Community Story

On the 50th anniversary of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s initiation of the war on poverty, the Obama Administration awarded the city of Los Angeles and its lead partner, the Youth Policy Institute (YPI), a federal Promise Zone designation from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Promise Zone program is a federal anti-poverty initiative with the goal of significantly reducing poverty through job creation, increased economic activity, improved educational opportunities, improved public safety, leveraged private capital, preserving and expanding housing affordability, and through smart growth policies.

The Los Angeles Promise Zone (see Figure 1) covers diverse, dense communities in central Los Angeles. As part of a set of larger Promise Zone strategies aimed at revitalizing the distressed neighborhoods, a key goal of the LA Promise Zone is to improve residents’ health. An important means of achieving this goal is by increasing access to healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Los Angeles Promise Zone is located in LA County Service Planning Area (SPA) 4, and covers the central Los Angeles neighborhoods of Hollywood, East Hollywood, Koreatown, Pico-Union, and Westlake. Lack of access to healthy food in the zone is a major health issue. Eighty-five percent of adults in this Zone report having eaten less than the recommended five daily servings of fruits and vegetables in the past day. Door-to-door surveys conducted by YPI in the East Hollywood neighborhood of the Promise Zone demonstrate that youth are also not consuming the recommended amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables, finding that 82.1% of survey respondents under age 18 eat four or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables each day. The health implications are clear: 20 percent of SPA 4 residents are obese and 32 percent are overweight according the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

Portions of the Los Angeles Promise Zone are classified by the USDA as Low Income/Low Access, and the overall poverty rate in the Zone is about 35 percent (American Community Survey 2007-11). The Promise Zone is home to about 165,000 residents, but only four farmers markets, all of which are located in the northern part of the zone. This leaves large swaths of the central and southern areas without access to locally-grown fruits and vegetables. Moreover, the Promise Zone is comprised of high poverty neighborhoods that have many discount grocery chains offering low quality produce. Data from the 2013 Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community Survey found that, of stores in Los Angeles County that sell tobacco, only 40 percent sell any fresh fruit or vegetable, and only 28 percent sell a good selection of quality fruits and vegetables. There is clearly a high need in the Los Angeles Promise Zone for increased access to high quality, fresh fruits and vegetables.
Figure 1 - Promise Zone Neighborhood
As part of the Los Angeles Promise Zone initiative to increase access to such foods, YPI has worked to develop a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) program in the Promise Zone in the near-term, with the longer-term plan of creating a Promise Zone Food Hub. The goals the Promise Zone CSA seeks to accomplish in two years are:

1. Increase access to locally grown, healthy fruits and vegetables for 510 low-income residents
2. Boost economic opportunity for 20 farmers/producers in the Southern California region through a 40% increase in revenue
3. Revitalize six sites in the Promise Zone through building stronger connections between community members who participate in the CSA, with a focus on sites with affordable access via biking, walking, or public transit.

The Promise Zone CSA has partnered with 32 farmers who are part of the Old Grove Farm Share, and has been providing weekly boxes of produce for 40 low-income Promise Zone residents at two pilot pick-up sites in East Hollywood and at the Promise Zone middle school. YPI serves as an intermediary between farmers and buyers, and has spearheaded outreach and recruitment through its other social service programs in the Zone.

The Youth Policy Institute applied for technical assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program in 2014 to plan the Promise Zone CSA program and strengthen connections with other partner in the region that can help improve food access in disadvantaged communities. The Local Foods, Local Places program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). The Learning and Development Center’s mission aligns well with the desired outcomes of the Local Foods, Local Places program, which include:

- More economic opportunities for local farmers and business.
- Better access to healthy local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- A revitalized downtown that is the economic anchor of the community.
This action plan is a key outcome of the Local Foods, Local Places project in the Los Angeles Promise Zone. It captures the highlights of a two-day workshop and includes a targeted set of goals and actions for moving forward.

