

Dealing with Food Insecurity

&

Preserving City Beautification

A Report by

TSU SPO

Stephania Alvarez

Andret Rayford

Jason Moreno

APATX Conference, Galveston, TX

October 17-19, 2018

OBJECTIVE

This proposal aims to simultaneously and synergistically mitigate community-wide barriers to healthy food access while materializing a vibrant Hitchcock City Center that builds on existing green spaces and that will feature a beautiful esplanade parallel to the major highway transecting the city.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity describes disruptions in eating patterns and reduced food intake due to socioeconomic limitations and/or challenges to food access (USDA-ERS). Though food insecurity happens at the household level, oftentimes whole communities can be affected. Moreover, the duration of food insecurity varies between households, at times lasting only several months or, in some cases, over several years. Looking at food access through an environmental lens, one must consider these factors to promote greater access and affordability:

1. Transportation to and from the food retail outlet (i.e. the supermarket)
2. Number of food retail outlets serving the target community (proximity of like businesses will likely keep food prices competitive)
3. Quality and variety of food retail outlets

With a poverty rate of 24% and a limited food environment, Hitchcock possesses indicators of community food insecurity. After Hitchcock's grocery store at Main St and Hwy 6 closed four years ago, and the owners would not sell or lease the property, the city was devoid of a major supermarket, forcing residents to travel to neighboring cities to buy their groceries. Using Stringfellow Orchard as a central marker, the closest grocery stores for residents include:

- Sam's Club in La Marque (5 miles away)
- Wal-Mart in La Marque (5 miles away)
- H-E-B in Santa Fe (6 miles away)
- HEB in La Marque (9 miles away)

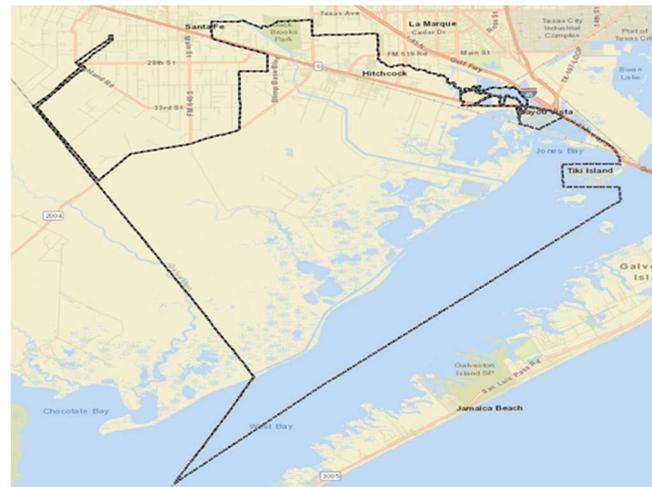
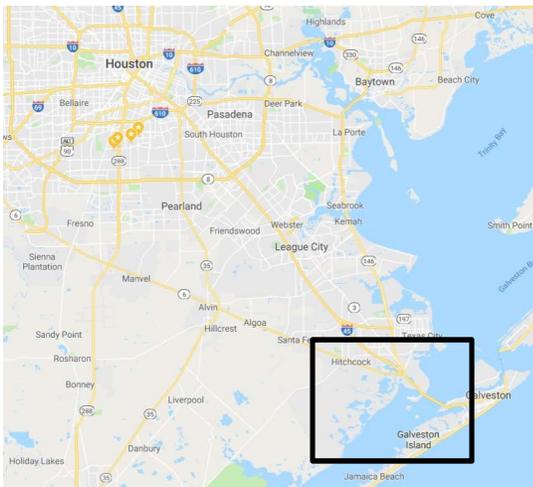
Driving these distances to purchase food may only present an inconvenience to most Hitchcock residents; however, for the 10%-15% of the non-driving population, these distances represent an extreme barrier to food access (American Fact Finder). Since Hitchcock does not connect with any transit lines, non-drivers would have to rely on carpooling or walking as means of transportation to the nearest or preferred food retail outlet, which may only be a convenience store. Lastly, dining out options are limited to a few fast food options, making it difficult to eat healthy on the go.

