

TO: City-County Planning Board
FROM: A. Paul Norby, Director of Planning and Development Services
DATE: June 23, 2016
SUBJECT: Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Urban Food Access Report

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As part of its 2015-16 work program, the City-County Planning Board (CCPB) asked Planning staff to prepare a report on food access in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County. This report also researches progress made on accomplishing the food access goals outlined in *Legacy*, analyzes current trends in the study area, and summarizes successful national, regional, and local programs that encourage a more equitable food environment.

This report focuses on the most developed areas of the county: Growth Management Areas 1 (City or Town Centers), 2 (Urban Neighborhoods) and 3 (Suburban Neighborhoods) (see Growth Management Areas map, page 8). While many factors affect food access, this report focuses on specific planning-related regulations and policies that support, impede or impact food accessibility. The report makes land use and planning policy recommendations that can assist in mitigating local food access issues.

Background

Food access is a community issue that impacts the economic well-being, health, safety, and overall quality of life of all residents. The concept is broader than merely the physical availability of food options - it is also influenced by affordability, travel time, and access to healthy food options.

Certain urban areas began losing grocery stores to suburban areas starting in the 1960s. A migration of residents from the city core left certain urban areas without a traditional grocery store within an accessible distance and ultimately led to the formation of food deserts and consequently, food insecurity in these communities. Food insecurity is defined as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the limited or uncertain abilities of an individual to acquire those foods. Increased food insecurity has resulted in a growing reliance on emergency food sources such as food banks and feeding sites.

The United States Department of Agriculture is the agency responsible for identifying and defining food deserts by census tract. To be considered a food desert, 500 or more residents and/or 33% or more of the population of the tract must travel more than a mile from their residence to the closest supermarket or large grocery store (that distance is extended to ten miles in rural census tracts).

Negative health impacts are often prevalent in food desert communities. Studies by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) show that residents of food deserts have increased physical health

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Forsyth County Commissioners: David R. Plyler, Chairman; Don Martin, Vice Chair; Ted Kaplan; Richard V. Linville; Walter Marshall; Gloria D. Whisenhunt; Everette Witherspoon; County Manager: Dudley Watts, Jr.

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problems including obesity, diabetes and other diet-preventable health issues. An extension of this problem is that even in communities with sufficient food access, families are not eating as many fruits and vegetables as recommended in the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. This problem is compounded in food deserts, where residents often lack the necessary knowledge needed to properly prepare, cook and store produce because of their limited exposure to those foods. Informed land use decisions that remove barriers or create opportunities to increase and develop food access and education are an essential step to alleviating this growing health concern.

Best Practices in Other Communities

Many communities struggle with equitable food access and have taken steps to mitigate those issues. Throughout the nation and locally, communities are initiating different policies and practices to encourage, educate and improve food access. Staff has identified the following programs as best practices.

National Initiatives

The City Farm Program (Baltimore, MD)

Baltimore has created a Public Land Use Agreement that allows residents to garden in seven city parks. The City provides free security fencing, locks, water, hoses, wood chips and leaf compost to gardeners. Community plots may be rented for \$20 per year.

The Beacon Hill Food Forest (Seattle, WA)

This public food forest is based on the concept of permaculture, defined as sustainable, self-sufficient agricultural ecosystems. The intent of this project is to create an entire forest of edible or useable plants for community consumption. The property is located adjacent to a reservoir and is owned by the Seattle Public Utilities Department. Management of the site is handled as part of a Memorandum of Agreement by the City's Department of Neighborhoods.

Milwaukee Urban Gardens (Milwaukee, WI)

The City of Milwaukee has partnered with the Milwaukee Urban Gardens nonprofit community land trust to allow select City land to be turned into community gardens with the understanding that the Department of Water Works will provide watering options and the citizen gardeners are responsible for maintenance. The Milwaukee Urban Gardens nonprofit now has a network of over 75 community gardens that are primarily located on vacant city-owned property.

Grocery Store Incentives in South Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA)

Because of the high rates of chronic disease present among residents of South Los Angeles, a nonprofit organization, Community Health Councils (CHC), was created to study and potentially alleviate some of the contributing factors to chronic illnesses in the community. Limited access to healthy foods, along with an overabundance of fast food restaurants, were two major problems identified in a large-scale assessment that included community input. City Council approved incentive measures to attract grocery stores and sit-down restaurants to the area. The initiative seeks to attract new grocery stores with retail spaces 12,000 square feet or greater, produce marts with 80% or more of their retail space dedicated to fresh produce, and sit-down restaurants to

South Los Angeles. Financial incentives include loans, grants, tax credits, and discounts on utility services with potential sites identified and reviewed on an expedited basis by the City Planning Department and Building and Safety Department. This program has made possible the development of five new or planned grocery stores in South Los Angeles.

