

Finding Food in Portage Park: Summary Report, February 11, 2007

Northeastern Illinois Community Food Security Assessment

The Project:

In fall, 2003, researchers at Chicago State University and UIC were funded by the Chicago Community Trust to perform a region-wide analysis of access to healthy food. This study, named the Northeastern Illinois Community Food Security Assessment, called for region-wide mapping and deep analysis of a number of case study areas. The Portage Park Community Area was chosen as a case study area. Researchers partnered with the Six Corners Chamber of Commerce to collect the Portage Park data. The Portage Park Neighborhood Association partnered with us by helping set up this dissemination meeting.

The Northeastern Illinois Community Food Security Assessment measured access to food in Portage Park through three techniques. First, Portage Park was part of a broad mapping of food access sites in the six-county Chicago area. This data was analyzed by the number of stores in each community and also by a technique that looked at the mean distance from all street addresses in a community to stores of various types. Second, Portage Park was one of five case-study areas where qualitative group interviews were performed. These interviews included consumers, store managers, emergency food system workers, service providers, and local activists. Third, a market basket study, where stores are assessed for the availability of foods on a standard list, was performed.

The Geography of Portage Park:

For this study, we use the borders for Portage Park set by the city, which may not match the popular view of Portage Park. The northern border is Lawrence, the southern border is Belmont. The eastern border is Cicero or just east of Cicero, and the western border is Narragansett and Austin. This area is traditionally a middle class, ethnic white community, with a large Polish population. Numbers of both Hispanics and somewhat higher income families have risen in the area in the last ten years. This has pushed the average age of the community down. While poverty rates for Portage Park are relatively low, 8% of the households had incomes below the poverty level in 1999, and 9% of children lived in households below the poverty level.

Store Mapping:

Key Findings of the GIS Study include:

- Compared to many other parts of the city, particularly the South Side, access to supermarkets in Portage Park is good. There are five supermarkets in Portage Park, four of them “large.” (two Jewel-Osco stores, a Pete’s Market and Family Fruit Market). There is also a Jewel-Osco immediately outside the community boundary to the west.
- However, access to chain full-service supermarkets declined between 2005 and 2007 with the closing of a Jewel store on Belmont. This particularly affected the southern and southwestern portions of the community and was one of a number of chain supermarkets that closed on the northwest side during the period.
- The existing large supermarkets are primarily on the outskirts, rather than in the center, of the community.
- Facilities for impoverished residents are slim. There is only one food pantry served by the local food banks, corner stores are relatively few, and there is no discount store (such as an Aldi or Save-A-Lot) in the community.

Group Interviews:

Seven qualitative interviews were completed in Portage Park, across four food system sectors, retail food stores, community members, restaurant and emergency food pantry. Perspectives were sought from a range of food sector stakeholders ranging from community members to retail food store owners and food pantry staff. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were coded for each food sector then were analyzed across sectors.

Key Findings:

The Emergent Themes fall into seven major categories, with the issues briefly summarized below.

- Availability and Accessibility to Healthy Foods: In general, stores were considered largely available and accessible via public or private transportation (e.g., cars) for most people, with the exception of seniors, the disabled, the homeless and large families for whom shopping using public transportation is difficult.
- Strategies for Accessing Food among Food Insecure Residents: In addition to buying in bulk and stretching out food, some unique strategies to access food were detailed by interview participants including routinely accessing patronizing bank openings and public events that offer free food.
- Role of Economic Diversity in Portage Park on Community Food Insecurity: In some cases, interview participants had a hard time discussing community food insecurity, and cited that Portage Park is diverse. However, most could speak to vulnerable populations such as seniors, persons with health problems, the working poor, and the homeless.
- Food Insecurity Issues among Community Residents: Food insecurity was discussed as being influenced by the working poor such as not having enough money, experiencing bouts of unemployment and having family problems such as alcoholic family members and those with gambling problems. Attempts to use food supplemental programs include lack of knowledge of available programs and the stigma associated with program participation.
- Problems Experienced by Local Food Sector Representatives: The Food Pantry representative cited lack of storage, limited funding and an increasing demand for services as major problems. Also lack of awareness of the Chicago Food Depository emerged as a major problem to community food retailers and restaurant participants.
- Unique Role of Restaurants: Restaurants as partners on community food insecurity issues often are limited by corporate policies including those that contribute to a great deal of food waste.
- Proposed Solutions: Solutions proposed by interview participants include developing a food co-operative, providing budgeting classes for low income residents and improving inspection of existing food pantries to improve food quality and selection.