Lacking a Community Core

The City of Hitchcock is anchored by the crossing of Highway 6 and Main Street. Located near this intersection are the historic Stringfellow Orchards, the Good Ole Days Fairgrounds, and an under-utilized shopping center. A half-mile southeast of this nexus lies City Hall. If Hitchcock were to claim a community center, this indefinite area would be it. Under these circumstances, residents might sporadically be capable to enjoy the outdoors, walk for leisure or exercise, or to indulge in the aesthetics of their surroundings. Aside from educational services, Hitchcock's major industries--construction and manufacturing--tend to place jobs outside of this central area. Fostering the development of complementary or boutique industries in the city center, would maximize on the human and real estate capital available in this area.



IDENTITY WITHIN HITCHCOCK



Hitchcock, Texas - located between Houston and Galveston on HWY 6, east of Santa Fe, south of La Marque - struggles with food insecurity, a lack of healthy options, and not having its own grocery store. Established in 1982, the Hitchcock Industrial Development Corporation

(HIDC) embraces its mission to create a positive business environment, expand economic development, support local businesses, and promote community involvement in Hitchcock.

The Texas Southern University (TSU) Student Planning Organization (SPO) will discuss the possibilities of future community development with business ownership among residents and the youth, the opportunity to attract and retain consumers by branding the city's quality of life through practical programs and events, and the need for public engagement to discern and build events for food security and community development.

Mayor Dorothy Childress has identified challenges but is very optimistic the city will make it through the current difficult times. In the first few months of her leadership, a significant growth of new and potential businesses has materialized within the city. The city is working with the Hitchcock Economic Development Corporation and Urban Planning and Zoning. Childress has met with potential business developers and owners who will open their businesses and hire residents to manufacture and provide their products and services. Many existing businesses are growing and confident the city's direction will move forward. While Hitchcock may be seen as a "bedroom community," Mayor Childress is confident that it will provide the minimum services needed to sustain the demands of a city (Schwertner 2018).

Hitchcock is home to Stringfellow Orchards, 9.5 acres of green space with thirty oak trees. This is a community hub for activities that support local culture. For example, on May 6th, Stringfellow Orchards hosted Lemonade Day--a nationwide program that supports youth entrepreneurial opportunities on "how to create your own business."

The Chamber of Commerce sponsors events at the Good Ole Days Grounds, twelve acres of pear and pecan trees on green space, located just 0.3 miles away from Stringfellow Orchards. The latest event held on August 10th and 11th celebrated the 47th Hitchcock Good Ole Days

Festival, with a barbeque cook-off, food and vendor booths, mutton busting, live music, a pageant, bungee jumping, and Sonny the BirdMan.

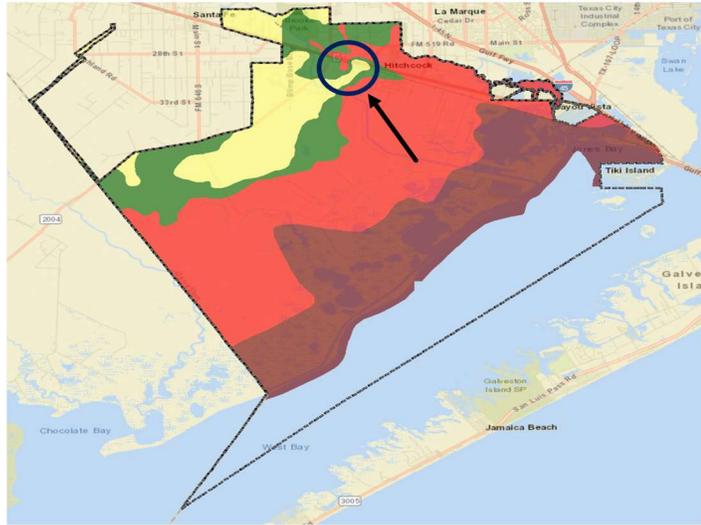
Despite the optimism and green space, though, it is easier to buy Jack-in-the-Box and Subway than to find a fresh fruit or vegetable in the community. The city is missing farm-raised and organic pears, peaches, figs, peppers, herbs, mustard and collard greens that are affordable and locally grown (Gibbs 2010). Based on nearby cities' success stories, community gardens at Stringfellow Orchards and Good Ole Days Grounds would provide much-needed locally-grown produce. This also provides possibilities of entrepreneurial activities through Hitchcock High School, Career Technology Education (CTE), Crosby Middle School, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs with youth engagement and involvement for community development.