Engagement

The main event of the Local Foods, Local Places program in Los Angeles was a workshop on June 2 and 3, 2015. The workshop brought together local community development organizations with state and federal agency representatives to identify next steps for building a healthier community and stronger neighborhood, with an emphasis on strategies that incorporate local foods and place making in the Promise Zone area. This action plan, which lays out several critical next steps, is the primary outcome of the workshop.

The workshop attracted a small group of local and regional stakeholders involved in building the local food economy in Los Angeles, including officials of the Youth Policy Institute (who organized the workshop), Hunger Action LA, Food Forward, Thai CDC, With Love Market and Café, LA Food Policy Council, Roots of Change, and the Old Grove Orange Farm Share. Several state and federal officials also participated including representatives from CalTrans, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. EPA Regional 9, and EPA Headquarters.

The workshop featured three sessions. The first session included presentations on the economic, health, social, and place-making benefits of local foods, while also encouraging discussion about local challenges and opportunities unique to this particular neighborhood. The second and third sessions explored what is already happening locally to build the local food economy and featured presentations by many different local stakeholders and explored possible partnerships that can bring more community and economic development through local foods to the Promise Zone. The information gleaned through exercises and discussions influenced the community goals described below and a set of actions for achieving them.

1. Identify six Promise Zone CSA drop locations
2. Develop programming for CSA drop locations
3. Secure additional funding and seek ways to reduce subsidy needs for the CSA program
4. Create a Local Foods, Local Places program model that can be scaled to the rest of the Promise Zone (getting beyond just the CSA)
5. Increase the number of Promise Zone participants in the CSA program

Figure 2 summarizes the technical assistance process.
Key Neighborhood Stakeholders

While the workshop focused on the Promise Zone CSA program, a key outcome desired by the Youth Policy Institute is a stronger network of organizations working on food access and community development issues in Los Angeles. A local food system is a network of people and organizations that work to produce local foods and distribute them to local consumers. Coordination and collaboration are key ingredients in the success of any local food system. Several key players participated in the workshop and presented on what they are doing to strengthen the local food system. This section summarizes some of those key partner opportunities.

Youth Policy Institute – LA Promise Zone

The Youth Policy Institute is a non-profit organization that has worked in Los Angeles for more than 30 years to alleviated poverty and create opportunities for young people. They are also the lead agency for the LA Promise Zone initiative. YPI is a natural lead agency for the Promise Zone initiatives because the program aims to improve the neighborhoods in which low income children are raised. New research has indicated that neighborhood environment is a key determinants in children’s’ long-term success. YPI’s work through the Promise Zone program is focused on achieving four goals, which are:

1. Foster good jobs and healthy businesses
2. Improve educational opportunities
3. Make our neighborhoods safe
4. Promote more sustainable and livable communities
The fourth goal encompasses several strategies that will increase access to healthy foods for people living in the Promise Zone. Among the food-related strategies in support of this fourth goal are:

1. Promote farmers markets
2. School-based healthy eating/active living programs
3. Develop community supported agriculture.

The Local Foods, Local Places workshop focused on the last action and this action plan lays out several concrete steps for accomplishing it.

Los Angeles Food Policy Council
The LA Food Policy Council describes itself as a “backbone organization” that is “helping to facilitate and coordinate the efforts towards food system change that are happening in L.A.” The organization aims to coordinate existing efforts and jump start work to fill any gaps. The Council is managed by a 40-member Leadership Board and seven working groups focused on healthy food retail & food equity, school gardens, farmers markets for all, street food, urban agriculture, sustainable seafood, and food rescue and recovery. The working groups meet at least every other month while the larger Food Policy Council holds Network Meetings five times per year that are open to everyone with an interest in food policy.

Its two major programs are the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) and the Healthy Neighborhood Market Network (HNMN). The Good Food Purchasing Program is a voluntary program that rates member institutions for their food sourcing policies and practices. The City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Unified School District both adopted the GFPP. In 2015, the school district was purchasing 50 percent of its $125 million annual food budget from local sources. The HNMN program helps small stores procure and sell healthy foods. Through the HNMN program, the Food Policy Council delivers workshops for small shop owners on technical, marketing, and produce management skills.

