supported agriculture (CSA)

subscription program, and culturally specific produce that is sold at the Easthampton Farmers' Market and Go Fresh Springfield Mobile Market. It will also provide produce for Nuestras Raíces' own mobile market that is launching with the help of a Massachusetts Food Ventures Program grant of \$174,000 from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources.

More photos of the locations visited during the community tour are presented in **Appendix C**.

Vision and Values

Forty residents and stakeholders attended the first public session of the workshop on the evening of August 15th. Neftali Duran, Nuestra Comida Program Manager at Nuestras Raíces, welcomed attendees and spoke about the organization's ongoing efforts to address food insecurity, social justice, and community empowerment through food-based initiatives and other programming. An excerpt of Neftali's opening remarks were captured and reported by the local media, The Republican newspaper, and shared via MassLive.⁵

The technical assistance team then introduced the Local Foods, Local Places program with a short presentation. To provide additional context for the group conversation, prepared slides about the demographics of the city brought rise to the point that that even well-respected data sources can be imperfect and are subject to underrepresentation of key population groups. This should be kept in mind when referencing the community profile statistical sets in **Appendix A**.

The attendees also took a moment to recognize the role of racial inequality in contributing to the current food system and how Holyoke's population is disproportionately impacted by negative health outcomes that stem from lack of consistent access to affordable, fresh food. Several people in the room expressed thoughts related to empowerment and bringing the center of control for food-related work back to Holyoke groups.

THIS I BELIEVE ...

THIS I BELIEVE ABOUT LOCAL FOOD IN HOLYOKE:

- There are great environmental conditions here for food production.
- There are good opportunities for food waste diversion businesses.
- There is a huge market opportunity given high demand for food.
- Skilled, creative, excited young people are leading the way on food innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Holyoke has the potential to be the epicenter of the food economy in the Pioneer Valley.
- Holyoke has 2 million square feet of mill space that could be used for indoor growing.
- Holyoke has the best Puerto Rican food.

THIS I BELIEVE ABOUT DOWNTOWN HOLYOKE:

- Holyoke has a rich history and natural beauty.
- We have exciting community initiatives.
- Major assets include the Holyoke Health Center, community gardens and farmers market.
- Residents are warm, passionate, and diverse.

Figure 8 - Select responses to the "This I believe" exercise.

⁵ MassLive Online. "Once kids know how to grow something, they will eat it: Education emphasized at healthy food workshop in Holyoke." http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2017/08/local_food_local_places_worksh.html. Aug. 16, 2017.

The primary purpose of the community meeting was to hear from residents and other stakeholders about their hopes for the future of food in Holyoke. The technical assistance team led attendees through an exercise designed to evoke statements that capture the vision and values of Holyoke. The community meeting concluded with a discussion of the proposed workshop goals, which participants revised to clarify the focus of each. Discussing the meaning of terms like access and who is considered a grower, farmer, or producer allowed for important consideration of different perspectives and illustrated how important it is to use language that is inclusive and relatable. The visioning exercises also highlighted challenges and opportunities like those in Figure 10 that influence and shape this action plan. The positive, forward-thinking discussion established solid, shared ground for the remainder of the workshop. The second day of the workshop began with examples of strategies used by other communities to move forward food system and place-based initiatives. Among those highlighted were the Food Security Coalition model of Somerville, Massachusetts; the Healthy Bodega program and staple food ordinance of Passaic, New Jersey; commercial greenhouse operations like Little Leaf Farms in Devens, Massachusetts; indoor growing and business/education collaboration spaces like Plant Chicago; and a variety of food hub models.

Workshop attendees then participated in back-to-back brainstorming exercises, the first called “Ideas Ripe for the Picking” to capture possible ideas for Holyoke’s action plan inspired by what participants have seen in other communities. Workshop participants brainstormed ideas that they have seen and liked and could possibly be implemented in Holyoke. In the second brainstorming exercise, participants worked individually and then as a group to identify specific actions to support each of the community’s goals.

