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Summary Notes from Community Conversations on Grocery Store

5 sessions hosted between 8/14/2021 – 8/28/2021. (3 virtual, 2 in person)

About 35 people attended in total across all 5 sessions

Excitement and Optimism

- As a community we need to be willing to be open going forward. It is important to acknowledge the past and use that as a learning lesson so we can move towards a better future, but we need to be open to giving people a chance to help us create a better future.
- I am excited about this project. From a SNAP perspective and food access / food insecurity perspective, having a grocery store in east Gainesville is a HUGE need.
- I am excited about this project, but I don't know anything about operating a grocery store so I can't speak much to that. But what I do know is I love the Bravos in other parts of Florida. It would be great to have one in our community.
- A project like this would be transformative for East Gainesville. It is what we need in order to see further investment in the community and more services brought to that side of town. This project is going to be a catalyst for change
- Bravos in other parts of Florida are beautiful and really do a great job of representing the culture of the community, especially in terms of the products sold. It would be wonderful to have an option like this for east Gainesville residents. It would be far superior to shopping at Walmart or the dollar stores which is all that exists in the community right now

Working with local farmers

- Lots of support around the buy-local motto of Bravo.... It makes good business sense for Bravo, and it is mutually beneficial to our local farmers.
- Community members were excited to hear that Bravo is willing to invite farmers into the store to showcase their products, and the store will help create marketing materials that let customers know where the food was grown so that we can celebrate the local farms.
- There was enthusiasm around the idea of having a map on the wall of all the local farms that Bravo is sourcing from, as well as bios of the farms / farmers themselves... this is something Bravo did in another store in Florida and plans to replicate in Gainesville
- *Bravo buys from local producers every single day and has the capacity to work with small farmers who do not have access to wholesale markets due to limited growing capacity. Bravo offers a unique market for these small growers that can be a supplement to the CSA and Farmer's Market operations they already run*
- There was some discussion around how Bravo could serve as a food hub for local farmers to aggregate and distribute their products beyond what is being purchased by Bravo to be sold in the store
- A lot of engagement with the local farming community needs to be done to ensure that the farmers are interested in selling to the store, and what capacity they have to meet the demands of customers
 - o Bravo should leverage the work the City and County are doing on a Foodshed map to connect with farmers
 - o Is there a way for the store to work with farmers to buy the overage they produce?
 - o *Bravo is very interested in have robust conversations and building one-on-one relationships with local farms, as that will only help the business be successful*

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Community Engagement Process:

- There needs to be a meaningful, transparent, evidence-based community engagement process conducted by the City and Development Team together to ensure community members thoughts and ideas are driving the project through the design, development and implementation phases
 - o Community wants to know how feedback will be used to influence the project.
 - o Community engagement needs to be more than a “check the box” exercise for the development team. The feedback received needs to have a way to be implemented
 - o Many people called for a longer, more comprehensive engagement process...
 - The City and the Development Team need to pause on the project and talk with more people in the community
 - More in persons meetings need to be held, and they need to be publicized
 - If the City is going to be involved in the engagement process, the City needs to be promoting these sessions and ensuring people know about them so they can show up
 - o The development team needs to do their homework. This is a deal that is going to bring them profit, so they need to invest the time and energy into connecting with people to create buy in. It is not the City's job to do their work for them. *Mr. Fred Washington (member of the Development Team) responded with: Here is my personal cell 352.266-0157 . You don't have to wait for a community meeting... call me!*
- Community engagement should have started much earlier
 - o The City should have started talking with the community about this project as soon as the unsolicited proposal came in and the City began considering providing a forgivable loan with public funds
 - o There is a problem with how the term sheet was drafted... the community was not engaged in drafting the terms, despite there being community members / leaders who have worked on food access issues in the community for decades.
 - o Engage people in the design stage of the project... don't show up and ask us for our opinion about an already crafted plan... allow us to be a part of creating that plan.
- Mistrust of the City of Gainesville (specifically the City Manager) was voiced by several community leaders and was noted as one of the major reasons why some community leaders have a negative first impression of this grocery store project... because it seems the City Manager has played a big role in moving the project forward.
 - o Why did the City not host a community engagement process? No one knew about these meetings and it is unclear who is actually hosting them. Why did the City not do more? Who is taking notes? How will the feedback be shared with leadership?