Thai Community Development Center
The Thai CDC works throughout Los Angeles to advance the social and economic well-being of low and moderate income individuals. One of its key strategies for achieving this mission is its East Hollywood Certified Farmers Market. The market’s mission is to “establish nutrition education programs, develop linkages between area nonprofits, local agriculture and market customers and collaborate with area agencies to make the East Hollywood Certified Farmers Market a ‘one-stop’ solution for affordable produce, nutrition education, health awareness and assistance, as well as a location for neighborhood and government outreach.”
Thai CDC operates the market every Thursday afternoon and evening at the Hollywood Boulevard and Western Avenue Metro Station Plaza, which is in the Promise Zone. In keeping with its mission, Thai CDC’s through the market provides training for farmers and vendors; connects vendors to local restaurants, schools, and stores to increase their sales revenue; and provides financial support in the form of matching dollars so that low income families and people can afford to purchase more healthy foods at the market. The CDC also provides education and encouragement for healthy eating by providing cooking demonstrations and posting recipes at the market and online in both Spanish and English. The market has also hosted health insurance enrollment and voter registration events.

Old Grove Farm Share
The Old Grove Farm Share is a coalition of 28 farmers from nearby San Bernardino and Riverside Counties deeply committed to the local foods movement and rebuilding the local food shed. They currently serve as the vendor for YPI’s existing CSA program and represent an active local stakeholder group interested in improving access within the neighborhood to fresh, local foods. As partners with YPI, they are also looking to help identify longer term strategies for helping the CSA program become more financially sustainable and less dependent on subsidies.

Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities
In order to maximize the economic and community development potential of the local food system, the local partners, including those described in the previous section, must take action to address obstacles and capitalize on strength and opportunities. This section summarizes workshop discussions that revealed the most pressing challenges and promising opportunities in the local food system.

Strengths
Los Angeles has an abundance of people and organizations that care about the issue of food access and building a stronger local food economy. Additionally, there are several strong organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life and opportunity for people living in this neighborhood. This is a strength that will help the city and the Promise Zone neighborhood address the challenges it faces in providing access to healthy food for all and furthering additional community betterment goals.

- **Dedicated People and Organizations** – The Los Angeles area is home to many organizations working on different aspects of building a strong local food economy. It also has a well-organized Food Policy Council that serves to keep these organizations and people coordinated and working towards the same vision and goals.

- **Local Agriculture** – Southern California and the nearby Central Valley are agricultural powerhouses, supplying the nation with a year-round supply of fruits and vegetables. Los Angeles County alone has nearly 1,300 farms doing about $200 million of sales per year. Within a 200-mile radius of Los Angeles are 23,000 farms doing more than $16 billion in sales.¹ Within this neighborhood, there is a strong presence already by local farmers – including the Old Grove Farm Share and other farmers serving the Thai CDC market.

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Challenges
The challenges listed below are obstacles to achieving the community’s vision. While they do not encompass every challenge, these ones were most discussed during the workshop.

- **Food Insecurity** – The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research in 2011 found that four of 10 low-income adults living in Los Angeles County are food insecure. These people have limited or uncertain access to food. Meanwhile, about one million Los Angeles County children are eligible for free or reduced price school meals, but only six out of 10 participate in the School Lunch Program. Additionally, community members identified a more the acute challenge within Promise Zone the neighborhood regarding the lack of quality, affordable fresh produce within walking distance of existing homes. Some workshop participants cited concerns that the existing discount grocery retailers, liquor stores and bodegas that sell affordable produce do so because the produce is of lesser quality in terms of its freshness. Produce purchased at higher end retailers at higher prices has a longer home shelf life (7-12 days) versus produce purchased in some retail outlets at a lower price point may only last 1-3 days.