For the entirety of the afternoon, groups of workshop attendees self-selected into smaller groups to attend to the important task of filling in the details of actions prioritized for each goal. After several hours of intense collaboration, each group presented its results. Because not everyone can be at each table for every goal, this is an important part of the workshop for filling in gaps in information and sets

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES:

- Racial, income, and health inequity.
- Few job opportunities and pathways to upward mobility.
- Exclusion of long-time residents if future growth is not managed in an intentional way.
- Inadequate local food production and distribution to address severe access issues.
- Terminology (e.g. local, sustainability, food waste) that does not resonate with or respect key stakeholders.
- Exclusion of downtown and South Holyoke from current growth and investment
- Too few organizations like Nuestras Raíces that are doing good work.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Established regional and state food system plans have created awareness and efforts to address shared goal areas.
- Public and private funding sources routinely provide grants to support food-systems related initiatives and businesses.
- Interest exists to advance urban agriculture at the state and local levels.
- Successful programs in other cities can be used to build the business case for piloting new initiatives in Holyoke.
- There are many individuals and organizations willing to work with Nuestras Raíces and each other.

Figure 9 - Workshop Participants’ summarized thoughts on the challenges and opportunities present in the local food system and downtown revitalization efforts.

the stage for the final exercise of the workshop, which begins the eventual transition from planning to doing.

In a final exercise, participants stood up one by one and provided an “offer” and an “ask.” Offers capture the one or two things that each person is committed to doing to help move the Local Foods, Local Places process forward and help Holyoke achieve the goals outlined in the action plan. Community members offer whatever they have the time, capacity, and skills to provide. “Asks” capture what it is that participants need or want from the rest of the group to help move the process forward. This can include help on specific tasks, technical assistance, financial support, or simply continued communication and cooperation from others. The full list of offers and asks is available in **Appendix D**.



Figure 10 – Workshop participants hammer out the details of specific actions for each of the community’s goals. Photo Credit: Holly Fowler (Northbound Ventures)

Action Plan

The culminating product of the workshop was a community action plan. The plan is organized around five community goals and includes actions the participants brainstormed at the workshop and during follow-up calls. The following action plan matrix helps to identify needed actions, prioritize next steps, and define roles and responsibilities for moving forward. A list of funding resources (**Appendix E**) and references (**Appendix F**) are provided to aid the community in implementing the action plan.

GOAL 1: Increase capacity and collaboration to develop food-related activities between organizations in Holyoke and with neighboring communities, especially Springfield and Chicopee.

Holyoke is a city that has many food-related assets and initiatives. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of local community members and organizations, Holyoke is home to a network of community gardens, an urban farm, a mobile food market, a community-oriented soup kitchen and commercial kitchen, a chef training program for people with barriers to employment, and a robust culinary program at the community college, just to name a few. One of the major challenges facing the community is how to connect all the disparate initiatives and organizations into a mutually beneficial network for the long-term sustainability of the food economy in Holyoke. By connecting key players and developing their capacity for action, the innovative work that is currently underway can be sustained into the future and can reach as many residents of Holyoke as possible. In addition to the benefits of internal support and collaboration within the city, Holyoke also stands to benefit from relationships with local food advocates and organizations in neighboring communities, particularly Springfield and Chicopee. Collaboration may involve resource sharing and pursuing joint grant applications.

| Action 1.1: Identify all community leaders and partners for future collaboration. | |
|---|--|
| What this is and why it is important | Action 1.1 kick starts the collaboration process by identifying all key local food partners in Holyoke, Springfield, and Chicopee. This action involves developing a comprehensive list of community leaders and organizations that can connect to develop food-related programs and activities. Community leaders include those people already involved in the local food economy and the Local Foods, Local Places process, such as Nuestras Raíces and the Holyoke Health Center, plus people of influence in the wider Holyoke community. Community leaders can be representatives from faith groups, student organizations, or neighborhood organizations, amongst others. What is important is that the list includes representatives from all socio-demographic groups in Holyoke, so that local food initiatives are driven by, and cater to, all sectors of society in the long term. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive, representative list of community initiatives and leaders in Holyoke, Springfield, and Chicopee is developed. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 month |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuestras Raíces (Beverly Lipsey) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Foods, Local Places steering committee |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time investment • Office supplies |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A |

| Action 1.2: Conduct outreach to community leaders. | |
|--|---|
| What this is and why it is important | Building on Action 1.1 (developing a list of community leaders), Action 1.2 involves conducting outreach to everyone on the list in order to build a stronger, wider network of local food advocates and organizations. An effective outreach campaign will require leveraging interpersonal relationships (people volunteering to reach out to their personal and professional networks) and developing culturally appropriate outreach materials in both Spanish and English. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community leaders agree to participate in developing Holyoke’s local food economy. • The community of local food advocates and organizations grows to be stronger, more diverse, and more representative of the needs and desires of all sectors of Holyoke’s population. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 months |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Foods, Local Places steering committee (Neftali Duran) |

