

Case for Support: A Red Circle's Community Grocery Store

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Digital Rendering of Proposed Location

PROJECT SUMMARY

A Red Circle has identified two major problems in the North County food system:

1. Local Black farmers and growers do not have a local cold storage and distribution site that they can use to efficiently enter the local food system.
2. Many residents in North County do not have sufficient access to affordable, healthy foods.

We will solve these problems by opening a **community grocery store**, as part of the North County Community Nexus. The store location will house local produce and sell healthy food to residents at an affordable price, while also offering on-site storage for local farmers.

WHO IS A RED CIRCLE?

A Red Circle is a nonprofit organization focused on economic and community development in North St. Louis County through a racial equity lens. Founded by Erica Williams in 2017, we meet the immediate and long-term needs of North County residents, who have borne historic and persistent lack of access to good education, jobs, safety, and opportunities necessary to survive and thrive.

A Red Circle serves 12 ZIP codes in the northern part of St. Louis County ("North County") with a population of 281,069 that is 71% Black and 18.3% of which fall below the poverty line. A Red Circle's staff are largely drawn from the community and continue to live and raise families in North County.



We approach each opportunity in a holistic, collaborative way – working with residents, elected officials, community leaders, and volunteers to support and invest in the individuals who make up North County St. Louis. Our programs and services focus on actions, initiatives, and advocacy that directly impact the lives of residents. Current programs include:

- **Education Advocacy Coalition**
- **Food & Justice Fellowship**
- **A Red Circle Arts**
- **Healthy Community Market**
- **Healthy Moms and Babies Program**
- **STL Mutual Aid - North County Pod**
- **Good Food Movement**

Through A Red Circle’s food justice programming we have created the Healthy Community Market and Healthy Flavor Community Garden in Riverview, transformed a vacant lot in Pine Lawn into the North County Agricultural Education Center, and in 2021 completed 513 grocery deliveries serving 383 unique families through our partnership with St. Louis Mutual Aid.

HISTORIC CONTEXT: NORTH COUNTY FOOD REDLINING

Over the past three decades, North County has seen persistent and crippling disinvestment in essential needs and services. Most recently, in 2018, Shop ‘n Save, the most affordable full-service grocery store with several locations throughout North County, closed its doors. While many locations throughout greater St. Louis were taken over and upgraded by the local Schnucks grocery chain, four North County locations were closed permanently. Three of the closed locations were not near another grocery store and remain empty, creating hardship on the residents and leaving three prominent vacant buildings.

According to the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, 48 of the 68 North County census tracts served by A Red Circle are considered food deserts. We consider many more to be "food swamps," where the only food available is unhealthy or of poor quality such as fast food or processed products from a convenience store.



A Shuttered Shop 'n Save in North County (from St. Louis Public Radio)

SOLUTION: A GROCERY STORE BY THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY

A Red Circle first approached the food access challenge by asking two guiding questions:

1. *How can we re-invest in the people and betterment of **our community**?*
2. *What does this community **want and need**?"*

Through our community engagement in focus groups and region-wide survey, we have found that demand for fresh produce is high on the community wish list and that residents of North County want and need a full-time, community-oriented grocery store.

The store will be an invaluable asset to meet both quality of life and economic goals in the region. Our North County grocery store will:

- Provide affordable, high quality, locally sourced produce and other high demand items
- Create a cold storage facility and distribution outlet for local farmers to get their produce into the community
- Generate sales tax revenue to help mitigate years of disinvestment
- Test out and support a unique social enterprise model for community-based business
- Create quality jobs for North County Residents
- Feature a robust Demonstration Garden to provide community members with hands-on learning and experience growing food
- House a bistro where A Red Circle, community leaders, and partners can host nutrition classes, cooking demos, and much more



Digital Rendering of Demonstration Garden

In partnership with other North County nonprofits, A Red Circle will support the mission and operations of the grocery store in numerous ways, including educating the community about healthy foods, offering food delivery, and enabling bulk purchasing of foods at lower costs. We envision a vibrant place that can serve as a welcoming space for individuals, families, and the community at large.

The grocery store will offer:

- Fresh produce – locally grown and chemical free
- Locally made dressings, sauces, soups, jams, and jellies
- Bulk spices
- Dry goods with more whole grains such as brown rice
- Fresh bread
- Dairy, meat, and seafood
- Healthy snacks
- Cleaning supplies and hygiene products

SAFETY, UNITY, AND INTERCONNECTION FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

The Community Grocery Store project is part of a larger effort to create the North County Community Nexus which will co-locate community services from A Red Circle ranging from our Education Advocacy to our partnership with STL Mutual Aid. We are starting a capital campaign which is launching solicitation for grants and donations toward the combined North County Community Nexus.

While our plans are ambitious, we know they are achievable and – most importantly – **essential** for the betterment of **our beloved communities**. A Red Circle, in just a few years, has proven itself to be a passionate, diligent, and trusted partner working hard on behalf of the people and communities it serves. A Red Circle is a member of North County – **homegrown**.

This work happens on every level and is not possible without your engagement in support of equity and opportunity for all. We envision a future where we are more impactful, resilient, and able to support the improved health and wellbeing of our friends, families, neighbors, and planet.

We thank you again for your support. Together, we can and will do more for one another. **See you in the produce aisle!**



Digital Rendering of Bird's Eye View

"I can't just exist on this planet and ignore its vast inequities; we all have a responsibility to work for what's right. I aligned my life with the pursuit of liberation, equity, and justice early on, and I'll continue to pursue them until my last breath."

Malik Yakini, Detroit Black Community Food Security Network