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- You (Development team) are entering into an environment of very low trust. We do not trust our City government. They do not listen to us or to each other. You are entering into a situation of dysfunction and therefore it is not you who created this mess, but the City has thrown you into it and now you have to deal with it.
- Several questions about who the development team has reached out to in the community:
 - Who have you been in conversations with in the SE Gainesville?
 - Criticisms for the lack of farmer engagement done thus far
 - "Talking to one or two community members that a Commissioner connected you with does not represent the voice of the community. You need to talk to more people."
- There was a lot of talk about Grace Grows community engagement process and a desire to see the data from that project into the grocery store
 - Feeling of mistrust stemmed after C. Johnson made the motion for Grace Grows to drive the community engagement process, but then there was not follow up conversation with the City about that opportunity. It felt like Grace Grow's name was used to get an idea forward, but then this private deal came into the picture and took precedent over Grace Grows' community engagement process.
 - *Karissa explained that the City needed to be sure the City Commission wanted to entertain this proposal before we could commit to an engagement strategy. Going forward, Karissa suggested we could use some of the data Grace Grows is collecting through their USDA funded project to inform that design of the grocery store as well as an opportunity to recruit more feedback from more community members. Grace Grows agreed and supported this idea. Richie said he would love to see any data that community members are willing to share*
 - *Karissa explained that we do not want to disempower the other non-grocery store focused ideas that are being generated through the Grace Grows USDA project (i.e. community gardens, nutrition education courses, etc.) by only focusing on grocery store initiatives. However, we could pull out the Grace Grows data relevant to grocery stores and use that as a guide for this project. But there should still be support offered to the other project ideas that stem out of the Grace Grows Community Food Project planning process in SE GNV*
 - *Development team scheduled a meeting with Grace Grows to discuss details of working with them as a contracted consultant to assist with community engagement and the community advisory board. That proposal by Grace Grows to the development team is under review.*
- Role of Advisory Council
 - "You do not need an advisory council or consultants, you need partners in the community who are working with you. You need them by your side or this is going to fail. By going about this the wrong way you are not creating the community buy in for this to be successful. You have not done your homework. You have not done community engagement."
 - Who is in charge of managing the community engagement process and community involvement throughout the lifespan of the store? How are you investing in ensuring the

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community stays in the driver's seat of this project for the long run? These questions go to what role and power the advisory council members will have in the store, both in the beginning and over time

- Sharing of decision making power and compensation for contributions
 - o "We [community members] are tired of giving our ideas for projects and not being paid for those ideas. There are many people in East Gainesville who have been working on food systems and food access work for years... We are deeply embedded in this and have worked on it as a community. Why are we not involved in this project? Why have we not been asked to set the terms of a contract? Why have we not been asked if we want to own the project?"

Inappropriate use of City / Taxpayer Money:

- There is no denying that we need a grocery store in E GNV... that is not the issue here... the issue is the process and the fact that we are using City dollars to fund the store, but it is then going to put money into other people's hands, not community members. We want a model of profit-sharing.
- Does anyone know why a forgivable loan wasn't an option for the community to create a grocery store in East Gainesville?
- Resentment over the City giving ARPA dollars to a private development deal when there are so many community organizations that have submitted requests to the City for ARPA dollars to fund their community-grown initiatives. "Community organizations are going to get pennies compared to the \$3.3 million going to a private developer as a forgivable loan. This is an example of how the community's wants and needs are ignored... we give ideas and potential solutions to solve community problems that we are experiencing everyday, but we are overlooked when it comes to resourcing those ideas and instead watch money be poured into development projects that will generate income for people who are not from our community."
- Any corporate store could locate in east Gainesville and they could do it without money from the city, so what makes this so special? Why do we give money here? What is the value add and strategy for community-wealth building that makes this project worth funding?
- Are you buying the entire plaza? What is the cost of renovating the space?
- Why would the City give a forgivable loan to a private developer for this? Why not use this \$3.3 million to buy the building and then lease it to Bravo?
 - o *Answer was that \$3.3 million is not enough to buy the building and the City was never offering to buy the building outright*
 - o The present owner is going to profit from leaving the building not taken care of. And the new owner will profit from the city paying for the deferred maintenance.
- Concerns over the purchase price:
 - o What is the purchase price? Are you buying the entire plaza? -- *Development Team said it is over \$5 million for the plaza... People then expressed a lot of concern. Several statements were made, including this one:* The statement just made about pricing