| Action 1.2: Conduct outreach to community leaders. | |
|--|---|
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood groups • Churches and faith groups • Schools, student organizations, parent groups • Youth organizations • Service providers |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time investment for outreach calls, meetings, translating outreach materials • Office supplies for outreach materials, printing • Roughly \$500 |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD |

| Action 1.3: Establish a Holyoke food council, coalition or other body of organizations and stakeholders to collaborate on food-related priorities for the city and its residents | |
|--|--|
| What this is and why it is important | <p>Once key community leaders have been identified, outreach has been conducted, and community leaders have agreed to participate in the future of Holyoke’s local food economy, the next step is to establish a consistent forum for convening stakeholders. Meeting monthly, representatives from participating organizations and the general public could work together to identify shared solutions to address community challenges to food security. Possible activities might include developing resources together and leveraging partnerships to attract funding. The convening platform could be modeled on the Somerville Food Security Coalition and could include partners from neighboring cities, particularly Springfield with whom Holyoke already has strong local food relationships and partners (e.g. shared school food service provider). The existing Let’s Move Holyoke 5-2-1-0 Group might be expanded or incorporated into this group.</p> |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A coalition (or similar organizational body) is established to connect local food advocates, support organizations, community leaders, and residents in Holyoke. • The group has regular meetings, with diverse participation that represents the needs and desires of all Holyoke residents. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 months to convene for the first time • Ongoing with the intent to dedicate personnel/lead staff (could be part of another role and shared by multiple people modeled after the Somerville Food Security Coalition arrangement) |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) |

| Action 1.3: Establish a Holyoke food council, coalition or other body of organizations and stakeholders to collaborate on food-related priorities for the city and its residents | |
|--|--|
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Holyoke: Mayor, Health Department, Planning Department, Mass in Motion • Holyoke Health Center • Holyoke Public Schools • Holyoke Medical Center • Dean Tech Culinary Arts and Health Staff and Students • Springfield Food Policy Council • City of Holyoke representatives (e.g. Office of Community Development, Holyoke Housing Authority, Council on Aging) • Local institutions (schools, hospitals, colleges) • Any organization that participated in the Local Foods, Local Places workshop • Head Start • Residents of Holyoke (and potentially Springfield and Chicopee) with an interest in food-related activities |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally a part time staff person (\$50k/annually) • Volunteer and organizational time • Meeting space • Resources for meetings – food, stationary, printing, etc. |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations • Fundraising • Grants • Approach Holyoke Community College and the Mayor’s Office about potentially funding a part time staff person to drive and manage this effort. |

| Action 1.4: Establish a centralized system or place for communication and resource sharing for all local food programs, initiatives, and ideas. | |
|---|--|
| What this is and why it is important | <p>To facilitate better collaboration and communication between the key players within the local food economy, the community needs a centralized place to share ideas, resources, and support for one another. This place could take the form of a website, a notice board (online and/or physical notice board), a listserv, an online forum, a printed document, or some combination of these ideas. What is important is that the system is accessible, flexible, affordable, and dependable as a place for local food advocates and organizations to connect and to share resources. During follow-up calls it was determined that a listserv may be the most efficient way to disseminate the latest information about best</p> |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| | practices, funding opportunities, and community events, for the mutual benefit of all members. A listserv is a low-cost resource that is accessible to all people and groups in the food system. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A listserv is established to share information and resources among local food advocates, leaders, and organizations. • There is increased participation in local food initiatives and higher turnout at local food events in Holyoke. • Partnerships and collaboration emerge as a result. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 months |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoke Community College IT & Communications |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoke Codes • PV Grows Investment Fund • Franklin County Community Development Corporation • Holyoke High School students |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium development • Cost can range from pure time investment to larger capital investment for a higher-end tool – depends what the vision is for this item |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Holyoke budget • Grants |

GOAL 2: Improve healthy food access for residents of Holyoke by ensuring that they can physically access culturally appropriate food that is affordable and that they have the knowledge, skills, and resources to prepare it.

