

This letter is especially effective because it contrasts the experience of the writer in his easy access to healthy food to that of others who find shopping for healthy food extremely inconvenient. Additionally, the letter is powerful because it makes reference to personal experience.

Daylong ordeal

By Sam Davidson, San Francisco

One of the things I love about my San Francisco neighborhood is how easy it is to find great things to eat. There's a farmers' market every week, corner stores with fresh produce and a grocery store within walking distance.

San Francisco is known for its love of food, for good reason, but not everyone has it as easy as I do.

I've spoken with many people who say food shopping is a daylong ordeal. One senior told me about the two buses she had to take to get to the closest grocery store and the expensive cab ride back home. I've talked to parents who don't have the time to commute to far-away supermarkets and must make do with the meager selections of canned goods available at their local liquor stores to feed their families.

Accesses to fresh, health food should be a basic right for everyone. City Hall must make healthy food access a priority and offer real incentives to developers to build full-service grocery stores in underserved communities. Why should I get to enjoy great food while others suffer because of their zip code?

Original article, "Tenderloin struggles to get local grocery store"

By Marisa Lagos

(San Francisco Chronicle, July 28, 2008, page B-1)

It seems like the simplest of necessities: a full-service grocery store. But things are never simple at the corner of Eddy and Taylor streets in the heart of the Tenderloin, San Francisco's densest neighborhood and one of its most notorious.

A local nonprofit has been working with city officials for two years to open a grocery store here, an area more known for drug dealers and prostitution than for its thousands of children and families. That admittedly well-deserved reputation, combined with the neighborhood's poor residents, security concerns and a lack of parking and financing, has made it nearly impossible.

It's not a challenge entirely unique to the area. Many grocery stores have pulled out of urban areas in recent years, including some San Francisco neighborhoods. But the demographics and reputation of the Tenderloin make things all the more difficult.

"It's so important to have, but it's one of those things that most of us live our lives without being aware of - except for the people who have to hop onto Muni and lug back their groceries," said Don Falk, executive director of the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp., which owns a parking lot at Eddy and Taylor streets. The nonprofit

housing company hopes to develop the land into a 14-story residential tower for low-income families, with a grocery store on the ground floor.

But after several studies, a lot of outreach and a few close calls, Falk and Mayor Gavin Newsom, who has met with grocers, aren't much closer than they were two years ago.

A number of stores have turned the city down cold, while others, like Fresh and Easy - a chain that will soon be moving into the Bayview neighborhood, a huge coup for Newsom - pulled out when representatives visited the proposed site, which is just a block from a Hilton hotel but seems worlds away.

Falk is now in talks with Grocery Outlet, a discount chain. If it commits to the site, the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp. would have to raise \$5 million to finance its construction - a challenging but not insurmountable goal.

The need is clearly there. While not all residents have full kitchens in their apartments, most have access to one. In a 2007 survey of Tenderloin residents commissioned by the TNDC and conducted by an Oakland nonprofit, 75 percent of respondents said they cook at home daily or several times a week.

There are about 40 stores that sell food items in the neighborhood, but the nearest full-service grocery store is, on average, a half mile away. Tenderloin residents either shop at corner stores - whose bread and butter are liquor and tobacco sales, not fresh produce and meat - or travel to other neighborhoods. The closest alternatives - the upscale Bristol Farms in the Westfield San Francisco Centre mall or Harvest Urban Market on Eighth Street - are well out of most residents' price range. And since very few of them have cars, they often make multiple grocery trips to other areas of the city.

"The corner markets just don't cut it. They tend to sell more alcohol than food," said Mike Williams, 51, who lives in the Franciscan Tower on Eddy Street, less than a block from the proposed grocery site. Williams said many of the corner stores change their prices from day to day and even customer to customer.

"I've also experienced, on and off, bad food - milk curdled at the point of sale," he said. "Generally speaking, I take the train to go all the way to Safeway on Church and Market streets, and many of my neighbors do, too."

The 2007 survey showed that there is fresh produce and some meat available in the neighborhood, but that the number of stores with these necessities are outnumbered 4 to 1 by establishments that do not carry fresh items. The survey also concluded that prices vary widely, and that customers must go to many stores to get everything they need and to find the best deals. In general, none of the stores have all the basics, which include fruit, vegetables, dairy products, grain products, meats, canned foods and fats and oils.

California Grocer owner Jimmy Shameih, who has had the small Eddy Street market for 17 years, said he tried to sell fresh meat but ended up throwing most of it out. He would

be happy to see a full-service market, he said. It could even spur his sales of fresh items eventually by making them more attractive to his clientele, he said.

"From a business standpoint, I don't think that (a full-service grocery store) coming into the neighborhood would hurt my business. If they are able to provide any services we can't ... it will enhance the Tenderloin," he said.

Dina Hillard, 33, a Tenderloin resident and former teacher, agreed. She noted that many residents haven't been exposed to fresh products and don't think of them when they are looking to make dinner.

"When I was teaching (at the nearby San Francisco Christian Academy), I had the kids draw a picture of their favorite vegetable," she said. One of the children drew a potato with sprouts on it - "that's how he thought a potato looks."