Contact Information:

For more information, please contact:

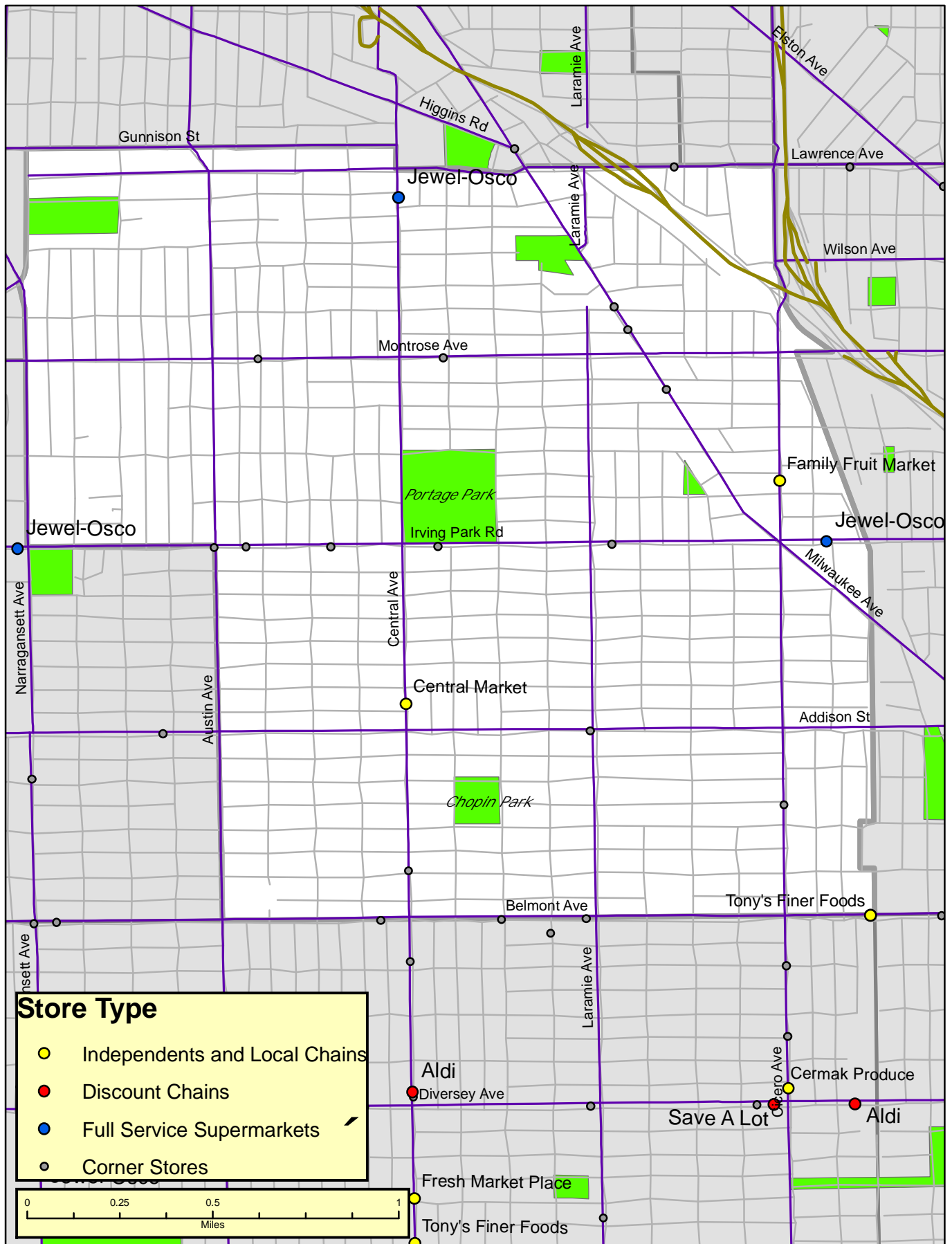
Daniel Block
Coordinator, Neighborhood Assistance Center
Chicago State University
773-995-2310
dblock@csu.edu

Noel Chavez
Community Health Sciences Division
School of Public Health
University of Illinois-Chicago
312-996-0747
nchavez@uic.edu