One of the major challenges facing Holyoke residents is low access to healthy, local food options. “Access” here refers to access in the broadest sense. Access includes physical access—there are stores that sell fresh produce, and residents can get there easily; economic access—food is affordable to people with income or available for free to those without income; culturally appropriate access—residents can buy food that resonates culturally, that people grew up eating, or that their culture or religion encourages or permits eating; and finally, accessible in the sense that residents have the knowledge, skills, and resources (such as kitchens and equipment), to cook and eat the food that is sold in the community. Goal 2 therefore addresses the physical, economic, cultural, and education elements of food access in Holyoke.

| Action 2.1: Initiate a Healthy Bodega Program. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | Many cities across the country are addressing food access issues by working to provide fresh produce in local corner stores or bodegas. This action involves coordinating with the bodega owners in Holyoke to provide fresh, local, affordable produce. A healthy bodega program could include a collaborative buying club between bodega owners and/or a city-wide policy requiring the sale of fresh food and staple dietary items at retail outlets accepting SNAP benefits. Other elements of the program could include healthy food demonstrations at the farmers market in collaboration with bodega owners, and customers using their Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) option to purchase produce. A healthy bodega program could be revived and if successful, substantially increase access to, and consumption of, fresh, healthy food in Holyoke. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participating bodegas • Increased sales of fresh produce at bodegas • HIP sales in Holyoke (at farmers markets and mobile market stops, at bodegas?) |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 year – establish pilot program |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) • Holyoke Health Center (Ana Jaramillo) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) • Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) • City of Holyoke – Dept. of Planning & Mass in Motion (Debbie Oppermann) |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with bodegas on purchasing guidelines and resources • Product displays • Signage and marketing • Technology for processing HIP payments |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) Food Ventures Grant |

| Action 2.2: Conduct a community survey to determine which foods local residents want to buy, cook, and eat. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | A local food survey would help local food producers and distributors match their supply to local demand in a way that is responsive to community needs. Surveys could be distributed at the farmers market, the mobile market, local K-12 schools, colleges, health centers, and transit stations to name a few. Surveys could include questions about which staples people consistently buy; which foods they would like to purchase but cannot due to access, price, or availability; and questions around how people would like to buy food—in bulk, at a mobile market, at the farmers market, etc. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of respondents (target 400 people) |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September-October 2017 |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuestras Raíces (Beverly Lipsey and Neftali Duran) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community leadership groups at Nuestras Raíces • Mobile market manager • Holyoke Public Schools - Food Services (Sodexo) • Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) – help with dot surveys at mobile market sites |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer time • Survey printing and other data collection materials (stickers etc.) |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donations • Grants |

| Action 2.3: Pass a local ordinance requiring staple foods be sold at food retail outlets. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | As a first step towards establishing a network of healthy corner stores (Action 2.1), the City of Holyoke could consider an ordinance that would require corner stores and other food retail outlets to stock staple foods. Similar initiatives have been implemented in other communities across the country and would increase basic access to food for residents of South Holyoke. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ordinance is passed requiring local bodegas or corner stores to stock staple goods such as bread, milk, and produce. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring – Summer 2018: Ordinance is researched • 2019: Ordinance is passed |

| Action 2.3: Pass a local ordinance requiring staple foods be sold at food retail outlets. | |
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| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Holyoke (Debbie Oppermann) <i>Administrative foundation</i> • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) <i>Political foundation</i> |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic (Emily Broad-Leib) <i>Research and policy foundation</i> |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer time • City staff time • Ordinance template (e.g. Passaic, NJ) |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A |

| Action 2.4: Bring Holyoke youth into the conversation about local food. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | Expand Nuestras Raíces’ efforts to reach young people in Holyoke so that they can learn and understand issues related to food justice. School curricula could be expanded to include local food education, hands on experience in community gardens, and pathways into food-oriented college programs and careers. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A culturally relevant food curriculum is developed for Holyoke schools. • The number of young people participating in the local food economy increases. • The number of partnerships in school settings—from early elementary to middle and high schools—increases. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – 2 academic years |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally relevant education coordinator (Dana Wright) • UMass Amherst (Joel Arce) • Isis Feliciano • FoodCorps |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoke Public Schools/Sodexo • Dean Tech Culinary Arts and Health staff and students • Allies identified in every school • Nuestras Raíces • Growing the Community • AmeriCorps members or interns • Existing programs and resources to reference and adapt |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer time to develop curriculum and conduct outreach and build relationships with schools • Cost of curriculum materials |

Action 2.4: Bring Holyoke youth into the conversation about local food.

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| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDA • Americorps • FoodCorps • Holyoke Early Literacy Initiative (Lleana Clintron) |
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GOAL 3: Increase production of food within the city of Holyoke

The challenge of food access in Holyoke, and especially South Holyoke, can be addressed in part by focusing on increasing production capacity and output within the boundaries of the city. Investing in existing local production is a community and economic development technique that creates jobs, improves incomes, grows local businesses, keeps money in the community, and most importantly, provides a convenient, affordable source of food for local restaurants, schools, hospitals, individuals, and families.