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makes me really concerned, I hope someone will address this and the city will do due diligence about the purchase price and ensure it is based on fair appraisal. What is plan for this? I know Commercial property is hard to do straight comparison valuation but from my limited understanding and conversations with Commercial realtors, 5+mil is really high!"

- "\$3.3 million should be more than enough to buy that property. A similar shopping center fully full of active, busy tenants is going for less than that. Often times the model in this type of project is that city buys property then does RFP for an operator. In this way they control the property and can get a lot of different models to choose from and would allow for more community input. One issue with this is that you have another property off tax rolls. What is good about it is the ability to have cost sharing with the community and designing it in a way that is driven by the community."
- Why wouldn't we just use that \$3.3 million to start a Co-Op grocery store? Owned by local people. There are proven models of this. -- *a number of participants supported this comment*
- This project should not be funded through ARP dollars... we should be using CRA dollars for redevelopment projects like this.
- There should be another RFP put out of this project, with the \$3.3 million loan as an option. We should give our community a fair chance to put a proposal together for a community-wealth generating model. The RFP that the City put out for 30 days was way too short... it doesn't even count in my opinion
- I was hoping for a community owned model where profits could go back into programs like ours. I was thinking we could locally own it, use it for agricultural education, economic development and a processing center for local farms..... -- *a number of participants supported this comment*

What investment are you bringing to the table Bravo team?

- People are not going to invest in this if you are not invested. So I want to know what is your investment in dollars? What is being spent on the project beyond the loan from the City?
- How is your investment (if any is being made) going to ensure sustainability of this project so there is continued benefit and equity for the community?
- Sustainable and profitable are two different things... we don't need profit to be sustainable. We can do this in our community.
- *Josie said that she is always invested in the communities she works in. She showed her letter of contribution to Habitat for Humanity in Broward County as an example of her personal investment in community development work. The response she received was: Habitat is not a good example. The Habitat here builds homes that are falling apart in less than a year. They are forcing people to take 2nd mortgages and the shutdown the Neighborhood Revitalization initiative but still expect land to be gifted... However, it speaks to the issue that we must be clear on what a community partnership actually looks like. Josie replied: I am saddened to hear that. That has not been my experience and I feel that home ownership is a key part of building a strong and healthy community.*

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- If you buy the entire plaza, you will be inheriting the leases of Family Dollar, Lucilles, China Wok, and the laundromat. That's a lot of income continuing to leave town.

Community-based Model & Partnership Programs

- What is the % of profits that will return to the community? And what specific community programs will benefit from those profits?
- How can we use the mobility hub component of the Terms Sheet to be a space for information and resource sharing? How can that space be given a more community-vibe
- How can other parts of the plaza and overall property be used to support needs and visions of the community? Are things like childcare, small parks, a dog walk, etc. on the table for discussion? *Development team said they are open to all ideas and would love to figure out a way to make the space as inviting and community-oriented as possible, in partnership with the City*
- Site design for the store should also take into consideration bicycle and pedestrian access to the store. The microtransit hub is great, but how can we serve people who might be walking or biking?
- Is there a way to support reintegration of citizens with criminal history to help them gain entry back into the workforce?
- How can we create and integrate programs that support our youth into the project? Is there opportunity for workforce development programs?
- *There was a lot of positive discussion and excitement by community members and the Development Team around exploring partnership opportunities between Bravo and community partners around youth-focused programs, workforce development, and nutrition education:*
 - o There is a lot of interest in Meal Kit Prep program being run as a partnership between UF Family Nutrition Program and Eastside Culinary Institute.
 - o Culinary Cert. Program through Working Food and UF Office of Professional and Workforce Development - individuals enrolling in this program need to have an externship component, so maybe Bravo could serve as that space if they are going to have a hot bar?
 - o Opportunities for youth from GDNA Youth Culinary Program and Chef Empowerment program to be mentored at the Bravo grocery store?
 - o Nutrition education and/or cooking demos in the store?
 - o UF Meat Lab - opportunities for students to work at Bravo or get internship credits?
 - o Could Bravo offer refrigeration / storage space for community nonprofits that are working on emergency food assistance projects but lack infrastructure needed to be most successful?
- Some community members asked what effort was put into bringing a CDFI to the plaza, specifically Self Help Credit Union? *Fred said he was quoted that a minimum of \$25K was needed for Self Help to come and that was more than the Development Team could afford. A community member says she was quoted \$15K... the discrepancy caused further mistrust.*