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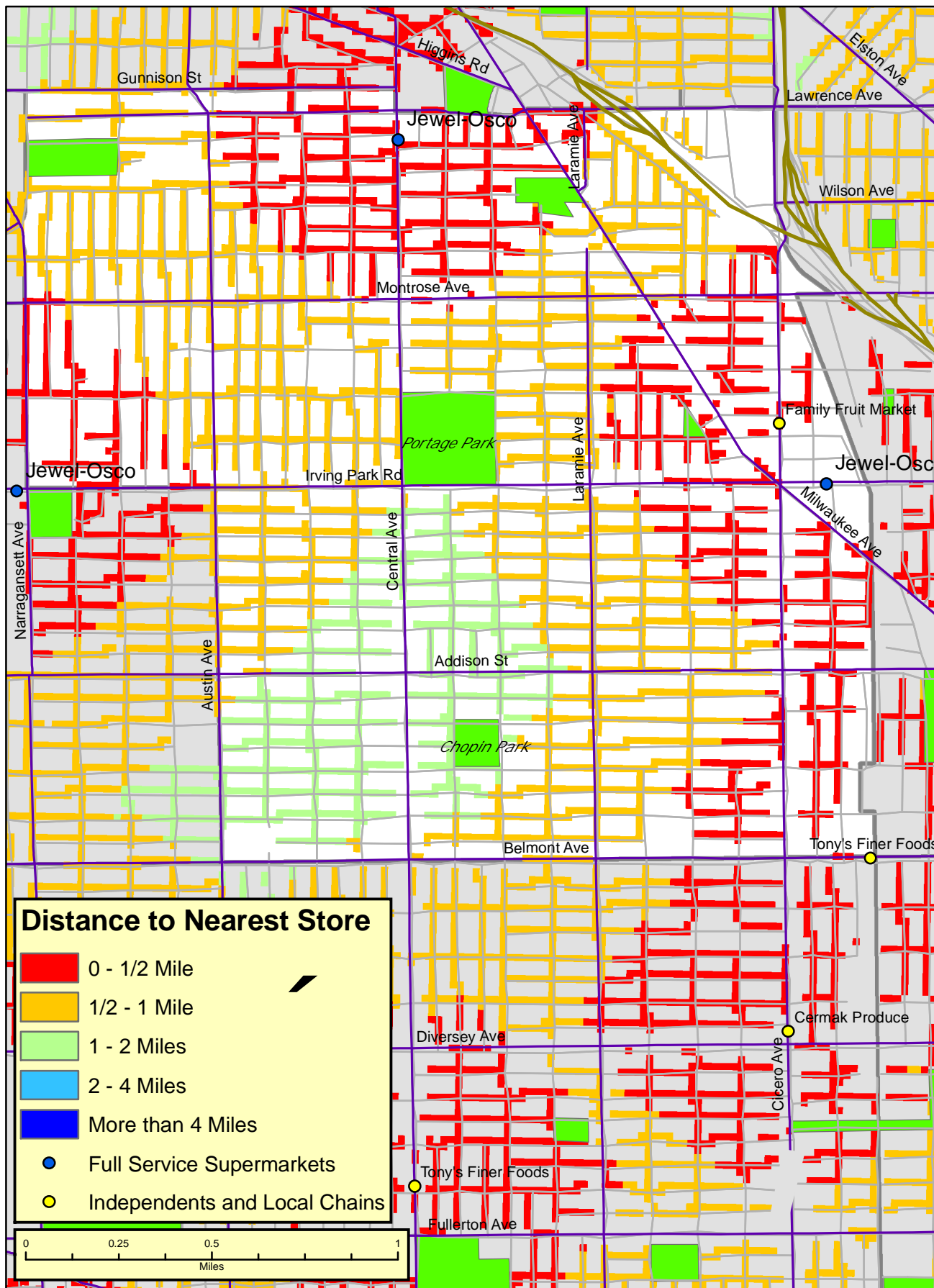
Supermarkets and Corner Stores in Portage Park



Sources:
 Supermarkets: Company Websites and In-person Surveys, Summer, 2007
 Corner Stores: InfoUSA, 2003

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 Funded by the Searle Funds of the Chicago Community Trust
 Map and Research Completed by
 Chicago State University, Neighborhood Assistance Center
 December 2007

Distance to the Nearest Large Supermarket Portage Park, 2007



Sources:
 Supermarkets: Company Websites and In-person Surveys, Summer, 2007
 Other Map Items: US Census Bureau, 2000; Chicago Metro Agency for Planning, 2001.

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