North Carolina Initiatives

The Healthy Corner Store Program (HB 250, SB 296)

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative is a bipartisan bill recently passed by The North Carolina House, which would create funds to use existing retail outlets across the state to facilitate access to and increase consumption of healthy food. Ideally, any fresh produce and meats would be sourced locally. The bill has not yet been passed by the State Senate, however.

Greensboro's Fresh Food Access Plan

In 2015, the City of Greensboro adopted the Greensboro Fresh Food Access Plan. The plan focuses on 17 census tracts identified as food deserts. Funded by the USDA's Local Food Promotion Program grant, this plan identifies strategies to create more opportunities for local food businesses to increase availability and consumption of locally-and-regionally-produced products. Plan strategies include improving retail access to fresh local foods in target census tracts, expanding existing local food business enterprises, and creating new local food business enterprises that address identified gaps in food access. Greensboro City Council decided in 2016 to fund actionable items from the plan, but no exact dollar amount has identified yet.

Friendship Gardens (Charlotte)

Friendship Gardens is a network of more than 90 community gardens in Charlotte. In exchange for financial support and resources, community gardeners donate produce to the organization's Friendship Trays program, which delivers 750 healthy meals to Charlotte residents every weekday. Friendship Gardens also operates the Mobile Market to increase access to healthy, affordable food, as well as an Urban Farm Learning Center, where residents can study urban farming and participate in workforce development programs.

Forsyth County Initiatives

The Garden Mentors Program

The Forsyth County Cooperative Extension began the Garden Mentors Program which consists of trained volunteers who provide guidance and serve as liaisons to gardening program participants. The program offers a two-day training course, which covers the organizing skills and basic horticulture knowledge necessary to start and sustain an active community garden. Mentors from this program are able to participate in the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer program that includes more intense horticultural training.

The Urban Farm School

The Urban Farm School is another Forsyth County Cooperative Extension program. It offers both business development and education through class and clinical experience. It is a nine-week program that is focused on training students in agricultural production, marketing, and business development. Currently, the pilot program is targeting the Cleveland Avenue and E.

Twenty-Second Street area. Land used in this initiative was leased through an agreement with the City of Winston-Salem.

Forsyth County Healthy Corner Store Network

The Healthy Corner Store Network, administered by the Forsyth County Department of Public Health, is a group of community corner stores that provide fresh produce and other healthy food options in areas where larger grocery stores or supermarkets are absent. Participants in this program are given signage, shelving, and are taught how to store and prepare fresh produce. Any corner store located within a Forsyth County food desert has the option of joining.

Participants include:

- Parker's Stop & Save (4257 Reidsville Road)
- Tickled Pink Convenience (3080 Kernersville Road)
- Kingz Downtown Market (418 N Liberty Street)
- P&P Convenience (2723 Farmall Street)
- La Comercial (1128 Waughtown Street)

Forsyth Community Food Consortium

The Forsyth Community Food Consortium is a collaborative regional effort that focuses on food system development throughout the Piedmont Triad region. It acts as a hub for collaboration, project facilitation, policy development and advocacy. Currently, the Food Consortium is working on several food access projects including a feasibility study for establishing a regional commercial food processing center and community-supported agriculture programs (CSA) sign-ups. A CSA refers to a network of stakeholders in one or more local farms who share the risks and benefits of food production by paying in advance for anticipated produce yields.

The Forsyth County Farmland Protection Plan

The Forsyth County Farmland Protection Plan is a coordinated effort between the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, the Forsyth Soil and Water Conservation District, the Forsyth County Agricultural Advisory Board, the Farmland Protection Leadership Team, the Forsyth County Cooperative Extension Department, the NC Forest Service, and the Forsyth County Farm Bureau. The objective of the plan is to help ensure farming remains economically feasible in Forsyth County. The document is in draft form but will include a section devoted to land use, as well as policy recommendations geared towards farmland preservation in Forsyth County.

Legacy 2030 Recommendations

As previously stated, *Legacy* contains several recommendations related to urban food access. Chapter 8 of *Legacy* (Healthy, Complete and Equitable Communities) recognizes the importance of safe, convenient opportunities for access to healthy, affordable food for all residents. *Legacy* includes the following policies and accompanying action agenda items to identify what has been accomplished and what further efforts should be taken to enhance urban food access.

Policy: Encourage healthy food production in urban as well as rural areas.

Legacy 2030 states that developing regulations allowing for community gardens and small-scale agriculture within residential neighborhoods and on publicly-owned property will help

accomplish its policies on food access, including encouraging healthy food production in urban areas. An Urban Agriculture ordinance was approved in 2015 by City Council in an effort to encourage healthy food production in areas throughout the city, specifically in residential neighborhoods. Urban Agriculture may include plant cultivation as well as the growing of nonfood crops such as herbs and ornamentals. This land use may also include accessory structures and buildings used for agriculture-related storage or field packing.

