

Atlanta Food & Farm  
LLC with Village  
Habitat Design LLC  
and Urban Collage

# "Food First: Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta & Urban Agriculture Based Local Economy"



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## SECTION 1

### CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS ATLANTA: ABOUT THE PROGRAM AND ITS GOAL

## CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS ATLANTA: ABOUT THE PROGRAM AND ITS GOALS

In 2010, the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Act passed the House Committee on Financial Services. This program is a centerpiece of the Obama Administration's interagency Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative and involves collaboration between the federal departments of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), Education, Justice, Treasury, and Health & Human Services. The goal of the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative is to encourage grassroots efforts for community revitalization in neighborhoods that have concentrations of poverty in proximity to current or former public housing locales.

*If poverty is a disease that infects an entire community in the form of unemployment and violence; failing schools and broken homes, then we can't just treat those symptoms in isolation. We have to heal the entire community. And we have to focus on what actually works. - Barack Obama, July 18, 2007*

The fundamental project of the planning grant is to create a resident-driven Neighborhood Transformation Plan (NTP). The NTP is a blueprint to develop safer, healthier, and stronger neighborhoods that include improvements to neighboring schools, creating thriving commercial districts, and development of culturally affirming amenities.<sup>1</sup> Once an NTP is designed, the plan becomes the basis for applying for future federal, state and/or local funding opportunities including the multimillion-dollar Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grant.

### **Components of the Neighborhood Transformation Plan**

#### **PEOPLE**

- Mixed income
- Living in quality affordable housing
- Improved health and safety
- Greater employment and educational opportunities

#### **HOUSING**

- Energy efficient
- Sustainable
- Accessible
- Internet connectivity
- Physically and financially viable

#### **NEIGHBORHOODS**

- Services such as high performing public schools
- High quality early learning programs
- High quality parks and recreational facilities
- Effective public transit
- Walking and biking options to connect to work and/or local services
- Access to economic development and employment opportunities



## Who Are the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta Stakeholders?

### STUDENTS

- Early childhood, elementary, middle, high school and college.

### RESIDENTS

- Anyone who lives in the community, i.e., renters, owners, seniors, and students.

### BUSINESS OWNERS

- Retail, restaurants, medical providers, dental care, legal assistance, real estate services, banks, barber/beauty shops, etc.

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Health care providers, financial institutions, government, public safety organizations, faith based organizations, utilities, educational institutions, transportation, neighborhood associations and planning units, community development corporations, non-profits, etc.

Application for a Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant is a rigorous process and only a small number of Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) are accepted. In 2010, the Atlanta Housing Authority was only one of seventeen PHAs awarded a grant. The Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta (CNA) develops a strategy for revitalizing the former University Homes site and surrounding neighborhoods in West Atlanta.

Figure 1 is a map that represents the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta area. At the heart of Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta, the historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) thrive. The HBSUs include Clark-Atlanta University, Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, Morris Brown College, and Spelman College.

Success with the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta initiative depends on the involvement and investment of the City of Atlanta, other key government agencies, various institutions, and numerous partners working within a resident-driven planning framework. The stakeholder network features former residents of University Homes, neighbors in the communities that border University Homes, and college students attending the various HBCUs in the CNA's geographic footprint.

Support from other stakeholders like community-based development organizations and non-profit agencies will help make it possible for neighborhoods to re-imagine themselves as 21st century communities. This work begins in both small conversations between neighbors as well as larger public meetings facilitated by planning professionals and supported subject experts.<sup>2</sup>

## ATLANTA FOOD & FARM

During the CNA Public Engagement Process, stakeholders share their thoughts, ideas, and local knowledge in a series of community meetings. AHA also extends an opportunity for individuals to become “ambassadors” for CNA. This allows neighbors to engage in the planning process.

Atlanta Food & Farm (AF2) is a community-based consulting group founded by Kwabena Nkromo, a former Chair of Neighborhood Planning Unit T (NPU-T) located in the CNA planning area. Specializing in urban agriculture and local food systems planning, AF2 shares both its expertise and local experience. AF2 was in a unique position to offer value to the goals of CNA.

Atlanta Food & Farm actively participates in CNA community meetings and advocates along with many residents for a strong local food component in the Neighborhood Transformation Plan. In 2012, AF2 created a formal proposal to capture the community's interest in urban agriculture as a major thread in its development strategy. The Atlanta Housing Authority subsequently hired AF2, along with its partner firm Village Habitat Design LLC, to assess the current and potential range of urban agriculture activity within the CNA planning area. The resulting *Community Food System Assessment* intends to provide useful baseline data and stimulate visioning for the Neighborhood Transformation Plan.<sup>3</sup>

## WHY A COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM ASSESSMENT?

Community Food System Assessments are a way to learn about the food issues in a particular area and engage residents in taking action to improve the food system. A focus of many food assessments is to empower residents to ask questions about resources, opportunities, and gaps with regard to food access in their neighborhoods. A successful food assessment is collaborative and participatory, and it prompts changes that enhance food justice and security. Assessments can take many different forms, focus on different aspects of the food system, and use a variety of methods.<sup>4</sup>

The project proposed by AF2 to the Atlanta Housing Authority as part of the Choice Neighborhood Atlanta planning process prioritized development of localized economy as the lens from which to examine questions of food networks and security. The particular intent of this work is to point a way towards what it would take for the community food system in the CNA area to have a meaningful impact on the economic well-being of residents, contributing to their ability to stay in place and better control their destinies.

Cheryl Kollin, a consultant who specializes in social enterprises, discusses the challenges and opportunities of urban farming when she states:

*They increase food security by growing food locally. They give under-served urban neighborhoods access to fresh foods. They strengthen local economies by keeping dollars circulating within the community. They engage consumers, who learn how food is grown. They reduce 'food miles' and fossil fuel use. And they create jobs. Urban farms are growing more than*

### What is missing in Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta?

- Comprehensive enhancements to the educational scaffold: early learning, K-12, post-secondary, trade schools / job training, mentoring, apprenticeships, etc.
- Cutting-edge economic development strategies that are actionable and relevant to the neighborhoods and its residents.
- Leveraging resources and building capacity through partnerships and collaborations among non-profits, institutions, and individuals to pursue more layered funding sources. (Source: Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta, page 25)

## SECTION 2

### AN INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS

*food. They are growing community. Yet to make their business work, urban farmers must contend with two challenges that rural farmers typically don't face—accessing land and scaling operations large enough to be profitable. Urban land suitable for farming is expensive and, even when land is available it comes in smaller lot-sized parcels rather than in acres. Urban land is at such a premium that farmers have to get creative and grow more densely to make their business viable.<sup>5</sup>*

Strong indications of the local economic implications of urban agriculture can be found at the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agriculture Library online site<sup>6</sup>. With the heading "Community Food Systems and Civic Agriculture", the webpage lists information and numerous resources related to this burgeoning area of local economic development. It is clear that certain federal government agencies and public policies have embraced the growing movement enthusiastically, while other national departments or local and state governments less consistently support it. With CNA Community Food System Assessment, the Atlanta Housing Authority has taken the first step towards meeting the best practices of 21st century planning.

## The CNA Community Food System Assessment Areas

While the CNA focus area includes the site of the former University Homes as well as the surrounding neighborhoods of Atlanta University Center, Ashview Heights and Vine City, this report also includes a wider visioning of the region, which is called the Atlanta Promise Neighborhood. The Atlanta Promise Neighborhoods (area) is in roughly a 2-mile radius around the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta, and is included because of the opportunities for further economic development and the desire to weave the Choice Neighborhoods area into the planning fabric of Southwest Atlanta and the city as a whole.

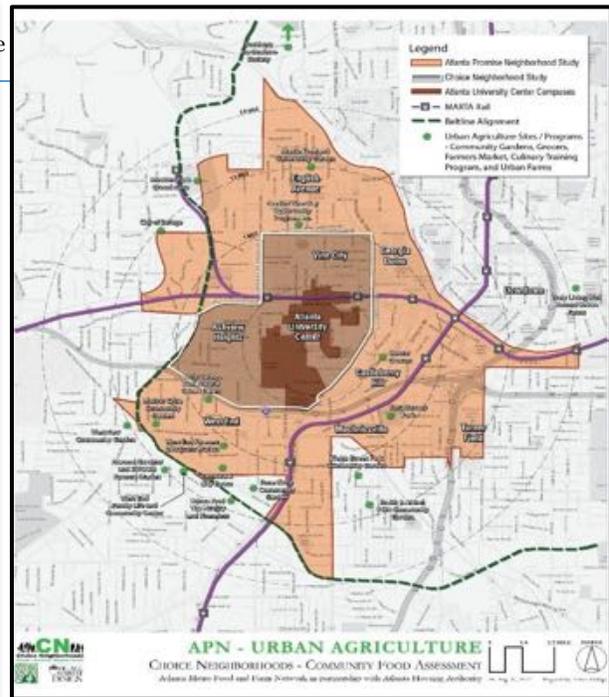


Figure 2 – Atlanta Promise Neighborhood

### AN INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS

The generic term “food system” often describes the totality of actions and processes involved in getting food from its source of production to ultimate consumption by humans. As further defined below, food systems include the foundations for food production, the social aspects of consumption, and relevant government and other policies as well as the actual growing, processing, and distributing of substances that result in foods that people consume.

Unfortunately, a simple definition cannot capture the complexity of the food system. Therefore, more abstractly, a food system is the set of complicated, interrelated, and often, tangled biophysical and social structures, processes, and materials that yield plant, animal, mineral, and synthetic substances that people define as consumable for sustenance or pleasure. Some aspects of the food system will be carried out commercially and some non-commercially. Although broader than most conceptualizations of the food system, we believe that all of these interrelated components are either a necessary part of the food system or shape it in important ways and, therefore, are important to family and community food decision-making.<sup>7</sup>

In their monograph "Growing a Community Food System," Steven Garrett and Gail Feenstra assert:

*A community food system assessment is a comprehensive “picture” of the way a particular community grows, processes, distributes, and consumes its food. It documents the specific ways that the community strengthens the links between the economic, environmental, and social aspects of its food system. It involves:*

- *Identifying potential collaborators and community resources*
- *Encouraging participation of a broad-based group of community members*

- *Integrating otherwise separate components of a community's food system (e.g., transportation systems and food access issues; direct marketing options for low-income residents; or agricultural value-added opportunities and employment for the community's youth)*
- *Creating a sense of community identity among participants*
- *Making a community's local food system more visible*
- *Educating policymakers and other local government officials about the state of the local food system*
- *Promoting leadership opportunities within the community to be served*<sup>8</sup>

Food is essential to our strength and vitality, and yet many of us remain disconnected from the systems that produce, process, and transport our food. We often take our food systems for granted.

Urban design planners take into consideration other subjects essential to life - air quality, water quality, and housing - while often, unfortunately, overlooking food. However, in U.S. cities such as Portland, Oregon, urban planners note a “growing awareness about the impact of the food system on climate change, local and regional economies, fossil fuel resources, community health and land use that have piqued planners’ interest in recent years. More intersections are now visible between food and what planners already do.”<sup>9</sup>

In the past several decades, the food system became global in scope. Food frequently travels several thousand miles from farm to plate. In response to the globalization of food, there is an increased interest in developing and supporting community-based food systems.

