



Office of the Mayor

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To: Madison Food Policy Council

From: Mark Woulf, Food and Alcohol Policy Director

Re: Northside Planning Council application to the Healthy Retail Access Program

On Tuesday, May 26, 2016, the Board of Directors for the Willy Street Grocery Cooperative approved the location of a third store on Madison's Northside, replacing the current Pierce's. This was welcomed news for residents on the Northside and for city staff that was closely monitoring the potential for a huge gap in food access for a large part of the city. While the crisis seems averted, there will still be a gap in services at that location due to the remodel of the store before reopening. This will leave an approximate four month time period without a nearby grocery outlet for the immediate area.

Staff was approached by the Willy Street Coop to explore if there is city support for assisting in an interim strategy to bridge the gap in services. There is precedent for the city assisting in these situations, most recently with the Allied Drive Walgreen's closing, the city made \$12,000 available for cab service to grocery stores for individuals and families in need. The City of Madison is very supportive of assisting in a similar way on the Northside during this gap. Staff suggested that it might be appropriate to look at the Healthy Retail Access Program if it was tied to the opening of the new store.

Since the initial conversation with Willy Street Coop, it became clear that the need extended beyond service to one retailer. The Northside Planning Council offered to take on the role of organizer and engaged other partners at the neighborhood centers in the area. In a matter of a few days, the NPC put together a brief proposal and submitted an application to the Healthy Retail Access Program, requesting assistance of \$5,650 for a shuttle service to area grocery stores.

The Healthy Retail Access Program has clear goals of increasing access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food by investing in retailers and/or systems to increase access to retailers in underserved neighborhoods. The intent of the program is to encourage partnerships, provide capital investment, and strong technical assistance, and staff has promoted a "guided" application process where city staff is involved early in the development of an application. The more complicated the proposal, the more time it may take to refine before it is ready for consideration for funding. While the merits of this proposal are not in question, this is clearly not the ideal process for an application to be considered within this particular program. Noting that concern, the application was submitted on Monday, May 2 and was provided to the Healthy Retail Work Group for consideration at their Tuesday, May 3 meeting.

Proposal Overview

The Northside Planning Council is proposing coordinating a shuttle service to transport residents between several locations on the Northside and two retailers (Willy Street Coop East and Woodman's East) and the Northside Farmers' Market. The service will operate starting as soon as program funds are secured and logistics are settled and run for 16 weeks. The service will run three days a week and charge a \$2 fee to users.

The proposal indicates that Kennedy Heights Community Center has committed the use of its passenger van for morning shuttle service. The proposal does not indicate other confirmed sources of transportation for other shuttle service, other than mentioning that other community/neighborhood centers are interested in the program.

The proposal requests city funding for wages for the shuttle driver, fuel for the shuttle, insurance and maintenance of shuttle vehicle(s), printing/promotion, and program coordination. The total request of the city is \$5,650. The NPC has provided letters of support from Willy Street Coop East and Woodman's East that commit financial participation in the project (\$800 and \$750, respectfully). The NPC is offering in-kind donations of staff time and printing.

The NPC has requested technical assistance with evaluation of the project, if awarded funds.

Healthy Retail Work Group Discussion and Recommendation

The Healthy Retail Work Group met on Tuesday, May 3 to discuss the Northside Planning Council's application to the program. The work group was joined by Abha Thakkar, Interim Executive Director of Northside Planning Council and Claude Gilmore, Executive Director of Kennedy Heights Community Center.

The work group discussed the transition from the closing of Pierce's to the opening of Willy North. The expected closing of Pierce's was May 31, 2016. Ms. Thakkar and Mr. Gilmore described the situation at Pierce's which seems to be drawing down inventory until closing. The store is also no longer accepting WIC (Women, Infant, Children) assistance.

The work group asked questions about the affordability of the new Willy North store and what steps were being taken to ensure that the location meet the needs of the neighborhood. The applicants explained that they have been impressed with the staff at Willy Street Grocery Cooperative and their willingness to engage directly with community members prior to opening. They are also brainstorming ways to maximize product offerings and affordability of products at the new store.

The applicants explained that the shuttle service could be a nice complement and build momentum to the opening of the new store. They explained that it will take some time for residents to become familiar with Willy Street as a retailer and the visit to Willy East, with the right type of outreach and incentives. The shuttle service will also help with the outreach in the lead up to the new store opening. The work group requested that information be collected, as much as possible respecting privacy, to assist in the evaluation and studying of shopping habits within the area.

The applicants also verbally requested funds to be available for cab service to grocery in the event that certain residents may not be able to take advantage of the shuttle service. The work group agreed that would be a good addition and encouraged the applicants to submit a revised budget that includes cab service.

The work group discussed the appropriateness of funding this type of proposal outside of the normal process. The work group agreed that though this is not an ideal process, the proposal itself meets the goals of the program in that it increases healthy retail access in one of our areas of focus. It has direct partnerships with retailers and is linked to a new retail location. The extraordinary circumstance of the closing of Pierce's and the urgency to have a new service up and running is of special consideration. The work group closed by recommending full funding of the Northside Planning Council's application to the Madison Food Policy Council.

Staff Comments and Recommendation

The question about funding this proposal is not about the merits. The City is committed to assisting with interim solutions until the Willy North location opens. The question is the appropriateness of the Healthy Retail Access Program funding for this proposal. This application is an "emergency" type of proposal that can be handled in different ways than through this particular program. Staff does have concerns about setting precedent within a new program for a lightning fast process without City Council review. The autonomy the program enjoys is because of the intentional process that is set up with extensive staff involvement and committee review. Additional proposals of this nature may jeopardize the flexibility of the Healthy Retail Access Program.

Despite the process and the potential for bad precedent; ultimately, the need in this area of the city outweighs those concerns. The work group weighed this aspect of the proposal and was fully supportive of funding this proposal. So long as this is an exception to the rule, staff is comfortable supporting the funding of this proposal. Staff also supports the addition of \$400 to the proposed budget for flexibility in adding cab service to grocery when appropriate. The total recommendation for city funding:

Wages for Van Service:	\$2,050
Fuel for Shuttle:	\$1,600
Vehicle Insurance/ Maintenance:	\$1,200
Funds for Cab Service To Grocery:	\$400
Printing/Promotion	\$320
Program Coordination:	\$480
Total HRAP Funds:	\$6,050.00