

# Plans Underway To Bring Grocery, Fresh Foods To Scotlandville 'Desert'



Photo by James Terry III

Shown in the photo is Edgar Cage, commentator with Mr. William Jones at the St. Michael Episcopal Church, where the discussion was about bringing a grocery store to the Scotlandville community.

By JASMINE HASTINGS JOSEF  
Syndicate reporter

SCOTLANDVILLE - The Food Access Team of Together Baton Rouge revealed the organization's plan to bring a "high-quality" grocery store or farmers market to North Baton Rouge, an area identified as a food desert for decades.

"The progress we have made in less than three months is very encouraging. We are not there yet, I don't want to be too optimistic but we are very, very close," said Together Baton Rouge leader Edgar Cage.

The organization looked to Nielsen Company research to understand the Scotlandville market. The company reported that the 2011 demand for food and beverage stores in north Baton Rouge is more than \$20.9 million dollars, while the supply was only \$7.6 million. "This leaves a leakage of \$13.3 million which has an investor interested," said Cage.

The investor, identified as connected with Associated Groceries, is interested in property adjacent to the Palisades apartments on Scenic Highway, near Southern

University.

Although the property has legal issues, redevelopment authorities said they can be resolved and two to three acres can be carved from the 10-acre track for a grocery store. "(The grocery) will be brand new, serve this neighborhood, and it will be in accessible to the people," said Together Baton Rouge leader Margret Reed.

But, Broderick Bagert, lead Together Baton Rouge organizer, said this is nowhere near being a done deal. "Although the land looks like it has potential, the community is merely organizing for this. No one is saying 'we want to put a grocery store in Scotlandville,' it's the community saying this is what we want," Bagert said.

Now the broader community needs to respond by completing a food access survey, organizers residents who met Dec. 1 at St. Michael's Episcopal Church, 1620 77th Ave. This was the first public food access committee meeting. The next meeting will be February 9 at 6:30 at the church.

Surveys were distributed for residents to share with

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neighbors and complete. Organizers said the results will be given to RDA, elected officials, and investors with Associated Groceries to show community need and support for the possible store.

Copies are available at area churches, the Scotlandville Branch Library, or by emailing [contact@togetherbr.org](mailto:contact@togetherbr.org). Residents, like Ebony Galloway and Thomasina Joseph, agreed to go "door-to-door" and to churches to complete surveys by December 16.

"What we are trying to do is give the people of Scotlandville access to quality, fresh fruits and vegetables at a reasonable price... considering the transit situation in Baton Rouge there are a lot of people who don't have access to vehicles who can't get to (the nearest) Piggly Wiggly on a regular basis," Cage said.

According to the USDA, there are seven census tracts around Scotlandville identified as food deserts, a term used to describe a community's lack of access to a major grocer or supermarket within walking distance.

North Baton Rouge also has other options for fresh foods, said Marcelle Boudreau, economic development project manager at the Center for Planning Excel-

lence. CPEX has developed an innovative van or bus system that, once funded, will stop at scheduled times with vegetables and fruits from local farms. Boudreau said CPEX is looking for resources and up to \$500,000 to fund the unit, which will be operated by BREADA and circulate throughout areas in North Baton Rouge.

"We are very interested in providing fresh healthy options to the community, improve the access, and show that the demand is here because it's so difficult sometimes to get the grocer to commit because it is a

large investment," said Darlene Rowland, BREADA director of development. BREADA's mission is to "build a strong and healthy food system to support local farmers/fishers and food producers and build communities through public markets." The group manages the Red Stick Market, every Saturday downtown in Baton Rouge.

Food access is one of five major groups that Together Baton Rouge, a grassroots, faith-based group, has organized to improve transportation, education, crime, and health care.