Community food systems are distinguishable from broader food systems because the system works to support the local economic, social and physical health of a neighborhood, city or region.<sup>10</sup> A Cornell University publication highlights the various dimensions of community food systems:

*Several qualifying terms have been used to describe the food system: simple, complex, local, global and regional. **A community food system is a food system in which food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place.** A community food system can refer to a relatively small area, such as a neighborhood, or progressively larger areas – towns, cities, counties, regions, or bioregions. The concept of community food systems is sometimes used interchangeably with "local" or "regional" food systems, but by including the word "community" there is an emphasis on strengthening existing (or developing new) relationships between all components of the food system. This reflects a prescriptive approach to building a food system, one that holds sustainability – economic, environmental and social – as a long-term goal toward which a community strives.*

Four aspects distinguish community food systems from the globalized structure that typifies the source endemic to the American diet:

- Food security is a key goal of community food systems. Basic food security only focuses on individual and household food needs while community food security addresses food access within a community context. This is especially for low-income households. It has a simultaneous goal of developing local food systems.
- Proximity refers to the distance between various components of the food system. In community food systems, these distances are generally shorter than those in the global food system are. This proximity increases the likelihood that solid relationships will form between different stakeholders in the food system – farmers, processors, retailers, restaurateurs, consumers, etc.
- Self-reliance refers to the degree to which a community meets its own food needs. When all food production, processing, marketing, and consumption occurs within a defined boundary total self-sufficiency occurs. While being 100% self-sufficient is not the aim of all community food systems, an increase in local production gives added strength to the community.
- Sustainability in agricultural and food system requires current practices not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their food needs. Sustainability includes environmental protection, profitability, ethical treatment of food system workers, and community development. Sustainability of the food and agriculture system increases with a diversified agriculture existing near strong and thriving markets. There is a reduction of non-renewable inputs and less reliance on agri-chemical fertilization and pest control. Finally, there are enhancements in citizen participation in food system decision-making.<sup>11</sup>



Community food systems can vary from self-reliant organizations to those that import all their food. They may vary from control by members of the community to control by outsiders. Subsystems within the same community food system might act independently of each other while still creating a cohesive system. For example, local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs are highly self-reliant and controlled by community members while the community still relies on supermarkets although they are entirely based on imports and control by outsiders.<sup>12</sup>

CSA from Atwood Gardens in Atlanta

Typical elements of community food systems include but are not limited to the following:

**Community Gardens** are organizations of community members that garden in the same space. Members either have their own beds or collectively grow produce.

**Edible Landscaping** is a form of landscape architecture that intentionally includes edibles into the design. This produces food while encouraging horticultural literacy. It also creates and esthetically pleasing environment.

**Farmers Markets** are temporary or permanent markets where various registered vendors sell locally grown items and locally made products. Markets are more than a place to shop for communities: they blend culture, leisure, and education into a space that simultaneously builds community.

**Food Retail** is built into the community through a number of outlets. Grocery stores and restaurants can sell locally produced and value-added foods. Garden centers serve food producers and there are commercial kitchens for preparing value-added foods.

**Foundations/Non-profits** are organizations that provide grants and other resources in support of the local food system.

**Horticultural Education** is provided by institutions or organizations whose goals are to educate and empower others to grow their own food.

**Institutional Gardens** are gardens affiliated with government institutions such as schools, libraries, public housing/assisted living spaces, and hospitals.

**Neighborhood Food Hub** is a coordinating entity that facilitates the complex logistics of aggregation and distribution and this creates new small food businesses and supports the businesses with administrative, marketing, human resources, and other business functions.

**Residential Gardens** are gardens maintained by residents who grow food where they live.

**Public Policy** can either destroy or strengthen a local food system. To build a strong community food system, the local government can promote a community food system through appropriate zoning and tax incentives.

**Urban Farms & Market Gardens** are farms that use intensive growing methods and sell to the community for profit.

## SECTION 3

CIVIC AGRICULTURE:  
EXISTING URBAN  
GARDENING NETWORKS IN  
THE CNA AREA

## CIVIC AGRICULTURE: EXISTING URBAN GARDENING NETWORKS IN THE CNA AREA

Section 2 lists a number of elements of the community food system. Comparing this list to the features found in the CNA neighborhoods, it is clear CNA possesses a relatively modest network of urban agriculture assets. Strengths in the community include a recent urban farm training for residents offered by a neighborhood-based non-profit. There is also a sizable retired and senior population with horticultural experience that provides intergenerational knowledge transfer. The recently opened Wal-Mart Super Center in Vine City improves residents' food access dramatically, as the store has a full grocery section. Challenges include a lack of fresh food retail availability as well as a lack of any large-scale urban farming within the footprint.

A qualitative survey conducted of the CNA neighborhoods by AF2 reveals a skeletal network of urban agriculture operations. AF2 personnel also mapped available assets for local food production, processing, and distribution in the CNA area and found a plethora of opportunities for strategic development of an urban agriculture-based localized economy. See Figure 3 for a map locating existing food assets within the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta area. Each respective neighborhood possesses its particular strengths as it relates to a comprehensive CNA vision of a community food system. Building upon the current network and assets provides a meaningful foundation to a more robust community food system.

## ASHVIEW HEIGHTS: LIVING WITH GOOD FOOD

Ashview Heights has a high concentration of existing and planned housing stock. There are single-family homes and new multi-family developments as well as senior high-rise living centers some renovated and others recently constructed. Besides the seasonal student populations of Atlanta University Center, the greatest residential density for the CNA footprint lies within Ashview Heights and its neighborhood subsections of Booker T. Washington, College Town, and Just Us Neighbors (JUNs). Due to these factors, both home gardens and living centers with connected local food operations are more prevalent in this community in comparison with Atlanta University Center and Vine City neighborhoods. While the general trend is toward residential gardens, there are two outstanding examples of institutional gardens located in Ashview Heights. One is the Omenala Griot Museum and the other is the now dormant Ashview Heights Community Garden. Figure 4 locates existing food assets within the Ashview Heights neighborhood.

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### ASHVIEW HEIGHTS HIGHLIGHTS

- **Ashview Heights Community Garden:** Founded by long-time Ashview Heights resident leaders, Mr. & Mrs. Abbensett, the garden is currently managed by the neighborhood association in partnership with ECOPAAT. ECOPAAT's mission is to "provide safe and affordable fresh vegetables to inner city neighborhoods through the establishment of locally owned and managed community gardens"<sup>13</sup>.
- **Omenala Griot Museum Institutional Garden:** Omenala Griot Afrocentric Teaching Museum is a community based cultural education institution located in the Ashview Heights neighborhood. Founded in 1992, the museum offers visitors a "hands-

on" African American cultural experience by seeing, hearing, saying, touching and doing. The museum's stated goal is to "rectify, reclaim and restore the contributions of Black people throughout history, which have been denied, ignored and omitted"<sup>14</sup>.

- **J.H. Harland Boys & Girls Club Institutional Garden:** The West Ends Boys Club opened in 1968, but was soon renamed John H. Harland Boys Club in March of 1970, in honor of Mr. John H. Harland. He made substantial contributions for the building of a new facility and his devotion to his community. A decade later, the club began serving girls and thus became the John H. Harland Boys & Girls Club of Metro Atlanta<sup>15</sup>. Judy Raines serves as Executive Director.
- **Just Us Neighbors Community Subsection Home Garden:** Ms. Veronica Ingram lives on Fountain Drive in Ashview Heights and maintains a small plot in the backyard of her home. She grows a variety of produce, including tomatoes and watermelon. Ms. Ingram indicated that she would be interested in having a community garden or urban farm developed on the large parcel of vacant land located next to her house.
- **The Veranda at College Town Institutional Garden:** The Veranda at College Town is a 100-unit apartment community located in the Historic West End Neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. This four-story building is designed and equipped to provide an active lifestyle for seniors. Indoor activities include a computer lab, library, media room, fully equipped fitness center and numerous gathering areas<sup>16</sup>. The small raised bed garden is located in the inner courtyard of the facility and acts as a communal amenity available for the residents use.

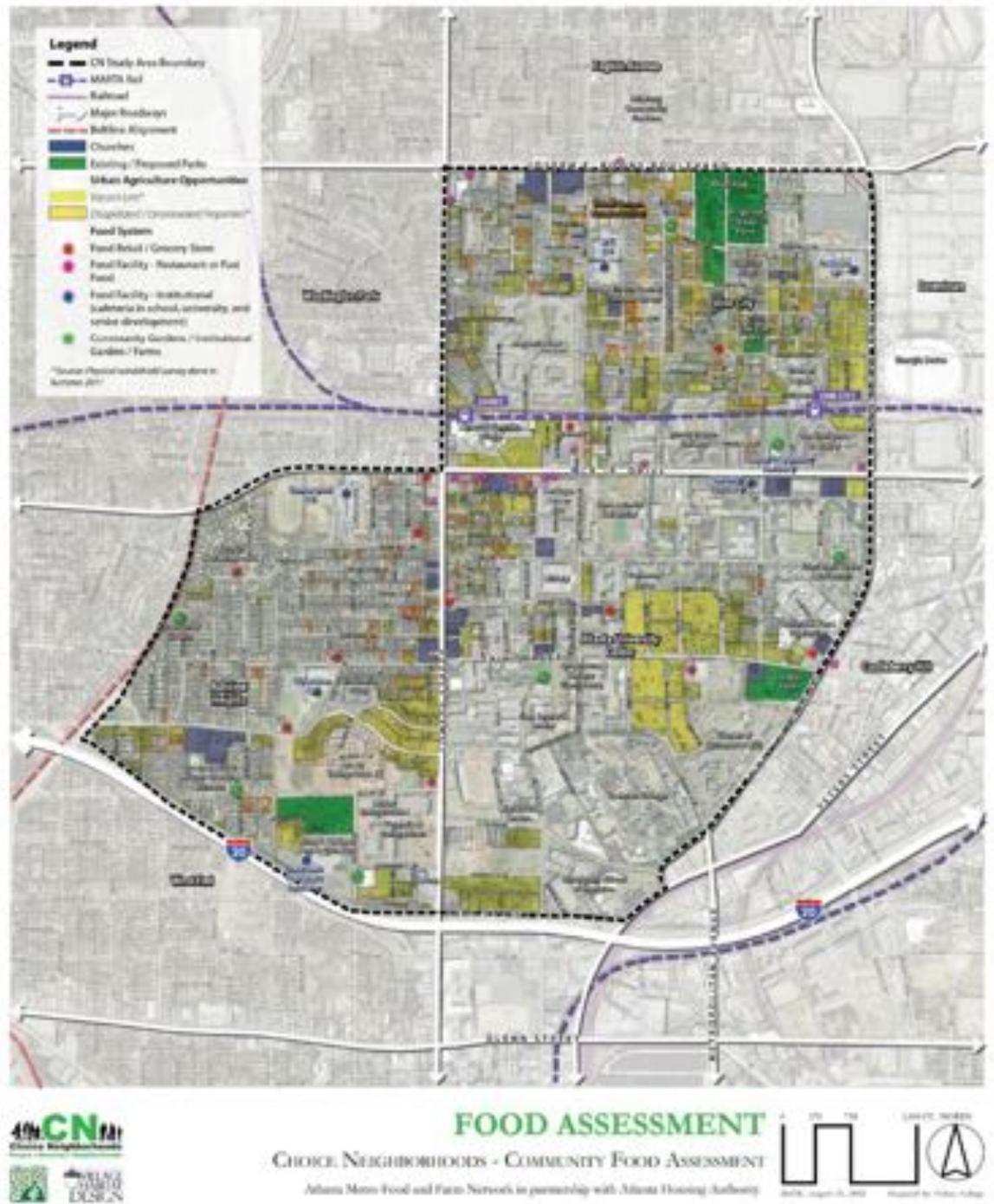


Figure 3 – Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta, Food Assessment