Action 3.1: Pass a Community Growing Ordinance (based on Springfield’s ordinance)

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| What this is and why it is important | Springfield, Massachusetts, a neighboring city of Holyoke, passed an ordinance that allows small-scale and backyard growers to sell their produce at farmers markets, farm stands, and restaurants. Replicating Springfield’s ordinance in Holyoke could help increase opportunities for existing growers to generate revenue in the city through more formal production and distribution channels and encourage more residents to invest in food production as a source of income. This could also increase the overall supply of fresh, local produce available in the community and at the farmers market. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ordinance is passed. • The number of local backyard and small-scale growers selling their produce at the farmers market and other outlets. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-18 months |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Holyoke (Debbie Oppermann) • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber of Commerce • Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development • Nueva Esperanza • Holyoke Health Center • Holyoke Health Department • Faith-based organizations |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money for people and research |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Voices for Children |

| Action 3.2: Identify properties for indoor urban agriculture—specifically through the industrial re-use of old mill buildings. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | The city of Holyoke is home to 2 million square feet of defunct mill space—vacant buildings that contribute to blight and dilapidation in the city. Workshop participants discussed the option of converting some mill spaces into indoor agricultural production sites—particularly through hydroponic growing. This action involves identifying properties for growing and determining the viability of hydroponic food production in Holyoke overall. If successful, this program could leverage the massive potential of the vacant mill space to allow for year-round food production that would increase overall supply of and access to fresh produce for the residents of Holyoke. Acquiring and transforming mill space will be a complex process that requires the cooperation of building and land owners in the city. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of key facilities or sites are identified as priorities for industrial reuse for indoor agriculture. • A list is developed of food products for hydroponic cultivation that are culturally appropriate, in demand, and likely to generate sufficient income for the growers and investors. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 months: building inventory completed in Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) and list developed of appropriate food products ideal for hydroponic cultivation in Holyoke. • Long term: successfully implement urban agriculture program and hydroponics in a number of mill buildings in Holyoke. |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MassDevelopment (Insiyah Bergeron) • City of Holyoke – Office of Planning and Economic Development (Debbie Oppermann) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) for equipment • University of Massachusetts (Prof. Frank Mangan) • Established commercial growers (e.g. Aero Farms) • Connectivity with Working Cities initiatives |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time from building owners, farmers, city staff, and consultants |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MassDevelopment – property inventory currently underway |

| Action 3.3: Better utilize land in Holyoke to produce more food for distribution to people and organizations across the city, with a focus on institutions and students. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | Existing property in Holyoke could be better used for food production. Many sites are underutilized when it comes to growing, including Holyoke Community College land. This action involves developing a strategic plan to use Holyoke’s existing assets to their maximum production capacity. Participants at the Local Foods, Local Places workshop focused particularly on increasing the amount of food that is produced for, and distributed, to schools in Holyoke. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategic plan is in place to improve the quantity and quality of local food produced. • Students are educated about healthy, local food consumption, and fresh food is accessible for all school students. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – 3 years (ongoing) |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoke Community College (Laura Christoph) • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoke Community College classes • Nuestras Raíces • City of Holyoke • Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture • Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources • University of Massachusetts |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer and staff time to organize the program and prepare the sites • Money for seeds, fertilizer, equipment, and other farming inputs |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDA Local Food Promotion Program |

Other Action Items Related to Goal # 3:

- Partner with churches to start community gardens.
- Increase pride and awareness amongst small-scale “growers” (as opposed to those that identify as farmers or producers).
- Identify current barriers to food production – policy, education, space etc.
- Build upon existing programs to help people grow healthy food in their backyards or in community gardens. This can include “soil test kitchens” at community events where residents can bring their soil to be tested for lead or other contaminants.
- Offer growing workshops or a food sovereignty workshop hosted by Nuestras Raíces and other city stakeholders.

- Use the Healthy Incentives Program’s “plant starts” to help more residents begin producing food on a small scale.
- Inspire pride in the agricultural heritage of Holyoke’s various cultures and communities.

GOAL 4: Increase opportunities for farmers, growers, and food businesses to market their products.