- **Food Industry Wages** – About 1.3 million people in the Los Angeles region are employed in food system economy, accounting for more than 10 percent of the region’s jobs. Many workers in these jobs struggle to make ends meet. The median hourly wage of non-supervisory jobs in the food industry is about $10.20 per hour. The living wage for the head of a household with two adults in one child in the LA region is estimated at $20.07 per hour.

- **Health** – More than 60 percent of adults in the Los Angeles area are overweight or obese. Consumption of healthy foods and sedentary lifestyles are likely contributing factors. Food deserts where healthy foods are difficult to find are also a contributing factor. Within the lower income populations, community participants also cited concerns about the elderly being particularly at risk without access to fresh foods and isolation associated with lack of transportation options.

- **Auto-Centric Street Design** – Los Angeles is well-known for its automobile-centered lifestyle and traffic congestion. However, many people lack access to an automobile and depend on the public transportation system or walking to reach their everyday needs, such as food. While the neighborhood contains several destinations within walking distance or along the bus route, several intersections within the Promise Zone have seen dozens of pedestrians struck by vehicles. The infrastructure throughout this area is aging and is also oriented to facilitate ease of auto travel, often times at the expense of improved walkability.

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5 Los Angeles Promise Zone presentation. June 3, 2015.
• **Affordable Housing Shortage** – The Promise Zone is home to many low-income families for whom housing prices are unaffordable. About 35 percent of the population lives below the poverty level and 25 percent of households earn less than $15,000 per year. The high cost of housing makes it difficult for these families to afford healthy foods. Additionally, the edges of the Promise Zone are seeing increased investment in higher end retail and housing, which over time is likely to result in even fewer opportunities for preserving and maintaining existing affordability.

• **Interagency/Inter-Stakeholder Coordination** – As evidenced by the stakeholder participation in this workshop, there already exists many non-profit and government based organizations committed to advancing community development and food access goals within the area. However despite this local capacity, there remains some missed opportunities for leveraging and partnering around projects in the neighborhood. Several of the stakeholders that participated in the Local Foods, Local Places workshop had not previously worked together on efforts in the neighborhood.

• **Language Barriers** – The LA Promise Zone neighborhood is home to several different ethnic groups and several non-English speaking residents. This is a barrier in terms of community members being aware of and able to participate in the various community development programs, but also in knowing where and how to access culturally relevant fresh foods.

• **City Policies** – Some workshop participants cited that the City of Los Angeles’ current building codes and other business operating rules and land use regulations are a barrier to strengthening the local food system. Specifically participants cited the regular enforcement by local police to remove street vendors from the neighborhood – often times confiscating all their product and equipment. Additionally, concerns were raised about the high bar needed to establish and run a community kitchen, food demonstration events and street vending – all of which are strategies that could improve food access and consumption for local residents.

• **Long Term Funding for Existing CSA Subsidies** – YPI currently covers the subsidy needed to enable the affordability of the CSA boxes for its clients. Over the long term, YPI may not be able to continue providing this funding at current levels. Therefore there needs to be a longer term strategy developed for creating a more financially sustainable program over time.

### Opportunities

The Promise Zone designation covering portions of the East Hollywood neighborhood is a major opportunity. It will provide the neighborhood with priority access to resources and elevate the visibility of the challenges facing the area as well as the hard work put in by many dedicated organizations that are working to improve the quality of life for its residents.

• **Promise Zone Designation** – The Obama Administration selected East Hollywood as a Promise Zone. This designation gives the neighborhood preferential access to federal technical assistance programs, preferential points for federal grants, a community liaison from HUD that is embedded in the community and helping it navigate federal programs, and five AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers.

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6 Los Angeles Promise Zone presentation. June 3, 2015.
Local Foods, Local Places Action Plan – Youth Policy Institute, Los Angeles, CA

- **Top Down/Bottoms Up Food System Entrepreneurism** – within the greater Promise Zone neighborhood there are layers of formal and informal efforts by local residents, public sector, non-profits and private businesses to improve opportunities for local urban agriculture production, provide direct access to healthy food for those in need, and food oriented businesses growth. This spirit can be capitalized on to engage new partners and individuals to move many of the goals and actions contained herein forward.