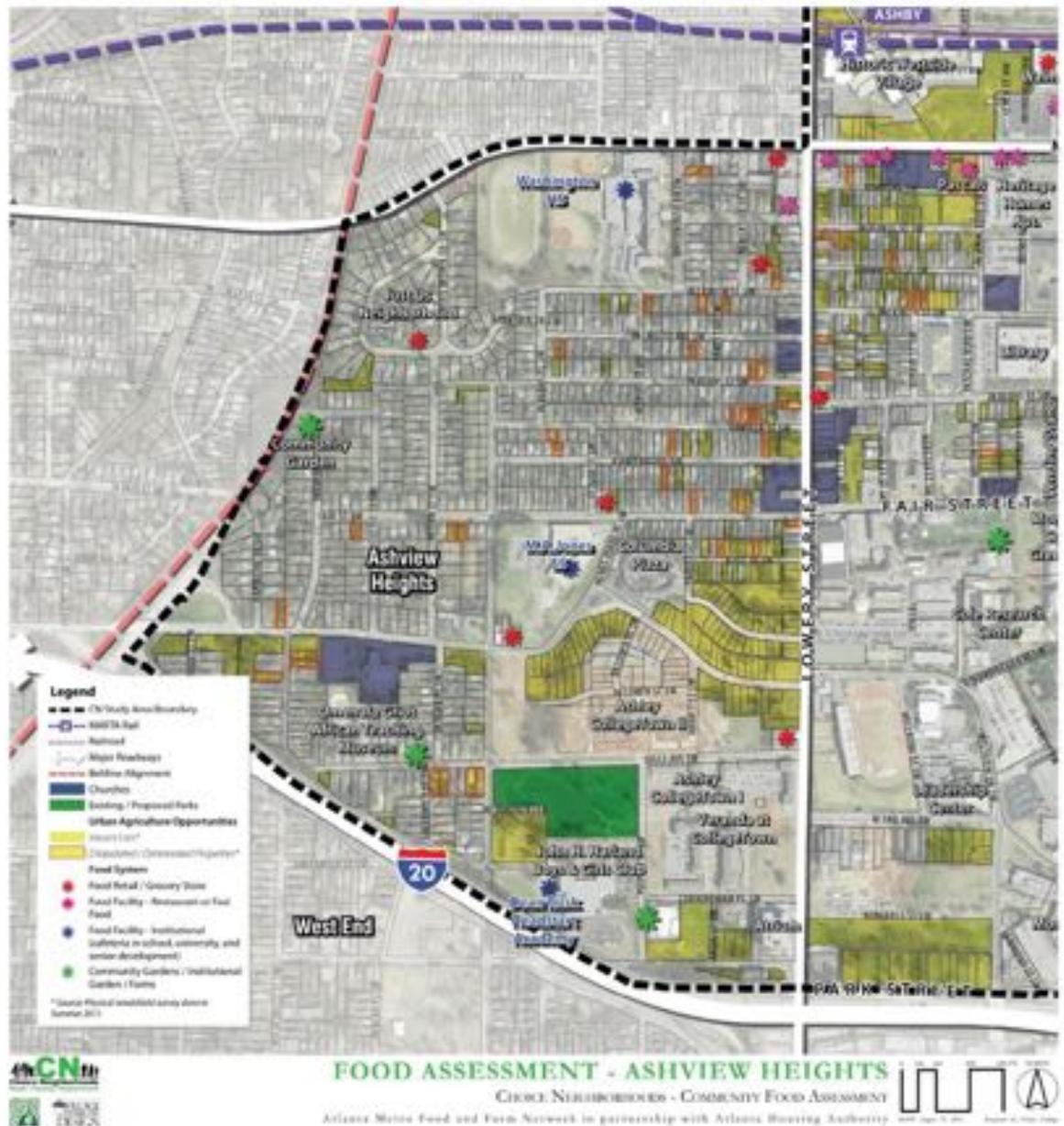


Figure 4 – Food Assessment for Ashview Heights

ATLANTA UNIVERSITY CENTER: Education & Food at the Core

While the Atlanta University Center neighborhood has several unique opportunities for larger scale intensive urban farming, it also generally has the least amount of permanently available aggregate open land available. There are also relatively few home garden possibilities. The

commercial scale greenhouse on the Morehouse College campus is a unique asset for the community. This could be a site to develop a sustainable integrated community food system. The Morehouse College students and the National Minority Male Health Project sponsor the farmer's market that is the only currently active fresh food outlet of its kind within the entire CNA area. The AUC colleges' operations and the neighborhood's civic culture both point toward educational leadership for a CNA community food system. Neighborhood leaders like Wanda Whiteside of the Atlanta University Center Community Association and Bill Cannon of the Booker T. Washington Community Association have made partnership with the AUC schools as standard method of operation. Figure 5 locates existing food assets within the Atlanta University Center neighborhood.

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#### ATLANTA UNIVERSITY CENTER HIGHLIGHTS

- **Morehouse College's Greenhouse** In 2005, Morehouse College and G.E.N.E.S.I.S. conducted a very successful student service learning trip to Haiti. This ten-day study abroad is the culmination of a nine-month effort to develop awareness of the value of the environment and nutrition to the culture and well-being of Africans at home and in the Diaspora. G.E.N.E.S.I.S. (Growing Energy and Nutrition for Environmental Stability and Investing in Society) is a project led by Dr. A. Kweku Andoh of the North Scale Education & Research Institute, Inc. (NSERI)

It is also the launch of an on-going effort to enhance the educational outcomes of Morehouse and other Atlanta University Center students through involvement in sustainable development projects and hands-on learning. Hands-on learning strives to bridge the gap between knowledge derived from theory and experiential knowledge derived from listening to community elders and living close to nature. Important specimen trees and shrubs collected in Haiti are housed in the Morehouse greenhouse and *Moringa* seeds were also started in the greenhouse for propagation. This experience and

#### Profile of Gwen Cain & Catherine Williams at Morehouse College Community Revitalization Initiative (CRI)

The mission of the CRI is to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with adjacent communities that will result in a sustained economic and social improvement and provide Morehouse Students with learning opportunities that cultivate civic growth and development. The program's goals and objectives include preparing a neighborhood revitalization plan that emphasizes community-articulated preferences for development and preservation, establishing community-based momentum for driving neighborhood revitalization, and strengthening meaningful linkages between the community and Morehouse College. Gwen Cain is the Program Manager while Catherine Williams serves as the Project Coordinator, and has produced several reports for NPU-T neighborhoods related to urban agriculture and local food issues.

other demonstrates the potential use of this unique asset for community benefit as well as the college's needs.<sup>17</sup>

- **Friendship Center Apartments Community Garden Site:** As part of its concern to provide spiritual and social uplift within the community, the Friendship Baptist Church congregation has provided an extensive housing ministry, including the E. R. Carter Old Folks Home (now demolished), the Samuel W. Williams/Friendship Center Apartments and the William V. Guy Tower High-rise for the Elderly and Handicapped<sup>18</sup>. While the community garden site within the apartment complex is dormant, it remains an ideal site for future revitalization.
- **Morehouse College Farmers Market:** The eating habits of students, faculty and staff have become a big focus for the Morehouse Research Institute (MRI) and the National Minority Male Health Project. The project promotes healthy lifestyles among minority males through research, education and service. Morehouse, under the direction of MRI, is one of five historically black colleges collaborating on this federally funded initiative. MRI also works on a variety of projects to get minority males healthier, both on campus and in the greater Atlanta community<sup>19</sup>.

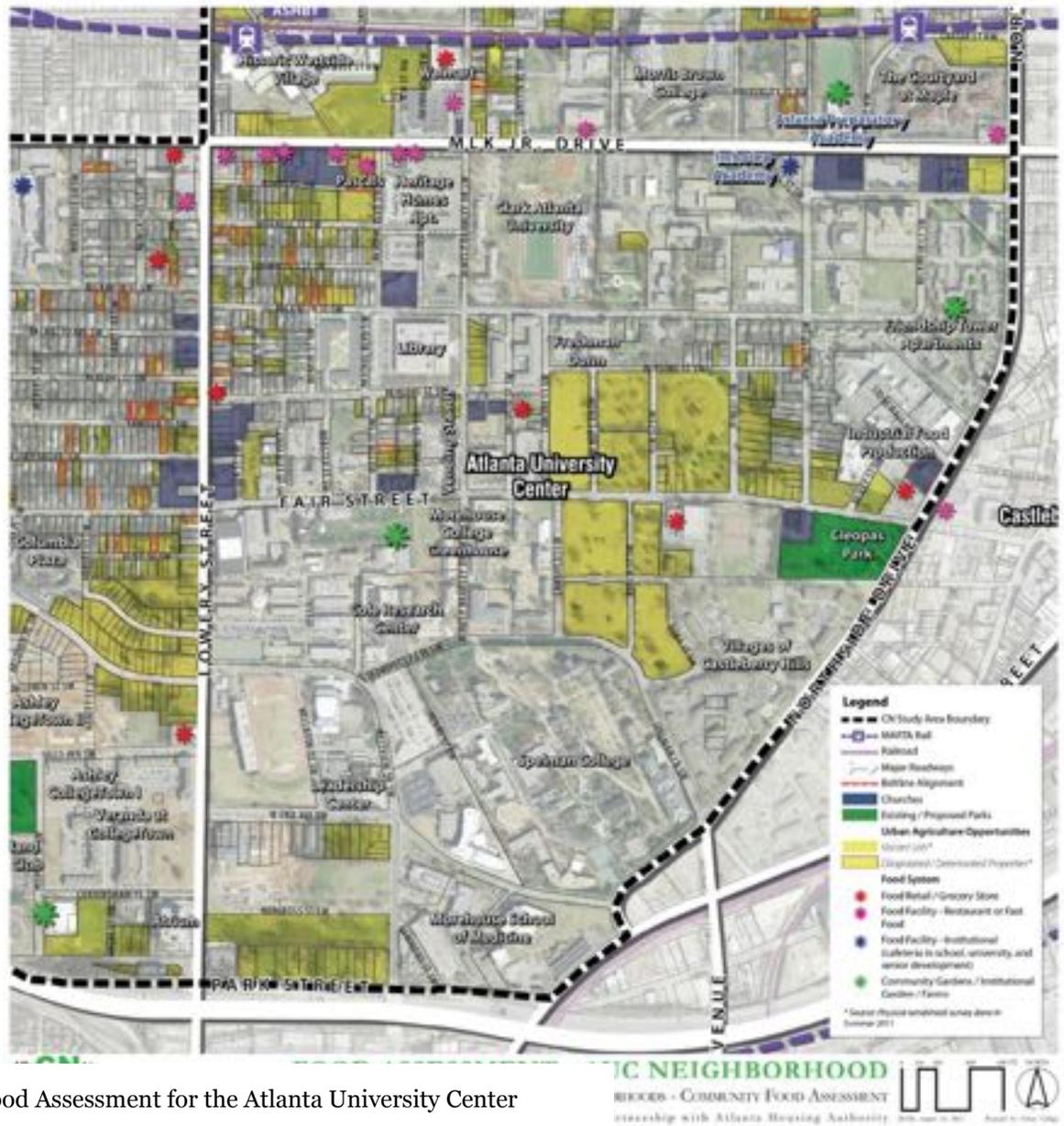


Figure 5 – Food Assessment for the Atlanta University Center

**Cleopas R. Johnson Park Community Garden Plan:** Cleopas R. Johnson Park is named in memory of the late band director of Morris Brown College’s band (also known as the “Marching Wolverines”) on October 2, 1997. The neighborhoods of Villages at Castleberry Hill, West End, Vine City, Castleberry Hill, and the Atlanta University Center are all stakeholders in Cleopas R. Johnson Park. The park is conveniently at the intersection of these five communities and provides a great opportunity for creating synergy among them<sup>20</sup>. Through a visioning plan sponsored by the nonprofit Park Pride, there is a future community garden in Cleopas R. Johnson Park<sup>21</sup>.