The local food economy in Holyoke includes a wide variety of formal and informal food producers selling their products at different scales and through different distribution mechanisms. Initiatives that target these producers to help them increase their distribution and sales would address challenges on both the supply and demand side of the market. Increased marketing and sales would improve incomes and standards of living for farmers, and would increase the supply of fresh, local produce available to residents of Holyoke. This in turn can result in long-term economic and health benefits for the city.

| Action 4.1: Create an inventory of commercial kitchens within the city of Holyoke. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | Commercial kitchens are valuable resources that can provide food entrepreneurs with much-needed opportunities for preparation, packaging, and processing their products. Commercial kitchens are also a key resource for training and educating new or inexperienced food entrepreneurs about all phases of the food production and marketing cycle. Different kitchens have different capacities and capabilities. It is important to have an inventory that outlines which kitchens can offer which kinds of teaching space, what kinds of food can be cooked and prepared, and what types of market each kitchen is certified to serve (e.g. retail, wholesale, direct). Once an inventory of this kind is established, resources can more effectively be matched to needs in the Holyoke food economy and workforce. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive inventory of commercial kitchens in Holyoke and the surrounding area is complete, with detailed information about the capabilities, clientele, capacity, services offered, hours of operation, fees, structure, and contact information. (Note: Some of this work has been captured already by others, so no need to start from scratch.) • New businesses are created that rely on local commercial kitchens—thereby also supplying a funding stream to the kitchens. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – 3 months |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoke Health Center (Ana Jaramillo) |

| Action 4.1: Create an inventory of commercial kitchens within the city of Holyoke. | |
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| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial kitchen facilities and managers • Holyoke Community College (Warren Leigh) • Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center (Joanna Benoit) • Chamber of Commerce SPARK (Tessa Romboletti) • Gateway City Arts/Mt. Tom Masonic Lodge |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time • The culinary kitchen at Dean Tech could be used weekends or evenings for food production. |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A |

| Action 4.2: Establish a connection between the Holyoke Community Market Steering Committee (which is working to open a community-owned retail grocery store that sells culturally appropriate food) and this action plan. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | <p>South Holyoke is a USDA-defined food desert, i.e., it suffers from a confluence of low incomes, little grocery store access, and low vehicle ownership. South Holyoke does not have a grocery store. Residents must drive to Stop and Shop to buy produce. Of the roughly 60 corner stores in Holyoke, fewer than 10 sell produce. It is therefore a major priority for South Holyoke to acquire a retail store that sells fresh, culturally appropriate produce. The cooperative model may be the most cost effective and integrated way to establish a retail grocery store in south Holyoke. The first step to achieving this action is to form a group to lead the effort.</p> |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A meeting is held to learn the history and status of the market initiative and to determine potential synergies between that effort and this action plan. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-3 months |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) • Holyoke Community Market Steering Committee (Gloria Cavallero, Amy Gilburg) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cynthia Espinosa (if funding is available) • Everyone on the leadership group |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer time • Money for a consultant to create a plan |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative Fund of New England (Dorian Gregory) • Common Capital • PV Grows Investment Fund |

| Action 4.3: Incentivize farmers and growers to sell their produce at the farmers market and expand their sales to more outlets or distribution sites overall. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | In South Holyoke’s food desert, the farmers market is one of the only opportunities for residents to purchase fresh produce. Despite this, barriers prevent local farmers and growers from selling their produce at the market, including the market fee. Many small-scale growers simply cannot afford to participate. Low customer participation in the market results in low farmer participation, and vice versa, resulting in a struggling market overall. An incentive structure could help remove barriers to participation and encourage produce sales at the farmers market and other important distribution sites such as schools, health centers, and bus stations. Incentives could include monetary incentives (growers are paid to sell at the farmers market) or other entrepreneurial and marketing assistance. Incentives that address both supply and demand—such as prescription produce programs, which ensure income for farmers and subsidize the cost for buyers—could also be considered. |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of community-based vendors selling produce at the farmers market. • Barriers to selling at the market are reduced or eliminated. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By farmers market selling season 2018 |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) • Farmers Market Managers (Andres Dillada, Cathy Anderson) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Transitional Assistance • Holyoke Health Center (Ana Jaramillo) • Farmers • Farmers Market Manager • Liz Wills-O’Glivie • Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) • City of Holyoke – Office of Planning and Economic Development (Debbie Oppermann) |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer and staff time • Money for incentives – cash, tables, tents • Money to waive vendor permit fees for growers |

Action 4.3: Incentivize farmers and growers to sell their produce at the farmers market and expand their sales to more outlets or distribution sites overall.

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| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Grants • Massachusetts Farmers Market Association • USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program • USDA Local Food Promotion Program – need to research community eligibility • Federal State Marketing Improvement Program |
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Action 4.4: Provide intensive technical assistance to small food businesses in Holyoke to support growth.