When Steven Spillette, President of Community Development Strategies (CDS), spoke at the Houston-Galveston Action Council's "Future of Retail" (HGAC 2018) event on retail in small cities, he emphasized that their unique lifestyles will enhance cultural desires for consumer preference and market support, thereby creating better development with a wide range of services and products (Spillette 2018). Brad Stafford, City Manager of Navasota, spoke on taking advantage of the strengths of Navasota, a small city located south of College Station and Texas A&M University. According to Stafford, their own revitalization, beautification, and downtown improvement projects have increased business, growth and support of the community with investments and capital growth (Stafford 2018). Ideally, TSU would like to bring the lessons and opportunities learned from examples like these to bear on the future of Hitchcock.

STRUGGLES WITHIN HITCHCOCK

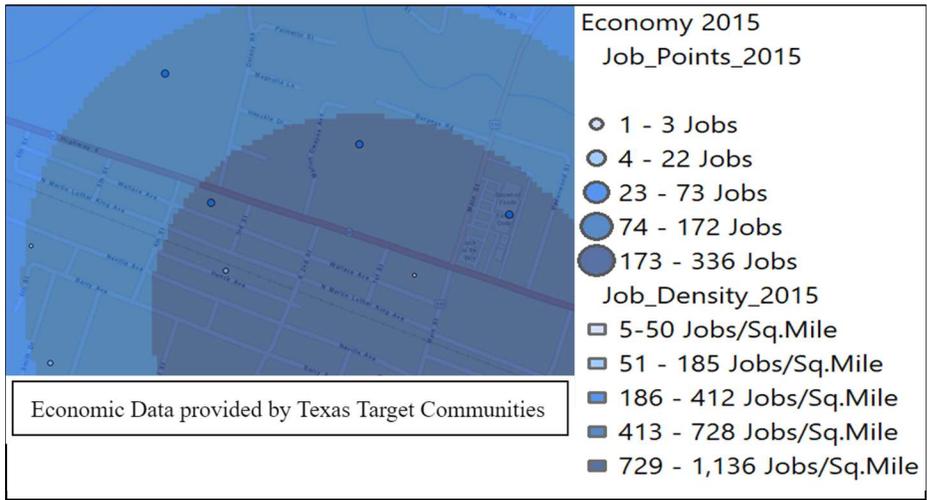
Flood Zones in Hitchcock, TX

Development is recommended for the area with less flooding risk, meaning the areas in yellow (outside the 500-year floodplain) and green (0.2% annual flooding risk); the areas in red and dark red (both with 1% annual flooding risk) should be avoided. The area circled overlaps with HWY 6 and the main local economic concentration and is recommended for local food options to be located.