- **Morris Brown College, Local Food Workforce Development:** “Urban agriculture is being adopted by the Green Jobs movement and offers agricultural training and workforce development programs targeted to needy populations, such as formerly incarcerated individuals, the homeless, marginalized communities, and disadvantaged youth”<sup>22</sup>. Morris Brown College’s President Dr. Pritchett outlines a vision forward that includes “identifying academic programs to support workforce development in a global economy” and “establishing a Lifelong Learning Center at Morris Brown”<sup>23</sup>. Such a role for Morris Brown could perhaps serve as the foundation of a popular education resource to promote horticultural literacy in the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta area, offering a sustainable foundation for urban agriculture related careers and enterprises.

#### VINE CITY: WHERE URBAN FARMING PAST AND FUTURE MEET

From the historic Wachendorf Estate farm to the anticipated neighborhood urban farm in the Mims Park plans, Vine City clearly possesses both the heritage and current capacity to be the locomotive that drives an enhanced CNA community food system. Due to the volume of its open land parcels, the majority of current and potential permanent large-scale food production exists in this neighborhood located in the northern segment of the CNA area. In addition, the urban farming education investments, made by Historic Westside Gardens, offer a foundation for widespread “horticultural literacy” work. This could support capacity sustainability for a resident-led neighborhood urban farming movement. Vine City is poised to be the “bread basket” of the larger CNA community. Figure 6 locates existing food assets within the Vine City neighborhood.

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#### VINE CITY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Atlanta Preparatory Academy:** The public charter school’s Parent-Teacher Organization has a parent-led Edible Schoolyard Committee. It runs a “farm at school” initiative with donated project management assistance from AF2. It began with a Hands-on-Atlanta volunteer day in the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year. The principal Dr. Lynette Walker arranged for installation of a simple garden. Interested parents and teachers quickly got involved with designing and maintaining the initial plots. They also have organized themselves into a committee that envisions a classic Edible Schoolyard as well as Community Urban Farm complex that benefits both the school population and surrounding neighborhood residents<sup>24</sup>.

## Profile of J.R. Murphy



J.R. Murphy is one of nine Vine City-English Avenue neighbors who have become tillers of the earth, thanks to an urban farm program established by Historic Westside Gardens, Inc. This nonprofit organization addresses the issues of food insecurity and economic disinvestment in Vine City. The training and experience have done wonders for Murphy and his community, he says. "You can't farm unless you have peace," he said. "You become connected to the soil. You become connected with Mother Earth." Though the training that the former entrepreneur received was valued at thousands of dollars, Murphy says the lessons he received upon completing the program two years ago are priceless. "I'm passionate about this," Murphy said. "Right now, I'm selling turnip greens, collards, and mustards for \$3.00 to \$3.50 per pound. The grocery stores may sell them at \$1.75 per bushel, but you may have to worry about pesticides with their produce."<sup>1</sup>

- **Occupy Atlanta Sustainability Group Community Gardens:** Across Vine City, landowners work with Occupy Atlanta activists on land deemed useless. With intermediary help from the activist Sally Mason, Occupy Atlanta plans garden projects throughout the neighborhood. The intention is to produce enough food to feed hungry people in the community.

- **Historic Westside Gardens:** Founded by Gil Frank in 2008 with a \$40,000 grant from the Fulton-Atlanta Community Action Authority, the program gives jobless area residents an opportunity to train and certify in urban farming. This takes place on a 5,000 square-foot, vacant greenspace at 280 Elm Street in northwest Atlanta. Mr. Frank recruits others to be a part of his vision to revitalize the Vine City-English Avenue neighborhood one garden at a time. With the recent groundbreaking of an 80,000-square-foot Wal-Mart, Frank hopes the mega-retailer will consider shopping with neighborhood growers<sup>25</sup>.

- **HELP Inc.:** HELP Inc.'s Neighborhood Revitalization Division ATL Health & Wellness Initiative targets areas encompassing Northwest Atlanta neighborhoods English Avenue and Vine City. Local residents and stakeholders have a plan to educate the public-at-large about permaculture. HELP is also sponsoring an Outdoor Classroom and an Urban Farm at 386 Elm Street in English Avenue.<sup>26</sup>

**Mims Park:** Farmer D Consulting and Village Habitat Design conducted a one-day charette on the potential for developing Historic Mims Park with farm and green infrastructure. The park is located in the Vine City Neighborhood of Atlanta Georgia. The charette focuses on the potential of developing Historic Mims Park as a peace park designed to honor Georgia as a historic state for civil and human rights leaders. The farm component provides neighborhood based food production, nutritional education, and farm based economic opportunities.<sup>27</sup> An Atlanta City Council committee recently approved consolidating parcels owned by the city and Invest Atlanta

and executing a 50-year lease with the nonprofit organization that wants to build, operate, and maintain the park that will span three city blocks on the edge of Vine City.<sup>28</sup>

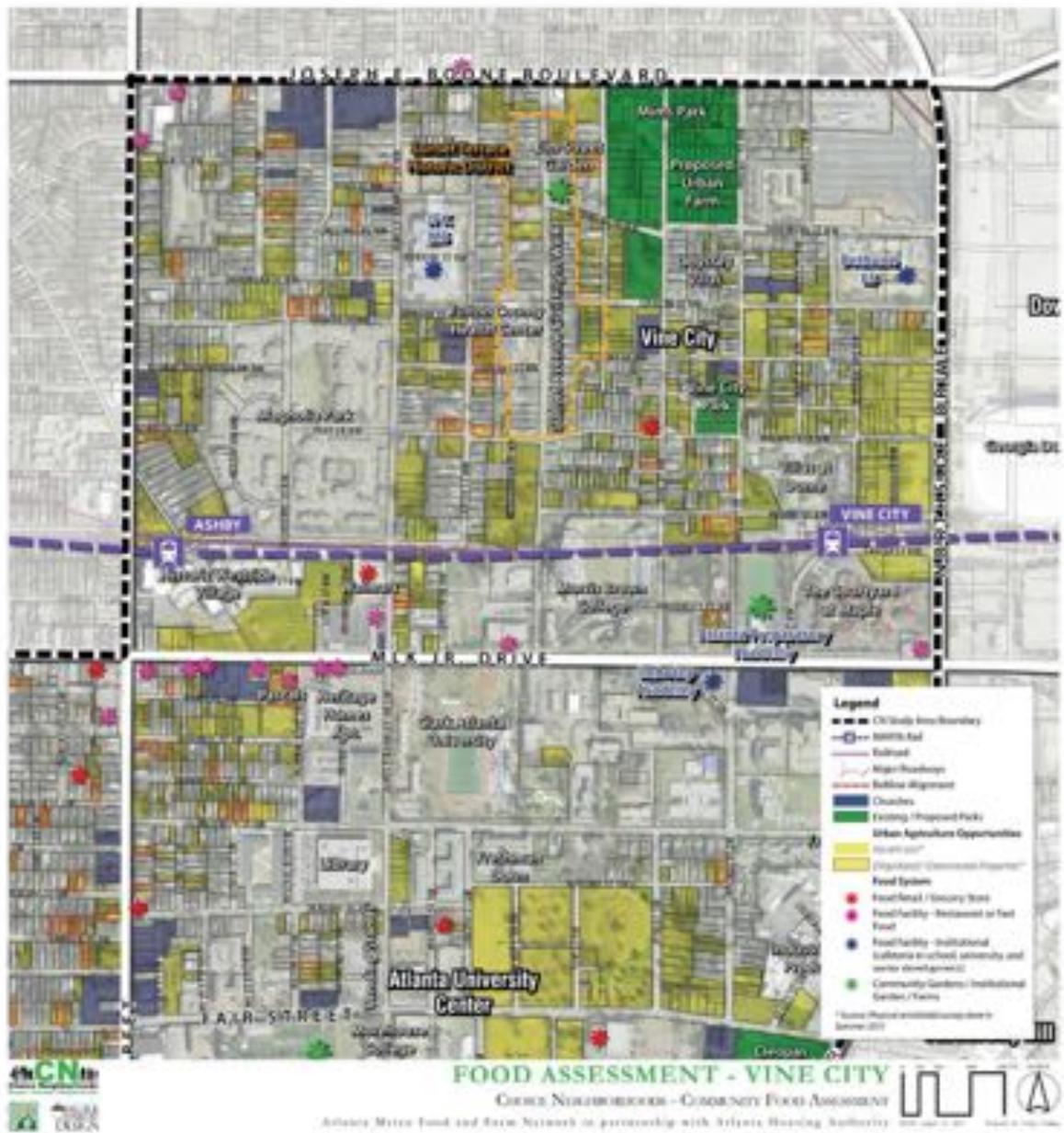


Figure 6 – Food Assessment for Vine City

## SECTION 4

### COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS

## COMMUNITY REFLECTIONS AND FEEDBACK

Meaningful engagement through broad and quality stakeholder outreach is a guiding principle of the CNA Community Food System Assessment work. The AF2 staff connects to the community through neighborhood canvassing, surveys, and organizing a Sustainable Neighborhood Visioning Workshop. A Vine City neighborhood public charter school serves as a host for this workshop and the community charette shares information about urban agriculture-based local economy and development. It also solicits focused feedback from residents and other stakeholders in the Choice Neighborhood Atlanta area.

Stakeholders involved in the outreach efforts include civic and business leaders, residents, and organizations or persons already engaged in food production. Particular efforts to connect leaders from the Atlanta University Consortium and Morehouse Community Revitalization Initiative, with local developers, members of the senior community, college student populations, and other community leaders including clergy of faith communities in the area.