- **Partner Organizations to Host CSA Drop Locations** – as noted in the strengths discussion, there are several existing organizations (e.g. public and charter school sites, churches, other social service entities) willing and interested in hosting CSA drops and co-programming efforts to support local foods and other community development goals. Better distribution of CSA drop locations throughout the neighborhood can improve walk access and provide opportunities for complementary programming on CSA box pick up days.

- **Advancing Local Food Waste/Food Recovery Efforts** – One key strategy for improving local access and consumption of fresh foods is ensuring that that fresh local foods don’t go to waste. There is a renewed interest at the federal level between EPA and USDA in providing more education and outreach to help businesses, institutions and individual people reduce food waste. Within the Promise Zone neighborhood, some near term education and outreach could be targeted to existing CSA clients with the help of regional EPA liaisons who are working directly with the West Coast Climate & Material Management Forum to deploy new tools such as the Food Too Good To Waste toolkit (http://westcoastclimateforum.com/food) to a broader audience of users.

- **Increased Urban Agriculture Production** – Within the Promise Zone neighborhood, there exists several privately owned fruit trees, some private gardens and some underutilized public and privately owned sites that could be targeted for urban agriculture production. Workshop participants cited this as another potential strategy within the Promise Zone neighborhood that may currently be overlooked. Identifying potential public sites (such as Caltrans owned properties) and privately owned production partners may be beneficial in better assessing additional opportunities for local production and improved access.

**Action Plan**

The food access challenges facing Los Angles are daunting and touch on all aspects of the local food economy. The Local Foods, Local Places workshop therefore was focused on the Youth Policy Institute’s near-term role in leading efforts to strengthen and expand the CSA program in the Promise Zone and engage other community partners in the process. This strategy could dramatically increase access to healthy foods for low income families in the Promise Zone that lack access to a healthy food options in their neighborhood. Additional goals and actions concerning placemaking, affordable housing, urban agriculture production, economic development and other food access and community betterment initiatives will continue to be addressed by the City and other Promise Zone stakeholders and partners.

**Goal 1** – Identify six Promise Zone CSA drop locations.

- **Action 1.1** – Compile a list of site criteria to evaluate potential sites and map the data to help determine opportunities and gaps. Identify new CSA locations in conjunction with mapping efforts identified in Action 4.3.
• **Action 1.2** – Identify potential stakeholders, partner organizations, and host organizations for CSA drop locations and programmatic support.

• **Action 1.3** - Determine community/culturally specific demand through targeted outreach within community.

**Goal 2 – Develop programming for CSA drop locations.**

• **Action 2.1** – Identify host-site specific opportunities in conjunction with Action 1.1 and 1.2.

• **Action 2.2** – Define and commit YPI resources to coordinate with partner organizations.

• **Action 2.3** - Engage community members in identifying program needs in conjunction with Actions 1.2 and 1.3.

• **Action 2.4** - Develop supporting educational programs focused on: 1) food waste/food recovery and 2) healthy eating, preparation and cooking techniques. May be combined with Actions 1.2, 1.3 and 2.3 but also include standalone trainings/educational events at YPI or other partners organizations.

**Goal 3 – Secure additional funding and seek ways to reduce subsidy needs for the CSA program.**

• **Action 3.1** – Define metrics of costs (needs/gaps) in terms of CSA program operations.

• **Action 3.2** – Establish new Promise Zone partnerships with different non-profit, institutional and private organizations able and willing to support CSA program and near term subsidy needs (identifying partners for the an “ask”).

• **Action 3.3** - Develop a “market match” program to incentivize CalFresh recipients to use the CSA program (need to establish EBT/SNAP acceptance).