Accountability & Contract:

- There was a strong desire to ensure future Bravo employees are well compensated and given a positive work environment with room for growth

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- Recommendation was to use Publix and Wards as the standard for employment wages and benefits
- There needs to be transparency of the wage scale of the whole business
- There needs to be practices put in place to ensure the workforce at Bravo is valued and supported
- *Bravo mentioned that they need help from the community to reach out to people who are looking for jobs and will sustain in those jobs. Employee recruitment and retention is a major challenge right now post-COVID*
- What are the teeth for accountability in this deal? How do we make sure that the values and needs that the community is voicing are being heard and implemented? *Karissa explained that the teeth are what is being put into the drafted contract, which soon will be available for public comment. Another participant then replied:* "We will be taking public comment" is not a sufficient response from the City.
- How would Community Advisory Group members be chosen? What is the process for selection and what criteria will be used? The Criteria created and implemented by Grace Grows is a good recommendation.
- Regarding the Community Advisory Group item in the Terms Sheet, 1/2 mile radius for residents to participate may be small in terms of finding enough citizens able to participate. Note the Health Dept. and Community Support Service office is adjacent and perhaps interested persons that work there could be eligible for the panel? They may also shop at the store. *Another participant responded: Increasing the 1/2 radius requirement would mean the most vulnerable residents would not be at the table.*
- The microtransit hub listed in the Terms Sheet would be an asset to bring more people to site and also allow persons greater ability to shop and have mobility to areas. This is a benefit that cannot be overlooked.

Other questions / comments:

- What history does the development team have working on issues of food insecurity? What is driving the development teams' passion for doing this type of community development project in an area like East Gainesville where other businesses have failed in the past?
- Will the store operate under normal business hours? - - *yes*
- You used a local contractor to do an assessment on the renovations? Will you hire locally? Will you do business with certified small, minority businesses? - - *we will hire locally and want to partner with local firms as much as possible. I look forward to any contacts that you all can bring me so we can create this as a community store that benefits the community*
- One participant demanded to know who is brokering the sale and what is their contact info.
- Bravo was in Ocala near an area very similar to East Gainesville, why did it close? - - *Development Team explained that it did not close, that it changed ownership and names due to a complicated situation of money and politics.*
- *At one point the topic of public safety at the proposed site came up... The Development Team mentioned the issues of theft and violence that occur at the plaza and an awareness that people do not feel safe right now when they are at the site. The Development Team stated that public*

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safety is a high priority for them to ensure people feel comfortable at the site. Some participants responded by saying:

- Shoppers are comfortable.
- That's not the truth... we use that area all the time... so stop
- It is surprising since I'm there a lot and use that laundry. I have NEVER heard that EVER. lol...for the laundry and the Family Dollar...we feel safe there.
- I don't think it is helpful to contribute to the fear mongering of East Gainesville.
- I shop at Family Dollar on a regular basis. And eat Lucille's and China Wok often. I've never felt unsafe there.
- *Development Team replied: The owners of the laundry and soul food restaurant and Family dollar told me about the robberies at gun point.*
- A model of shared ownership by the community could help address this. Right now there are no jobs or opportunities... Crime becomes jobs and opportunities the answer is more opportunity.

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