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| What this is and why it is important | <p>Holyoke’s local food economy includes many small-scale growers, subsistence farmers, and small businesses who would like to take their marketing to the next level. Scaling up their existing business may take the form of a food truck, a restaurant downtown, or manufacturing a value-added product such as jam or salsa. These entrepreneurs would benefit greatly from intensive training, mentoring, and coaching by someone who understands both their needs and the resources available to them. Learning to navigate financing mechanisms is particularly important for these entrepreneurs.</p> |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of local entrepreneurs trained. • Number of new business plans (to show evidence of demand for the program). • Number of new businesses established. • Number of local growers or farmers able to take their production and sales to the next level. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 – 9 months |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) • Chamber of Commerce SPARK (Tessa Romboletti) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to identify someone who can coordinate resources and recruit candidates. • Michael Abbate (Common Capital) • Rebecca Busansky (PVGrows Investment Fund) – for farm and local food businesses • MassDevelopment • City of Holyoke - Office of Economic Development |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money for new staff position to coordinate the training program • Money for ongoing program operations |

Action 4.4: Provide intensive technical assistance to small food businesses in Holyoke to support growth.

Possible funding sources

- Common Capital
- PVGrows Investment Fund
- Boston Federal Reserve Working Cities Grant (SPARK)

Other Possible Actions Related to Goal # 4:

- Establish a program to coordinate a small group of producers to get GAP certification.
- Develop a food hub and incentivize local farmers and growers to use it, and local distributors and restaurants to source from it.
- Develop a relationship with the Chamber of Commerce around food marketing.
- Create, grow, and support apprenticeship and incubator programs for the local food economy.
- Establish a worker-owned cooperative tortilla or bread company that meets USDA whole-grain standards

GOAL 5: Grow downtown Holyoke as a place and a destination where current and future residents want to and can, live, work, eat, shop, and host community-building activities

Downtown Holyoke faces many challenges including high vacancy rates, disinvestment, and a lack of retail and recreation options (particularly restaurants). The visioning exercises conducted during the Local Foods, Local Places workshop found that residents feel that downtown Holyoke, despite its challenges, has potential to transform into a vibrant hub of activity and is indeed on the brink of revitalization. Workshop participants also expressed concern that, like many analogous cities, with revitalization may come rising inequity and displacement. Goal 5 focusses on place-based interventions that can help transform downtown into a place to live, work, and play, with an emphasis on existing residents as the prime beneficiaries of change. As long as existing community members are at the center of positive transformation, the community would also like to see Holyoke become a destination that attracts visitors and new residents.

Action 5.1: Ensure that municipal ordinances support, and do not create barriers to, equitable downtown development that puts Holyoke residents first.

What this is and why it is important

This action focuses on securing a regulatory environment that supports equitable growth downtown. It involves researching what existing regulations and ordinances exist and which of these may be acting as barriers to innovative and equitable growth downtown and finding gaps in that need to be filled. Workshop participants expressed a desire for more clarity and less ambiguity regarding the regulatory environment in Holyoke. Some legwork has already taken place to acquire this information (during the Kellogg grant application process), and that information could be central to the completion of this action.

| Action 5.1: Ensure that municipal ordinances support, and do not create barriers to, equitable downtown development that puts Holyoke residents first. | |
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| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive list of ordinances relevant to downtown development is collected, with key information highlighted about barriers and incentives to equitable growth and innovative solutions. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 months |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Holyoke (Debbie Oppermann) • Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (Pat Beaudry) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyoke Chamber of Commerce – Real Estate Association • Holyoke Health Department • U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance (Pat Beaudry) • Time for research • See egis.hud.gov/cart for mapping resource |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance from Pioneer Valley Planning Commission • Housing and demographic data from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development • Graduate students in urban planning or public policy to conduct research |

| Action 5.2: Expand and move forward the development of the Puerto Rican cultural district. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | <p>The city of Holyoke is developing a Puerto Rican cultural district to celebrate the history and culture of the long-time Puerto Rican community in the city. This action makes the cultural district a priority, to ensure that the Puerto Rican community is at the center of downtown revitalization efforts and benefits from economic development in Holyoke. The city could expand its efforts to include local community leaders who can ensure that that process is equitable and culturally appropriate. The Puerto Rican Cultural District has the potential to be a vibrant, safe space that has a strong sense of place and identity.</p> |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Puerto Rican cultural district is established with formal gateways and borders. • The district is a vibrant source of community and economic growth for Puerto Rican residents of Holyoke and a destination for the community of Holyoke as a whole. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 years to be fully established • The process has already begun—celebrate milestones along the way, such as signage, art, new businesses and restaurants, and gateway design. |