AF2 collects feedback from a core group of community members, recording their specific needs, what resources and opportunities are already available within the community, and what networks exist that could possibly address these needs.

### Participating Organizations

- Ashview Heights Community Association
- Atlanta University Center Community Association
- Atlanta University Center Consortium
- Historic Westside Gardens
- Just Us Neighborhood Association
- Morehouse College Community Revitalization Initiative
- Neighborhood Planning Unit T (NPU-T)
- Neighborhood Planning Unit L (NPU-L)
- South West Atlanta Growers Cooperative (SWAGC)
- Vine City Neighborhood Association

## SURVEY OF COMMUNITY DESIRES AND NEEDS

A brief survey was administered to persons who indicated they were interested in local food issues within the Choice Neighborhood footprint. Table 1 summarizes the survey results. A copy of the blank survey is in Appendix A.

## SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBORHOOD VISIONING WORKSHOP

A Sustainable Neighborhood Visioning Workshop community charette held on August 18, 2012 was a signature event that allowed focused attention on the issues involved with planning a community food system. With facilitator assistance by sustainability planner Greg Ramsey of Village Habitat Design LLC at their disposal, community stakeholders had the chance to share their experience. Stakeholders were able to drill down deeply, and to gather detailed information

about innovative ideas in the field of sustainable community development. A summary of the results from the charette is in Appendix B.

<b>Table 1 Grower Survey Responses</b>					
<b>1. Do you grow food?</b>					
yes	47%	no	53%		
<b>2. Do you have a garden where you live?</b>					
yes	53%	no	47%		
<b>3. Do you know neighbors in your area who grow food? If so list them</b>					
yes	53%	no	30%	no answer	13%
<b>4. Do you know where food is grown near you? If so can you list the locations</b>					
yes	60%	no	20%	no answer	20%
Answers listed: Truly Living Well, Garden at intersection of Elm and Griffin Streets, Mother Clyde Garden, Atwood Gardens, Westside Garden					
<b>5. Do you have access to items/tools necessary for growing food?</b>					
yes	62%	no	23%	no answer	15%
<b>6. Do you need assistance accessing tools for growing food? If so what tools?</b>					
yes	39%	no	46%	no answer	15%
Tools needed: tiller, pick, rakes, general gardening tools.					
<b>7. Do you need assistance with labor for growing food? If so what type of labor do you need?</b>					
yes	38%	no	38%	no answer	24%
Assistance needs listed: general manpower or volunteers, carpenters					
<b>8. Do you need assistance getting knowledge to grow food? if so what information do you seek?</b>					
yes	38%	no	38%	no answer	24%
<b>9. Do you wish to have a garden where you live?</b>					
yes	60%	no	30%	no answer	30%
<b>10. Do you wish to be connected to other growers?</b>					
yes	74%	no	13%	no answer	13%

## SECTION 5

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR A GREATER COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR A GREATER COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM

As reflected in the Community Visioning Session on local food and in other forums where AF2 invited stakeholder feedback on urban agriculture, there clearly is interest and support within CNA neighborhoods for an expanded community food system. Residents are influenced by the rising popularity of growing food in cities, as well as the concentration of noted urban farming

### Community stakeholders involved in a community food system coalitions:

- Locally elected leaders
- Food and agriculture agency representatives
- Farmers or groups interested in sustainable farming
- Food banks and anti-hunger advocates
- Cooperative Extensions and other relevant university faculty
- Public health workers and nutritionists
- Environmental and sustainable community advocates
- Parks and Recreation Departments
- Urban gardening organizations
- Food processors, retailers
- Small business support and local lending institutions
- Interested community members<sup>31</sup>

projects in the southwest Atlanta region that surrounds the community. Given the desire of a large-portion of the CNA demographic for an expanded community food system and the nascent but respectable existing network of garden sites, it is helpful to understand the best practices to create greater food security and local economy.

Research supports organizing this network into a defined collective. A paper on "Growing a Community Food System" advises:

*Perhaps one of the most important elements of designing community food systems projects is that it is a collaborative process. This means that it includes the participation of multiple formal and informal organizations, associations and individuals with a variety of backgrounds and expertise. The participation of a broad cross-section of the community is essential for*

*the project to be representative and contribute to the growth of a community food system.*

*In order for any community food system project to function well, relevant stakeholders in the local food system, need representation in the beginning of the dialogue. The relevant stakeholders will then need to evolve into a coalition. A coalition has been defined as "individuals or organizations working together in a common effort for a common purpose to make more effective and efficient use of resources" (Clark, 1992). The coalition is essentially a mechanism for increasing the power or leverage of groups or individuals. Situations that are difficult or impossible for the individual to overcome alone can often be dealt with effectively by acquiring the right partners. Coalition partners are motivated to participate because it is clear to them that they will benefit from such a partnership in multiple ways.*

Connecting the current food production operations into a more cooperative network is the most important next step in developing the CNA community food system.

Once formed, a community food system coalition often benefits from professional facilitation for a set period to allow for stabilization of the group. “The facilitator should be perceived by the coalition members as neutral and trusted” (Clark, 1992). This can help prevent “turf wars” or leadership struggles and ensure that the group addresses issues in a smooth and timely manner.”<sup>32</sup>

The next step beyond strengthening the relationships between various stakeholders is conducting some level of strategic planning. By retaining AF2 to conduct this Community Food System Assessment, the Atlanta Housing Authority elects to provide an important preliminary information resource for the CNA community. While this document should go a long way towards inspiring CNA stakeholders to take control of their food future, an in-depth strategic plan remains beyond the assessment process. An Urban Agriculture Overlay Plan for the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta area would deliver a road map for constructing a community food system brought to maximized scale.

While effective planning can be extremely helpful, it also true that community food systems projects are most stable and successful when they combine project and policy work.

*Specific, short-term projects engage community participants in concrete ways. Besides building cohesion and trust, they can also produce results of which the community can be proud (e.g., community gardens, farmers’ markets, CSAs, job training programs, food-related micro-enterprises, and agricultural marketing programs). However, short-term projects by themselves are not enough to sustain groups interested in working toward the longer term goals of building a community food system.... Creating and influencing local food and agricultural policies allow the community to access additional resources to enable and enhance their work.*<sup>33</sup>

Even with the best of planning, there is no substitute for the capacity and will to implement urban agriculture projects on the ground. When emphasizing the economic value of urban farming, it is important to have the proper balance between visioning and practical action. The writers of “Farming Inside Cities: Entrepreneurial Urban Agriculture in the United States” express it this way:

*... visualize a wobbly three-legged stool. One leg of the stool represents urban vacant land, and the government agencies and policies affecting its disposition and management. The second leg represents entrepreneurial urban agriculture, a movement composed of individuals and organizations having the desire and knowledge to produce food in the city for market sale. The third leg represents the institutional climate within a particular city, the environment in which entrepreneurial urban agriculture would take place—be it accommodating, neutral, or restrictive.*<sup>29</sup>

In order to illustrate the first “leg” as described above, Atlanta Food & Farm, Greg Ramsey of Village Habitat Design, and Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta contractor Urban Collage developed a series of maps displaying unused and vacant land within the Choice footprint. These findings are discussed further in the subsection, Preliminary Food and Land Assessment.

The second *leg* of the stool serves as the economic engine that drives the purchase and production of food. The urban agriculture entrepreneurial movement exists in the area, though it is in its very early stage of development. Further community visioning of an urban agriculture-based local economy is documented below through local food-related business and employment projections. Planning activities that identify and facilitate physical connections between urban agriculture entrepreneurs and potential purchasers can help to accelerate this development. Greg Ramsey explores this recommendation through a planning concept called “Anchor Areas,” which is discussed further in the subsection of the report, Urban Agriculture Opportunity Areas.

Finally, the third *leg* seeks ways to make the institutional climate more favorable for a full-fledged CNA Community Food System. This is explored later in the report under Technical Recommendations. Authors Kaufman and Bailkey remind communities that:

*The more that entrepreneurial urban agriculture is seen in positive terms by government officials, lending agencies, and the general public, the greater likelihood of a smoother road. But if the institutional climate is cool or indifferent towards entrepreneurial urban agriculture, its advocates will clearly encounter more difficulties in achieving their vision.*

*The local institutional contexts within which entrepreneurial urban agriculture can—or potentially can—exist is composed of many separate units. Some units are networked, others not. Some are more open-minded towards innovative ideas than others. Given the lack of any sort of mandate for urban agriculture, its evolution within a particular city is dependent upon the personal attitudes of initiating and facilitating actors operating in a complex social and political environment.<sup>30</sup>*

## PRELIMINARY FOOD/LAND AREA ASSESSMENT

Unused and vacant land within the Choice footprint has the potential to be the foundation for a community food system. The yellow areas on the map (undeveloped lots and deteriorated properties) show the locations of greatest opportunities for future community or market gardens and urban farms. The maps also locate existing food system components in four categories: 1) food retail/grocery store, 2) food facility (restaurant or fast food), 3) food facility (university, school or senior development cafeteria) and 4) community gardens/institutional farms.



Table 2 indicates there is a total of 168 acres of open land (vacant land and parkland) and deteriorated property areas in the Choice Neighborhood Atlanta area. If an average of 20% to 30% of that land is preserved for urban agriculture that would total approximately 30 to 50 acres. This acreage could be developed as a combination of several larger urban farms, greenhouse production areas and a variety of large to small infill gardens.

<b>Table 2, Acreage of Available Land</b>					
Neighborhood	Vacant Land (Acres)	Park Land (Acres)	Deteriorated/Dilapidated Properties		Total Land (Acres)
			(Parcels)	(Acres)	
Vine City	71	1	35	5	77
Ashview	26	6	36	4.4	36.4
AUC	48	4	15	2	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>167.4</b>
Land acreage calculated electronically using map information. Assessment of vacant and distressed made by Urban Collage windshield survey conducted during Summer 2011.					

Additional land for cultivation could be available on existing non-deteriorated properties and on institutional properties such as churches, schools and senior centers. As a preliminary estimate, one acre of property can provide up to 100 persons with the majority of their fresh produce needs. The needs of 2500 to 5000 residents (which is the equivalent of 1/4 to 1/2 of the population in the CNA) can be provided through the cultivation of 50 acres. Additional food needs can be met using residential front and back yard areas or through institutional gardens. Table 3 indicates the population in the three neighborhoods of Choice Atlanta.

<b>Table 3 – Population, Households, and Household Size<sup>36</sup></b>			
Neighborhood	Population	Number of Households	Average Household Size
Vine City	2818	1200	2.47
Ashview Heights	2266	1085	2.43
AUC	6414	768	2.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>11498</b>	<b>3053</b>	

It is critical to locate the appropriate types of gardens and urban farms in optimal areas in the neighborhoods and manage them so they are aesthetically pleasing and a rich complement to the neighborhoods. An urban agricultural planning overlay can identify appropriate and optimal land use zones and standards to insure that this objective is met.

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**POTENTIAL URBAN AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Urban agricultural development of up to 50 acres of land in the Choice Neighborhood area will yield direct work opportunities in four main sectors: **urban agricultural production, secondary food products (value added), education/Agro-tourism and local food research.** The following are very preliminary estimates for part-time and full-time job creation in those sectors based on 50 acres of urban agricultural production.