Flooding Data provided by Texas Target Communities

Economic Concentrations Along Hwy 6

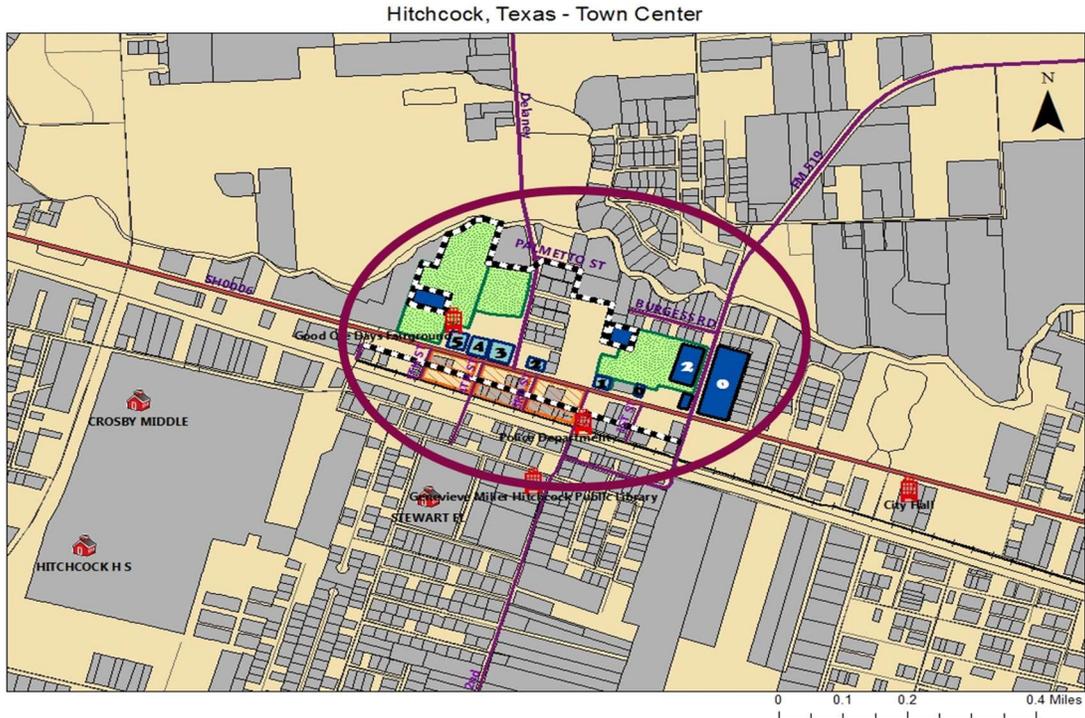


Economic Data provided by Texas Target Communities

Based on data provided by the Texas Target Communities Office at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX, this area being identified for development and food

opportunity expansion is already the center of economic activity in Hitchcock, making it a prime location for this project and the natural town center.