| Action 5.2: Expand and move forward the development of the Puerto Rican cultural district. | |
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| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development (Debbie Oppermann) • Nueva Esperanza (Nelson Roman) • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) |
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nueva Esperanza Community Development Corporation in South Holyoke • South Holyoke Neighborhood Association (Carmen Ocasio) • Local community groups • Businesses • Social clubs • Dance and recreation groups |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for place-based interventions • Funding for programming and events |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Endowment for the Arts • Local schools and organizations – fundraising efforts • MassDevelopment – “Patronicity” online crowdfunding resource • Community Development Block Grant |

| Action 5.3: Ask and learn how property owners and landlords are incentivized to maintain, sell or redevelop their properties downtown. | |
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| What this is and why it is important | <p>The real estate assets in downtown Holyoke can only be leveraged if property owners agree to participate in revitalization initiatives or are willing to sell their properties. It is important that property owners be brought into the process of positive growth in downtown Holyoke. Addressing vacancy and dilapidation are key steps to redevelopment. Some efforts have already begun. A Problem Properties Group identifies particularly problematic sites, and a Vacant Properties Ordinance exists and is being enforced by the city. These efforts can form the foundation of moving forward with action 5.3</p> |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First success: one major building is redeveloped (The Cubit building can be used as a success story to inspire others). • Long-term ultimate success: 80-100 percent of properties downtown have been renovated and are home to vibrant businesses. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 year |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Holyoke – Office of Planning and Economic Development (Debbie Oppermann) • Holyoke Chamber of Commerce |

Action 5.3: Ask and learn how property owners and landlords are incentivized to maintain, sell or redevelop their properties downtown.

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| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UMass (mapped empty lots) • Holyoke Housing Authority • Problem Properties Group including City of Holyoke, Fire Department, and Police Department • One Holyoke • City Solicitor Office |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major cost of property purchases and rehabilitation • Legal fees • Project management |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA Brownfield Revitalization and Area-wide Planning grants • Community Development Block Grant |

Action 5.4: Create an apprenticeship/mentoring program for young and/or aspiring entrepreneurs.

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| What this is and why it is important | <p>To ensure that downtown redevelopment benefits existing Holyoke residents, programs can be designed to tie local job creation, entrepreneurship, and affordable housing to economic growth. An innovative strategy to achieve this is the creation of an apprenticeship or business mentoring program. Such a program would offer skills training to high school graduates at existing and incoming businesses downtown. In this way, Holyoke youth could develop the technical and entrepreneurial skills to work at, and eventually run, downtown businesses through built-in succession plans.</p> |
| Measures of success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pilot program is launched with opportunities for apprenticeships at downtown businesses. • The first apprentices graduate from the program and launch a local business or rehabilitate a downtown property as part of the new venture. |
| Timeframe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2 years |
| Lead | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber of Commerce SPARK (Tessa Romboletti Murphy) |

| Action 5.4: Create an apprenticeship/mentoring program for young and/or aspiring entrepreneurs. | |
|---|--|
| Supporting cast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Holyoke (Debbie Oppermann) • Nuestras Raíces (Neftali Duran) • Holyoke Community College • Cooperative Fund • Local industry and businesses leaders • Small Business Development Center • Unions • Career Point • Way Finders (Formely HAPHousing) • Trade unions |
| Costs and/or resources needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programming/curriculum development • Scholarship funding • Incentives for businesses |
| Possible funding sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Development Block Grant (Alicia Zoeller) • Small Business Development Center • Start a real estate investment cooperative owned by Holyoke residents to acquire properties downtown |

Other Action Items Related to Goal # 5:

- List properties and empty lots. Explore if debt can be forgiven if spaces/lots are renovated for public use.
- Explore if the old idea of “homesteading” can be applied to buildings for indoor commercial growing or other owner-occupied business that benefits the transition of downtown.
- Create a community center downtown focused on food and family.
- Use cooperative ownership models to start restaurants downtown.
- Host rebranding efforts for the city, including events such as restaurant week and/or Puerto Rican Pride Day, Holyoke Day/ Puerto Rican Day
- Host food-related community events downtown.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Community Data Profile
- Appendix B – Workshop Participants
- Appendix C – Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix D – Workshop Feedback
- Appendix E – Funding Resources
- Appendix F – References