- Agricultural production: 2 – 4 persons per acre: 100 – 200
- Secondary food products/value added: approx. 20 – 50
- Education/Agri-tourism:  
1.5 persons per major urban agricultural site  
(20 sites): 30
- Local Food Research – secondary food products: 20

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Total: approximately 170 – 300 employment/work opportunities

These estimates represent direct work opportunities. It is difficult to assess the economic benefits stimulated in other sectors as well as the general impact on the community member’s well-being in areas such as health, community involvement, crime reduction, and economic well-being. Factors such as a community’s increased usage of local transportation, their reduced energy use, and their improved knowledge base (with a specific focus on sustainability issues) are real benefits to the community but are difficult to quantify.

The development of an agricultural overlay with an assessment of specific stakeholder categories in the Choice Neighborhoods is the next step towards refining the scope of cultivation and economic development potential for urban agriculture in the Choice Neighborhoods

## URBAN AGRICULTURE OPPORTUNITY AREAS

The Choice Neighborhood survey identifies potential locations for specific urban agriculture opportunities. Existing urban agriculture land use as well as vacant and parkland are areas of key focus. The first review of existing agricultural land focuses on four categories:



Urban Agriculture Centered Development Example  
20-70% preservation for garden/farm area

- 1) **Food retail/grocery store**
- 2) **Food facility (restaurant or fast food)**
- 3) **Food facility (university, school or senior development cafeteria and**
- 4) **Community gardens/institutional farms.**

These four classifications alone represent the bulk of the current food system uses in the Choice Neighborhood.

Besides the traditional categories listed above it is important to include additional classifications to encompass a greater range of food system components. The following food area classifications are applied to new opportunities identified in the Choice Neighborhood Atlanta area.

**UA – GEL:** Urban Agriculture - Garden and Edible Landscaping

- Infill community or market gardens and fruiting plants that are designed to permanently or temporarily occupy the many vacant lots and undeveloped parcels that are prevalent throughout the CNA area.

**UA – STPEL:** Urban Agriculture - Street Tree Planting and Edible Landscaping

- Urban forestry features designed to provide shade for pedestrians and street beautification, as well as contributing to the community food shed.

**UA – CD:** Urban Agricultural/Green Space Centered Development

- Development that integrates urban agriculture with mixed-use housing community development focuses on the preservation of agricultural and other greenspace related areas to enhance the activities, health and quality of life of the future residents.

**UA – FAS:** Urban Agriculture - Farm at School

- Campus based projects for grade schools that are larger than a typical garden (an acre or more in scale) and designed to serve the needs of the surrounding neighborhood as well the school community.

**UA – C/MG:** Urban Agriculture - Community/Market Gardens

- Urban agriculture projects that are typically located on less than an acre of land and designed to be used by residents for household consumption or by entrepreneurs for commercial food production purposes.

**UA – TUF:** Urban Agriculture- Temporary Urban Farm

- Urban agriculture projects that are typically located on an acre or more of land which is designed as a Phase 1, temporary for profit or non-profit commercial food production enterprise until a phase II urban agricultural-centered development occurs.

**UA – UF:** Urban Agriculture - Urban Farm

- Urban agriculture projects that are typically located on an acre or more of land and designed to be either for-profit or non-profit commercial food production enterprise.

**UA – CD:** Urban Agriculture - Urban Agricultural-Centered Development

- A development designed with local food production as its focus that preserves 20% - 80% of the green space on the site for a large garden, urban farm, orchard, and/or urban forest.

**UA – FH:** Urban Agriculture - Food Hub

- A multipurpose food processing and distribution center, alternately serving as a micro-hub within a walkable neighborhood foodshed or a larger hub for several neighborhoods with external transportation connections.

**UA-FG:** Urban Agriculture - Food Grocery/Retail

- A fresh food retail facility ranging from seasonal farm stands, farmers markets and convenience stores and to larger retail grocery outlets.

**UA - FR:** Urban Agriculture - Food Restaurant

- A farm-to-table restaurant or café.

## **UA – PCW: Urban Agriculture - Pond, Cistern or Well**

- An irrigation source for gardens and urban farms that is particularly designed for drought contingencies.

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## **IDENTIFICATION OF ANCHOR AREAS**

We have identified nine “Anchor Areas” in order to demonstrate the possibilities of an improved community food system. These areas concentrate a variety of opportunities in a relatively compact footprint providing a network of key urban agricultural connections and applications in a small space. Within each of these Anchor Areas, we find a significant number of parcels to be appropriate sites for urban agricultural uses. These include farms and their supporting infrastructure, institutional gardens that could serve as learning/mentoring opportunities for schools, food facilities and food retailing locations. Many of these Anchor Areas can serve as a node (production, food facility, education or agri-tourism) or food hub in a greater CNA community food system. These food anchors can also stimulate and connect to other sustainable sectors such as transportation (walk, bike, and transit friendly), culture and seasonal celebrations, historic tourism, green space initiatives, street beautification projects. The development of these Anchor Areas can enhance quality of life while providing a full working community food system that celebrates the past and connects it to a sustainable future.

The food area classifications identified above as well as specific Anchor Area locations are identified for each of the three neighborhoods in the maps below. Figure 7, Local Food Anchor Opportunity Areas shows the nine proposed Anchor Areas within the Choice Neighborhood footprint.

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### **ANCHOR AREA A – MOREHOUSE COLLEGE**

Located to the West of the Morehouse School of Medicine and South of the Morehouse Leadership Center, this anchor area continues the work undertaken by the Morehouse College Community Revitalization Initiative. We identified the open land to the east of the Morehouse College Center of Arts as an appropriate location for urban agriculture green space development. Specific urban agricultural opportunities include community gardens, urban farm, composting facilities as well as preventative medicine research and education gardens.

The gateway to the Morehouse College Anchor Area is on Joseph L. Lowery at the I-20 access ramp. Gateways provide opportunities for developing garden district themes such as integrated tree and edible landscaping plantings.

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### **ANCHOR AREA B – SOUTH ASHVIEW HEIGHTS**

Anchor B provides an intersection of opportunities for urban agriculture; it is a veritable neighborhood food hub. The following urban agriculture opportunities were identified for this anchor:

- Ten potential locations for urban agriculture/green space centered development.

- Five potential locations for infill gardens with edible landscaping
- A farm to school site at M.A. Jones elementary school

At the center of the anchor are several large open parcels that are ideal for a temporary or permanent urban agricultural-centered farm. Other advantages are the proximity of these parcels to a park and vacant or in need of revitalization buildings. Existing institutions such as the Dean Rusk Head Start Academy, the John Harland Boys and Girls Club, the Veranda Senior Center, the Omenala Griot Museum and the M.A. Jones Elementary School are ideal sponsoring organizations for infill gardening, edible landscaping and community gardens.

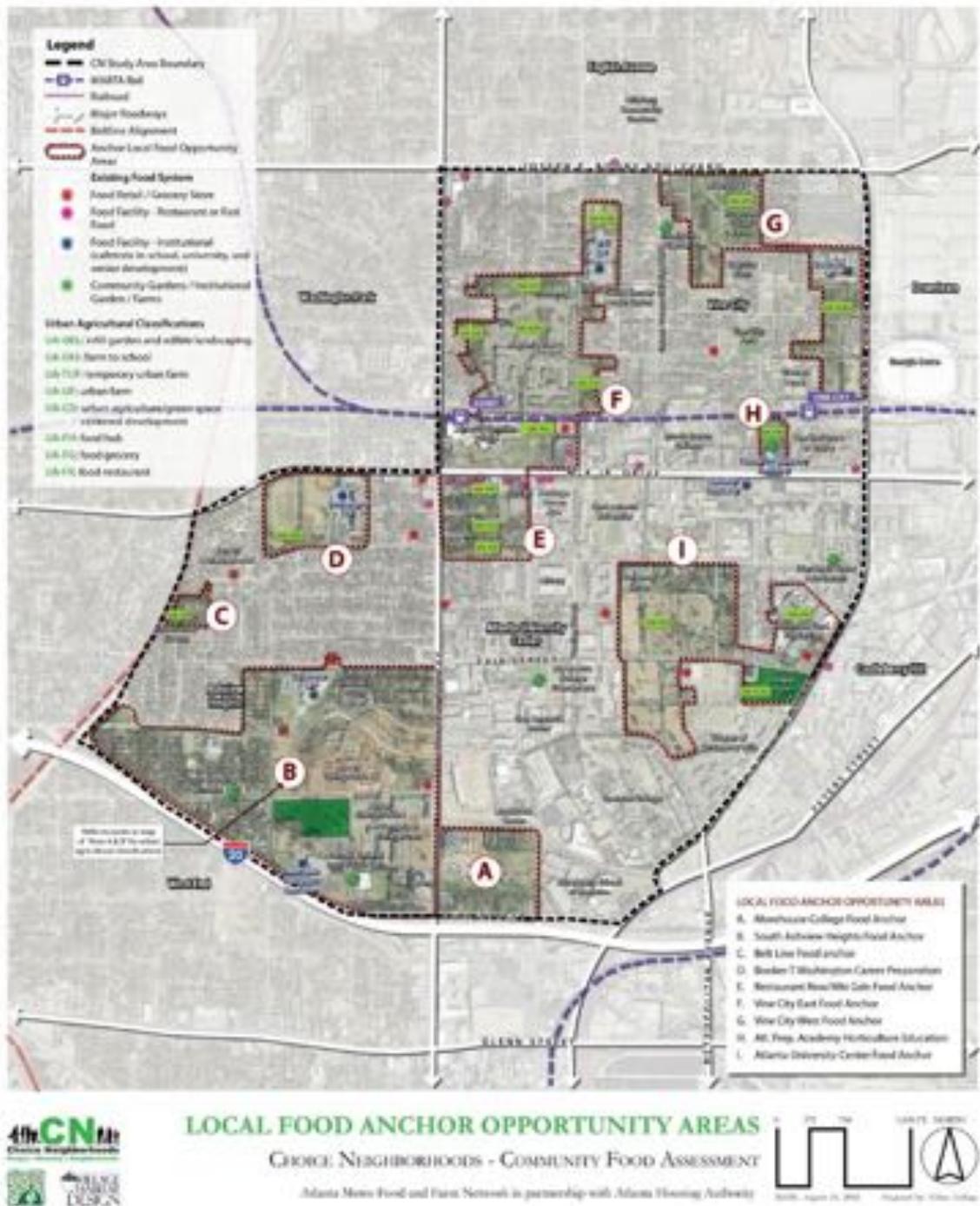


Figure 7 – Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta – Local Food Anchor Opportunities Area



Figure 8 – Local Food Anchor Areas A & B

Gateways to the South Ashview Heights Anchor are at the intersection of Sells Avenue and Joseph E. Lowery Blvd, intersection of Atlanta Student Movement Blvd (formerly Fair Street) and Joseph E. Lowery Blvd just north of I-20. Street planting and edible landscaping along two of main arteries, Sells Avenue and Joseph E. Lowery Blvd will further improve this area. This anchor has the potential to serve as the core of a full neighborhood food system. Figure 8 locates local food opportunities in Anchor Areas A and B.