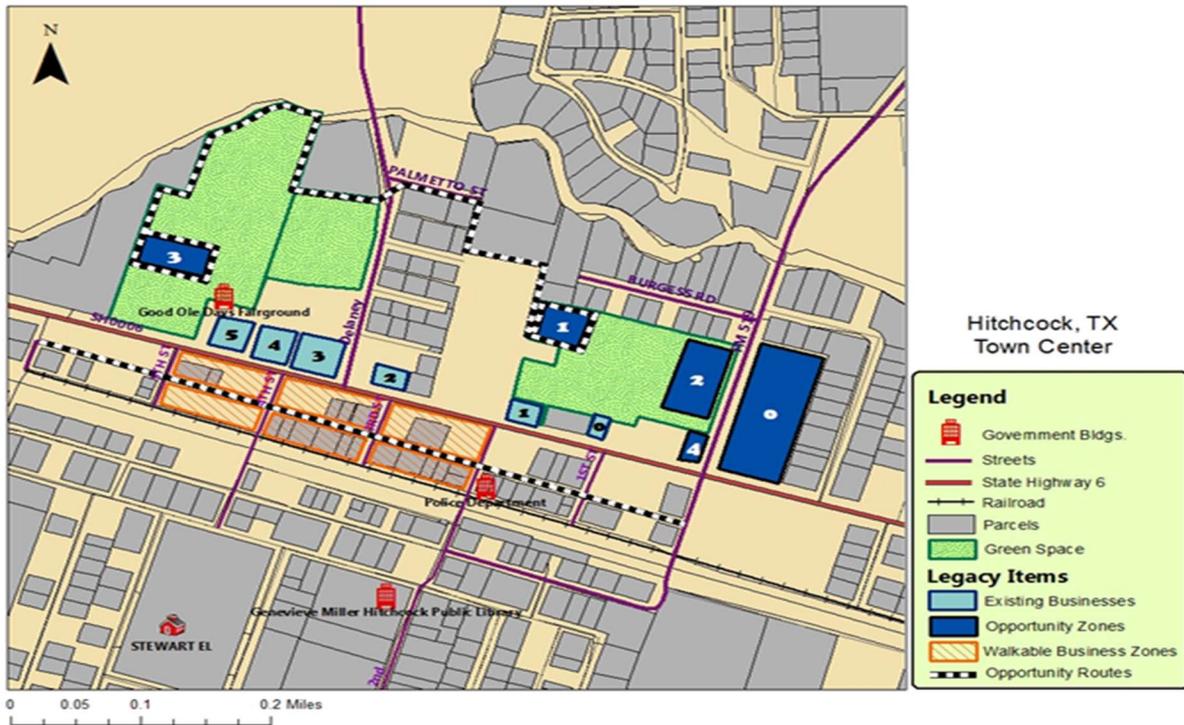
TSU SPO RECOMMENDATIONS



The following are suggestions from TSU SPO for Hitchcock:

- A. Develop community garden partnerships with Stewart Elementary, Crosby Middle School, and Hitchcock High School to establish community gardens at both Stringfellow Orchard and Good Ole Days Grounds, with the schools creating curricula and projects to be developed and run at the gardens and the produce being provided to the community.
- B. Approach the Chamber of Commerce, Associated Credit Union of Texas, Prosperity Bank, and Texas First Bank for creating tax and business incentives and offering loans for local entrepreneurs to start up local businesses with employment for residents; this would provide enough foot traffic along the economic corridor to justify bringing grocery stores into the community, particularly within the Town Center.

- C. Establish an Esplanade along Wallace Avenue for community farmers and craftspeople to bring their produce and other goods to sell and for tourists to wander and shop. Approach Cheaper Choices along HWY 6 to provide space for local produce as well.
- D. Along with the community gardens at Good Ole Days Grounds and Stringfellow Orchard, establish a Prayer Tree Maze and a bike trail to create more opportunities for enjoying the outdoors and the local flora and fauna.
- E. Provide incentives and opportunities for food trucks and food bank vegetable trucks to park outside the former grocery store during peak business times.
- F. Work with D&D Liquor to move the entrance to the side of the building and establish a beer garden for eating, drinking, and outdoor music. This would also be a great place along HWY 6 for restaurants and other local eateries.
- G. Create and Implement a Sponsorship Campaign. Leveraging the shareable resources of nonprofits, local for-profits, and public entities would enable success for the aforementioned recommendations. The following organizations and their resources are listed as potential partners:
 - a. Farmers Market Technical Assistance: Urban Harvest, Galveston's Own
 - b. Urban Food Production: Finca Tres Robles Farm, SE Houston Community Garden
 - c. Loans & Capital Assistance: Associate Credit Union, Hitchcock Chamber of Commerce
 - d. Volunteers & Champions: Hitchcock High, Crosby Middle, Hitchcock ISD



Opportunity Zones (Dark Blue)

- 0 - Grocery store strip center
- 1 - Stringfellow Community Garden
- 2 - City Hall new location
- 3 - Good Ole Days Community Garden
- 4 - Power Mart

Existing Business Partnerships (Light Blue)

- 0-Stringfellow entrance
- 1-D&D Liquor Store
- 2-Cheaper Choices
- 3-Texas 1st Bank
- 4-United States Postal
- 5-Prosperity Bank/Chamber of Commerce

**Bike trail between green spaces and around community gardens (dashed line)
Esplanade – 2nd to 5th Streets on Wallace (along lower straight dashed line)**

REFERENCES

Gibbs, A., Watering the Food Desert, June 2010. Ebony Magazine, Pages 60-65, retrieved on October 5, 2018.

H-GAC, Welcome to the Future of Retail, September 21, 2018, retrieved on October 5, 2018

Schwertner, S., Message from mayor Childress, Hitchcock Economic Development Corporation, Spring 2018, Page 3, retrieved on October 5, 2018.

Spillette, S., The Future of Retail H-GAC Livable Centers Program, September 21, 2018, Community Development Strategies, retrieved on October 5, 2018.

Stafford, B., City of Navasota, September 21, 2018, retrieved on October 5, 2018.

United States Census Bureau. American Fact Finder. Hitchcock, TX.

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>

United States Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service. Definitions of Food Insecurity. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security/>