**Goal 4 – Create a Local Foods, Local Places program model that can be scaled to the rest of the Promise Zone**

• **Action 4.1** – Identify additional Promise Zone partners interested in healthy, local foods and improved neighborhood conditions relative to placemaking.

• **Action 4.2** – Develop specific LFLP program goals and targets for pilots; develop pilot program elements; assess success and lessons learned from pilots; and create scalable neighborhood templates.

• **Action 4.3** - Identify data gathering, mapping and analysis next steps, which may include mapping healthy corner stores, potential CSA locations, farmers markets, other community assets. Include mapping to identify walk and transit access issues/opportunities.

• **Action 4.4** - Evaluate data and work with Food Policy Council partners to assess additional Local Foods, Local Places based needs (consider mobile markets, other creative options).

**Goal 5 – Increase the number of Promise Zone participants in the CSA program**

• **Action 5.1** – Ensure that YPI is able to accept WIC and CalFresh purchases (combine with Action 3.5 efforts).

• **Action 5.2** - Develop a communications/marketing strategy (see Action 2.4)

• **Action 5.3** - Strengthen partnerships to reach more clients (See Actions 3.3, 3.4 and 4.1)
Livability Principles Advanced by the Action Plan

The Local Foods, Local Places program is supported by the Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The Partnership includes EPA, DOT, and HUD. These agencies have been working since 2009 to incorporate livability considerations into their policies and funding programs. This section describes how the Youth Policy Institute’s Action Plan supports each of the livability principles.

Provide more Transportation Choices
Many residents living and working in the Promise Zone neighborhood rely entirely on bus, metro and walk access to reach daily destinations. As new fresh food outlets (CSA drop locations, farmer’s markets, community gardens, etc.) are contemplated within the neighborhood, YPI and its stakeholder partners are taking into account location factors for these sites to make them convenient and accessible for community members who don’t have access to a private automobile. Additionally, the identification of additional placemaking improvements in the future by the City and other transportation partners could help to improve the overall safety and walkability within the neighborhood.

Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing
While this workshop did not directly address housing issues, the neighborhood remains a key destination for immigrant families and lower income residents, yet housing affordability is an ongoing challenge. The goals and actions oriented around improving local access and consumption of affordable healthy foods and continuing to invest in transportation infrastructure that helps keep transportation costs low can in turn help residents have more income to dedicate towards housing costs. However additional efforts are likely needed to improve affordable housing options within the neighborhood.

Enhance Economic Competitiveness
This neighborhood is home to many local businesses that directly serve local neighborhood residents. Yet given its location within the greater city proper of Los Angeles, there remain many underdeveloped opportunities. The goals and actions oriented towards community development and placemaking can only further strengthen the longer term viability within the neighborhood for economic growth. In the near term, more efforts could be devoted to better connect local residents with small business creation resources relative to the growing local food system. Specifically, there could be value in connecting some of the existing street vendors or other informal entrepreneurs within the neighborhood to micro-lending and other small business incubation programs by the City or other agencies.

Support Existing Communities and Value Communities and Neighborhoods
The goals and actions of this program directly target efforts to improve the existing neighborhood and thereby further strengthen the social, economic, political and physical infrastructure systems within this vibrant existing community. The Promise Zone designation further addresses key goals aimed at improving quality of life and long term viability of improving this neighborhood while also supporting the preservation of its unique cultural diversity and history.

Coordination and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment
This neighborhood is already a Promise Zone designated area which seeks to leverage federal investments through a place-based approach. This technical assistance effort relied heavily on HUD participation. The key actions described herein call for additional partnering, leveraging and coordination between HUD, the City, YPI, Caltrans, LA Metro, and EPA to further advance key community goals.
Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Implementation Details
- Appendix B – Key Health and Agriculture Data
- Appendix C – Workshop Participants
- Appendix D – Funding Resources
- Appendix E – References
- Appendix F – Presentation Slides
- Appendix G – Final Coordination Call/Stakeholder Contacts/Notes