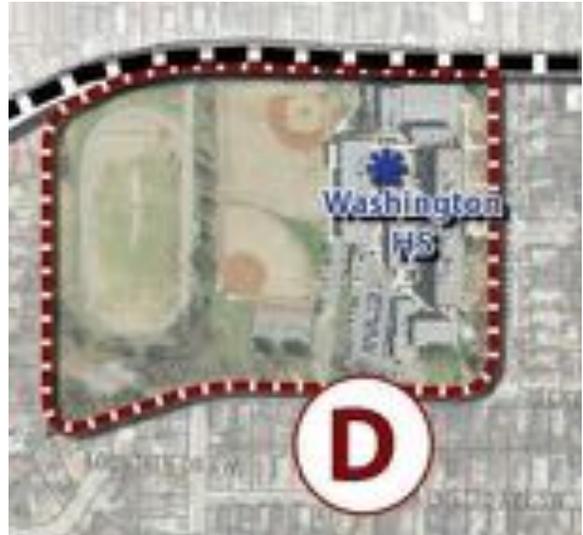


### ANCHOR AREA C. – BELTLINE

Located on the Beltline; Anchor C is a “farm gateway” into the Choice Neighborhoods. This food anchor is comprised of a planned urban farm site and several smaller, contiguous vacant parcels. The adjacent deteriorated properties can be converted to beneficial garden and farm initiatives.

**ANCHOR AREA D – WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL**

Washington High School has the potential to be the center of the Ashview Heights farm to school activities. This provides the foundation with community horticultural education and local food career development for its students. It currently houses a culinary program and has areas on its campus that would be ideal for a demonstration garden and research greenhouse. Links to the AUC schools could be further developed as a pathway to local food industry professional workforce tracking.



**ANCHOR AREA E – MARTIN LUTHER KING RESTAURANT ROW**

By incorporating market gardens, this Anchor has the potential to provide farm-to-table restaurant experiences at the numerous eating establishments lining Martin Luther King Drive heading east from the Lowery Street intersection. The housing south of MLK in this area is identified as locations for potential urban agriculture-centered development.



**ANCHOR AREA F – VINE CITY WEST**

Food Anchor F is centered on Magnolia Park, which is connected to former JFK Middle School. There are considerable potential resources to the North and Historic Westside Village to the South Wal-Mart offers a large-scale procurement opportunity for local urban farmers through a neighborhood food hub. **See the next page for an expanded view of Anchor Area F.**



**ANCHOR AREA G – VINE CITY EAST**



Vine City East has a rich foundation of urban agriculture with the Historic West Side Gardens, the future Planned Mims Park Urban Farm, as well as numerous community gardens in the area. These garden and farm initiatives lie in close proximity to Bethune Elementary School creating an excellent opportunity for educational and mentoring links.

**ANCHOR AREA H – ATLANTA PREPARATORY ACADEMY HORTICULTURE EDUCATION**

Atlanta Preparatory Academy has the potential to be the center of the Vine City farm to school activities. Farm-to-school initiatives will focus on curriculum appropriate to elementary school students through the Edible

Schoolyard model. Additionally, Atlanta Preparatory Academy has committed itself to local food system leadership with plans for a Community Urban Farm and Permaculture Orchard on its campus.

**FOOD ANCHOR I – ATLANTA UNIVERSITY CENTER**

The large land area at the heart of the Atlanta University Center has the potential to become a state-of-the-art farm and garden centered educational and cultural park centered development. Also, its connection to the nearby industrial food production center creates key possibilities for a neighborhood food hub and gateway to the community food system. The figure to the left provides an expanded view of Anchor Area I.



**LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM CONNECTIVITY**

Attendees at the Neighborhood Visioning Workshop estimate that sixty percent of the Choice Neighborhood residents rely on walking, bicycling or public transit for transportation. Youth and the elderly rely even more on these means of transportation. It is critical that connectivity considerations within the Choice Foodshed address these types of access.

The most convenient and community friendly access is walking. This requires food elements to be within 1/8-mile to a maximum of 1/4-mile walk of residents. Illustrated in Figure 9 Choice

Neighborhoods Atlanta, is the Walkable Foodshed Diagram. These areas are particularly viable for the development of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives in which residents can invest directly in gardens, urban farms and canning and food preparation facilities.

This easy walking access allows residents to become invested in the surrounding gardens and urban farms. This increases the benefits of the gardens and urban farm through regular visits other than for food needs. In addition, the neighborhood benefits from the creation of community gathering facilities, which holds cultural, recreational and educational events. It also creates economic development opportunities. Creating a walkable community re-enforces the neighborhood participation and reduce crime and vacancy.

Walkable foodsheds are connected within the Choice neighborhood primarily by bicycle and shuttle as shown in Figure 10, Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta Foodshed Diagram. Pedestrian, bicycle, shuttle and shuttle/transit linkages can provide food access and urban agricultural connectivity to neighborhood food anchors and hubs, connecting:

- Schools, parks, urban farms, gardens
- Historic areas/civil rights areas: Joseph Boone Corridor/anchor businesses,
- Historical Trail, Joseph B – Sunset – Magnolia –MLK (Hunter Street church) to J Lowery
- Bethune to Mims Urban Park
- The three senior centers to gardens and urban farms

It is important to develop a friendly, aesthetic and safe bicycle route as well as a shuttle that circuits through the Choice Neighborhoods. Bicycle routes and a Choice neighborhood shuttle can also be a wonderful tool for historic and agri-tourism. They thread the concept of walkable food sheds, neighborhood civil rights and historic districts together. Agri-tourism visitors on bicycles or on the shuttle to the Choice Neighborhoods will bolster the demand for local unique food products and cultural, educational and recreational events.

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## URBAN AGRICULTURE CENTERED DEVELOPMENT

Urban agricultural and green space centered development (UA-CD) integrates urban agriculture with mixed-use housing development thus focusing on the preservation of agricultural and other green space related areas. This enhances the activities, health and quality of life of the residents. UA-CD development does not necessarily reduce the quantity of housing placed on a site but it simply rearranges the design priorities so that key areas are preserved for gardens, urban farms, ponds and woodland areas first. Housing is then designed to “frame” and focus on those areas. See **Appendix C** for additional information on Urban Agriculture-Centered Development.

Urban Agricultural-Centered Development is becoming increasingly popular in the United States. One local example is East Lake Commons (ELC), which developed in the late 90s and has operated as a very successful development/urban farm for nearly 15 years. The concept of the farm is so popular, that the farm developed before the residential area. Residents purchase homes in the development because of the presence of a neighborhood farm.

ELC preserves over 50% of the developable greenspace by offsetting buildings into the areas that are not as conducive for the farm or wildlife habitats. It has a pond and a well specifically designed to replenish the pond during drought periods. The farm operates as a neighborhood community supported agriculture (CSA) enterprise. Owners of the 67 homes in the neighborhood allow long-term lease of their land to a farmer. In return, residents receive farm produce subscriptions during the growing seasons. In addition, the farm hosts numerous festivals as well as recreational and educational events. There are also programs for internships and summer camps. Surplus produce goes to local farmers market and restaurants.



Figure 9 – Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta – Walkable Foodshed Diagram



Figure 10 – Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta Foodshed Diagram

## TECHNICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the various opportunities identified for further development of a CNA community food system, there are certain key technical components that be . Without these, strategic investments expansion of meaningful local food system is difficult. Even though it was not practical to address here, water access and management issues are chief among the critical features. These must be adequately addressed should the CNA community have a realistic hope of achieving the scale of sustainable local food production that will impact the economy and health of the area.

- **Composting: closing waste loop as much as possible locally.** Windrow composting is an ideal composting operation to bring the basic raw material robust community food system to scale. There is a unique opportunity both on the campuses of the universities and on the numerous institutions that serve cafeteria food daily. They can turn an external waste stream into a closed-loop, system where food scraps and waste transform into high-value compost. This enterprise can also create employment opportunities within the community. “Urban agriculture is uniquely dependent on large volumes of high quality compost and soil amendments, and currently there is a lack of sufficient supply to support any substantial growth in urban agriculture. There is real potential for a profitable market for these materials to develop.”<sup>31</sup>
- Establish a **commercial greenhouse** for seedling production in the CNA area. Next to high quality compost and soil, an affordable supply of plant starts is critical to better facilitate urban commercial scale food production. There is the opportunity to leverage the existing institutional capacity of the greenhouse located on the campus of Morehouse College to expand the supply of community food systems needs and local horticultural research.
- **Urban farming work force development.** In addition to the horticultural literacy work ideally done through popular education methods and grade schools in the area, it is invaluable to recruit the institutions of higher learning at the Atlanta University Center to participate in the training of advanced local food professionals. Morris Brown College can design academic programs in the fields of Agro-Ecology, Sustainable Economics, or other disciplines related to the community’s development priorities. Departments such as Biology, Economics, and Sociology of all the AUC schools can play a role in responding to a new job market for experts on local food system dynamics.
- **Affordable housing** brings motivated young people/seniors to the community. These people can run entrepreneurial endeavors such as market gardens, composting facilities, or gardening retail stores. Affordable housing for new business owners is an essential component for growth and attracting more people to the area. This type of housing stock would most appropriately be accommodated within the Vine City neighborhood.
- Developing a **Tool Bank** to organize and share farming equipment as well as share information resources. This can be done through some form of community message

board. A tool bank will lower operating costs for new small businesses as well as encourage growth and job creation. This equipment center is best located centrally in the warehouse spaces along the White Street/Donnelly corridor.

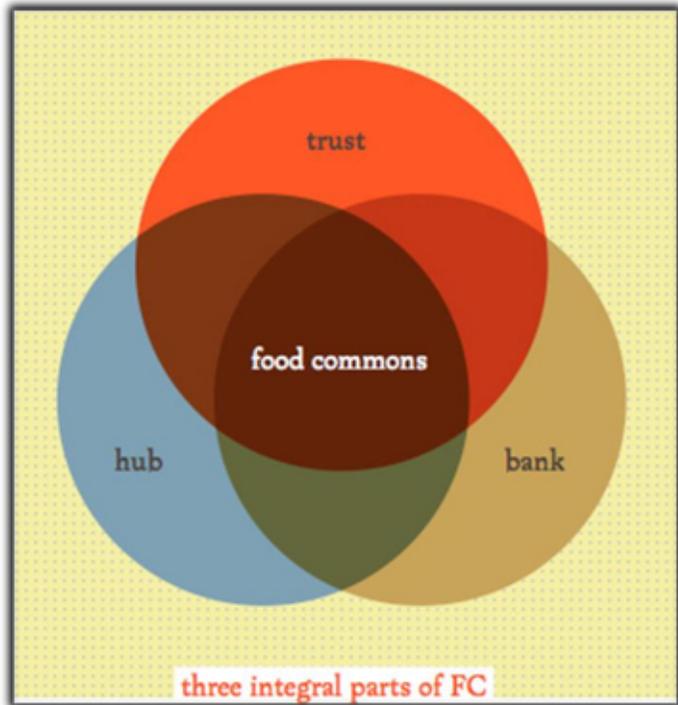
- **Neighborhood food hub networks** bring the ideas of an urban agriculture based economy to the very local scale. The food hub is based on what's existing, identify possible local centers of finance, real estate, and food production/distribution to promote not only a very localized food system but also community resiliency, employment opportunities, and a local economy
  - All elements including **growing, processing, packaging, and distribution capacity in every community sector** can take place at the neighborhood level or the Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) level
  - **AHA/Integral/AUC investments** should be highly involved in establishing the network so that these goals of local empowerment and local connectivity are met.

- **A Food Commons** is a robust local food system development model with three main components:

1) a **Food Trust** is a largely real estate-focused entity designed to collectively purchase and maintain various assets necessary for development of a local food system (urban farm land, warehouses, restaurants, etc;).

2) a **Food Bank** is a community-owned financial institution that provides capital and financial services to businesses in the local foodshed ; and

3) **Food Hubs** are coordinating entities that facilitates the complex logistics of aggregation and distribution and creates new small businesses and helps them achieve economies of scale in their administrative, marketing, and human resources and other business functions.



AF2 is creating a prototype of a Food Commons, which is called “The Fertile Crescent”. This prototype, shown in Figure 11, is being developed generally within neighborhoods abutting Beltline subareas 1, 2, & 10, as this area contains warehouse space for processing and distribution and other Food Commons features. This "Fertile Crescent”

## SECTION 6

### THE ECONOMIC PROMISE OF URBAN AGRICULTURE

concept can be duplicated to build the local food system. The combination of making land available, providing capital, and connecting production centers with centers of processing and distribution alongside smart, effective transportation routes can create the synergy that will allow the local food system to take root and thrive.

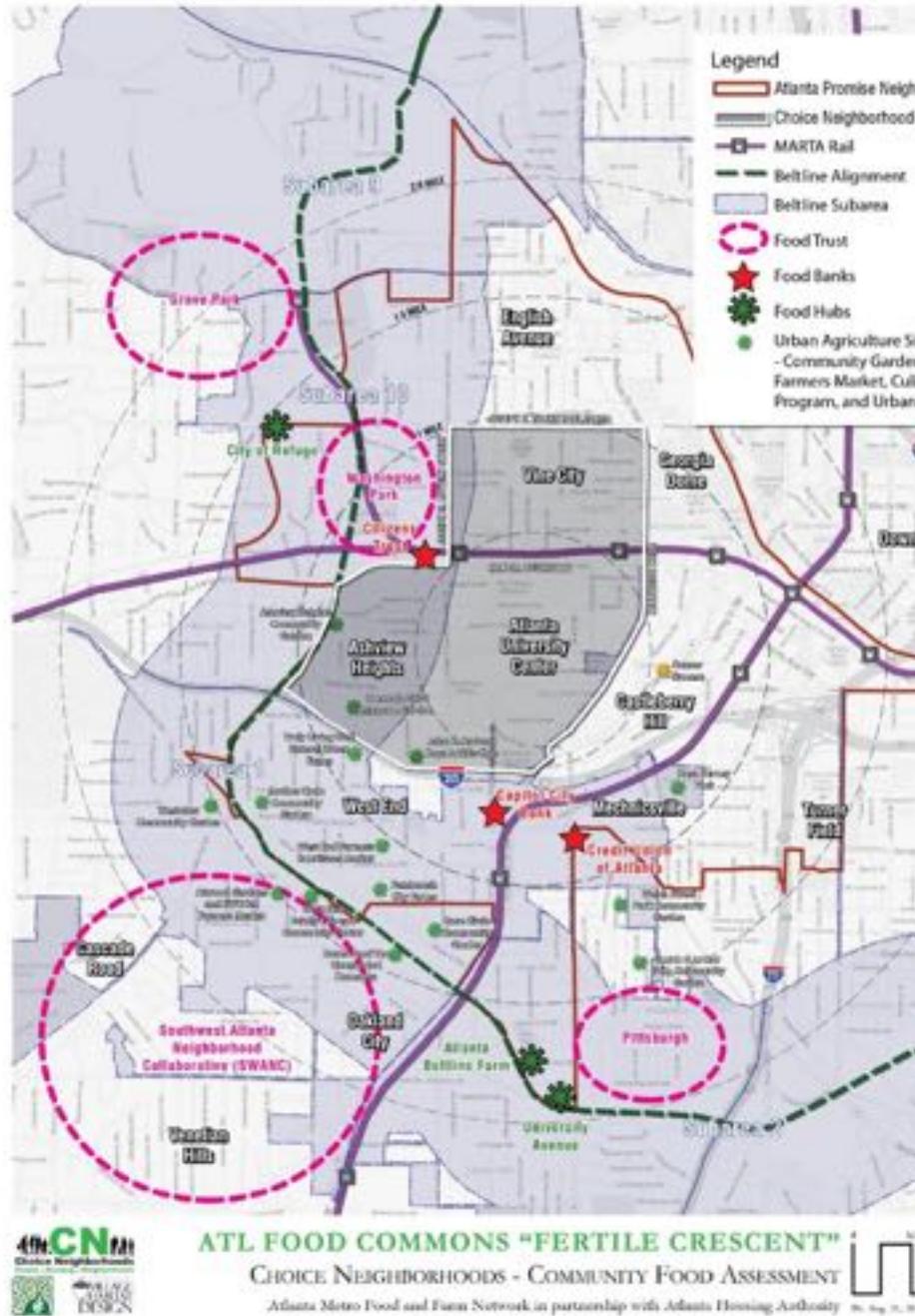


Figure 11 – Atlanta Food Commons “Fertile Crescent”

## THE ECONOMIC PROMISE OF URBAN AGRICULTURE

A purpose of this report was to provide baseline information to the Atlanta Housing Authority and other institutions or policy makers that recognize a strong food system creates economic opportunity and localized wealth for existing residents. It also attracts new families seeking sustainable 21<sup>st</sup> century neighborhoods. However, an equally important goal is to inspire the people and grassroots organizations of the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta area to imagine a future in which they are in far greater control of their food security and possess new employment or business opportunities that controlled locally by the community. The following conclusions and recommendations highlight the gaps in the food system of the community as it currently is, as revealed during the assessment process. In addition, we hope to challenge CNA stakeholders as a whole to capitalize on the unique chance to exhibit bold leadership in the area of sustainable community revitalization and neighborhood transformation.

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### CHOOSING FOOD FIRST:

#### THE FOUR KEYS TO A CNA URBAN AGRICULTURE-BASED LOCAL ECONOMY

1. Atlanta Housing Authority

As a dominant landowner in the area and the applicant for the Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta grant to HUD, AHA is in a position to provide the momentum to accelerate the desires of residents and stakeholders in the CNA neighborhoods. If AHA can determine an internal policy adjustment necessary to allow its substantial land holdings to temporarily be used, then a vigorous CNA community food system can quickly become reality. These sites can be for either direct food production or to provide critical inputs like windrow composting facilities. Investing in a full Urban Agriculture Overlay Plan for Choice Neighborhoods Atlanta will also add an important catalytic element necessary to help this community reach increased food security and possibly food sovereignty.

2. City of Atlanta & Fulton County

Even with the optimal mobilization of private and quasi-governmental resources and coordinated initiatives, no community food system is truly secure and sustainable without the public policy support of local governing bodies like the Atlanta City Council and Fulton County Commission. Land use and zoning issues that give urban agriculture appropriate sanction are essential to the stability of local food economy and confidence of investors. Additional engagement of the city's development authority (Invest Atlanta) will also help contribute the seed capital and risk reduction necessary to provide traction in the early years of this new industry.

3. Property Developers & Management Companies

In addition to the public and non-profit sectors, having commercial companies involved in a CNA community food system will indicate an important level of collaboration and credibility. Utilizing opportunities like an urban agriculture centered development concept and retrofitting existing multi-family properties with community gardens or

urban farm amenities, private firms can often help normalize the sustainability aspect of the food economy. Developers can benefit through market differentiation by offering highly sought after quality of life features, which are increasing in demand.

#### 4. Residents and Community Based Organizations

Above all else, the potential of a CNA community food system will only be fully realized when the people of the neighborhoods decide at a critical mass that it is something they want and are willing to work towards. A network of relationships and investments will have to be woven to connect the food needs of residents, businesses, and other institutions to a new inner community of operators who are capable and committed to meeting those needs.

### SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT CONCLUSIONS

The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Act is designed to increase economic development within a neighborhood. A strong possibility for economic development is through the development of a community food system. Creating a local food system is a holistic approach to community development. Not only are jobs created but there is an increase in access to healthy foods.

Each of the three neighborhoods in the Atlanta Choice Neighborhood possess particular strengths as it relates to a CNA food vision. Ashview Heights presents the greatest potential for elements such as home gardens and urban agriculture centered development. Atlanta University Center Neighborhood presents opportunities for temporary larger scale urban farming on AHA owned land awaiting eventual housing development, ideally as urban agriculture centered projects. Key elements in the AUC area such as the greenhouse and farmer's market can be expanded to serve as community assets within the neighborhood-wide food system. Vine City is likely to be the location of most permanent large-scale urban farming enterprises, due to less immediate competition from other types of development and the presence of the urban agriculture advocate Historic Westside Gardens.

Within these three neighborhoods, there are nine Anchor Areas for food system development: Morehouse College, South Ashview Heights, Beltline, Washington High School, Martin Luther King at Lowery, Vine City East, Vine City West, Atlanta Preparatory Academy and Atlanta University Center. Each area has its own strength. While each of these areas are separate entities, it is important to recognize all systems work together. It is important to strengthen relationships between local food actors including community members, local small businesses, farmers, urban agriculture organizations, City of Atlanta Parks Departments and other agencies, as well as local leaders among others is necessary to create the collaborative environment necessary for the development of a food system project.

Fifty cultivated acres is a threshold for urban agricultural enterprises that can have a significant impact as the foundation of a local economy. By converting land within the Choice Neighborhood to agricultural use, it is estimated enough food will be grown to meet the fresh food needs of 1/2 to 1/4 of the Choice Neighborhood residents. This conversion will also provide 170- 300 employment opportunities.

Planning geared towards urban local food system needs to focus not only on food production elements (i.e. community gardens, urban farms, and market gardens), but also on horticultural education that teaches and empowers individuals to grow food. There must also be a focus on processing elements such as food hubs, distribution issues (connectivity and farmer's markets), and consumption both directly by residents and through such elements as stores and restaurants. Public policy issues influence the ability of individuals to grow, transport and sell food locally.

#### SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage the formation of the charette steering committee who would continue to be engaged with food system planning activities and who could serve as the point from which community feedback could be solicited.
- Target the development of 50 acres of land within the CNA geographic footprint for food production.
- Develop an Urban Agricultural Overlay Plan as the next step toward refining the scope of cultivation and economic development potential.
- Consider planning for community food system development within the context of seven Anchor Areas, Morehouse College, South Ashview Heights, Beltline, Washington High School, Martin Luther King at Lowery, Vine City East, Vine City West, Atlanta Preparatory Academy and Atlanta University Center.
- Support the development of transit projects to enhance local food system the connectivity.
- Consider urban agriculture centered development for future AHA projects within the Choice Neighborhood Atlanta footprint.

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