Another action agenda item to encourage healthy food production in the county is to identify opportunities for establishing additional community gardens. The Urban Agriculture page on the Planning Division's website (<http://www.cityofws.org/Departments/Planning/Urban-Agriculture>) aids citizens in understanding urban agriculture and the process and resources in place to start their own community gardens. It provides information on how to spark interest in the neighborhood, form a garden club, find land and ownership information, and identifies permits that may be needed before construction.

An additional action agenda item related to this policy is to explore the economic development potential of local food production. Although Planning staff has not directly conducted an agricultural economic development potential study, staff was involved in the Farmland Protection Plan drafting process. The plan will present statistics and findings that go into more depth about the economic value of agriculture to Forsyth County.

Finally, *Legacy 2030* calls for a review of municipal regulations to facilitate and/or remove barriers to the utilization of land/buildings for various forms of urban agriculture production, including community gardens, hydroponic agriculture and rooftop gardens. In addition to the initiatives already in place in Forsyth County, the previously mentioned Urban Agriculture ordinance removed barriers to allow for small-scale food production in urban areas and residential neighborhoods.

Policy: Encourage a more balanced, healthy food environment.

An action agenda item identified in *Legacy 2030* calls for a review of zoning codes, municipal regulations and administrative procedures to facilitate and/or remove barriers to urban food access, including the location of farmers markets, mobile vending and a variety of payment options. Currently, there are a number of farmers markets located through the county, as well as several Helping Our People Eat (H.O.P.E.) mobile feeding sites throughout Winston-Salem (see Other Food Access Sites in Forsyth County map, page 11). Also, the Forsyth Community Food Consortium is working with the Liberty Street Market to allow for EBT, WIC, and SNAP payment. Staff is unaware of any significant issues regarding the UDO and establishing farmers markets and mobile vendors.

A second action agenda item states that there should be consideration of incentives to encourage a more balanced retail food environment, including the location of grocery stores, healthy food restaurants and other food retailers in areas lacking them and to upgrade existing neighborhood and convenience stores. The South Los Angeles grocery store and restaurant incentives package (referenced on page 2) would be a good model to draw on for this. Local government and other agencies worked together to identify affected areas and create an expedited review process for grocery store and restaurant development, along with advising potential developers on available

incentives. *Legacy* specifically states that community organizers, the City Community and Business Development Department and the Forsyth County Public Health Department should coordinate to develop and implement such a program locally.

The City of Winston-Salem currently offers a number of business development programs geared towards increasing economic investment in distressed and underserved areas. Programs and financial assistance are offered in the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA) and Revitalizing Urban Commercial Areas (RUCA), many of which are located in food deserts.

Another action agenda item to encourage a more balanced, healthy food environment is to assist in identifying locations and assembling land for neighborhood-oriented grocery stores, produce markets, and other healthy food retailing outlets in areas lacking access to healthy food options. This report identifies currently undeveloped, government-owned parcels of land (see Undeveloped Government-Owned Property map, page 13). Within the study area of this report, there are more than 100 vacant properties owned by local governments which may be viable sites for such uses. However, further analysis is needed to categorize suitable land for different uses, such as grocery stores, produce and farmers markets, healthy food retailers, and community gardens.

Although there is currently no formally endorsed initiative or process for using City-owned lots, lease agreements have been established to allow citizens access to these sites on a case-by-case basis. The City Community and Business Development and Real Estate departments have collaborated in the past to create and administer lease agreements to facilitate gardens on City property. These lease agreements allow the City to maintain land ownership rights, but allow groups or individuals the use of the land for the duration of the lease.

Finally, *Legacy* calls for a review of the availability of public transit from neighborhoods without grocery stores/healthy food retailers to neighborhoods where these resources are available. Currently, most grocery stores are accessible by City bus routes and were a consideration in the new routing patterns of City buses. Staff recommends that grocery store locations should be considered in any future bus route designs. Access to healthy food retailers should be considered in future transit route updates and in other transportation planning efforts, including bike route planning and sidewalk construction prioritization.

Mapping and Analysis

As part of this report, staff analyzed local food access conditions. There are 21 census tracts in Forsyth County that are USDA designated food deserts (see USDA Identified Food Deserts in Forsyth County map, page 9). All or a portion of these designated areas fall within the study area boundary. The majority of local food deserts are located in the central and eastern portions of the county. The Grocery Stores in Forsyth County map on page 10 shows that most grocery stores are located in the western half of Forsyth County. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 12% of the county's population is low income without access to a grocery store within one mile of their homes.

Childhood hunger is also an issue in the Triad region. According to Feed America, Forsyth County had a child food insecurity rate of 24.5% in 2013. Forsyth County ranked number one nationally in this study for percentage of households with food insecure children.

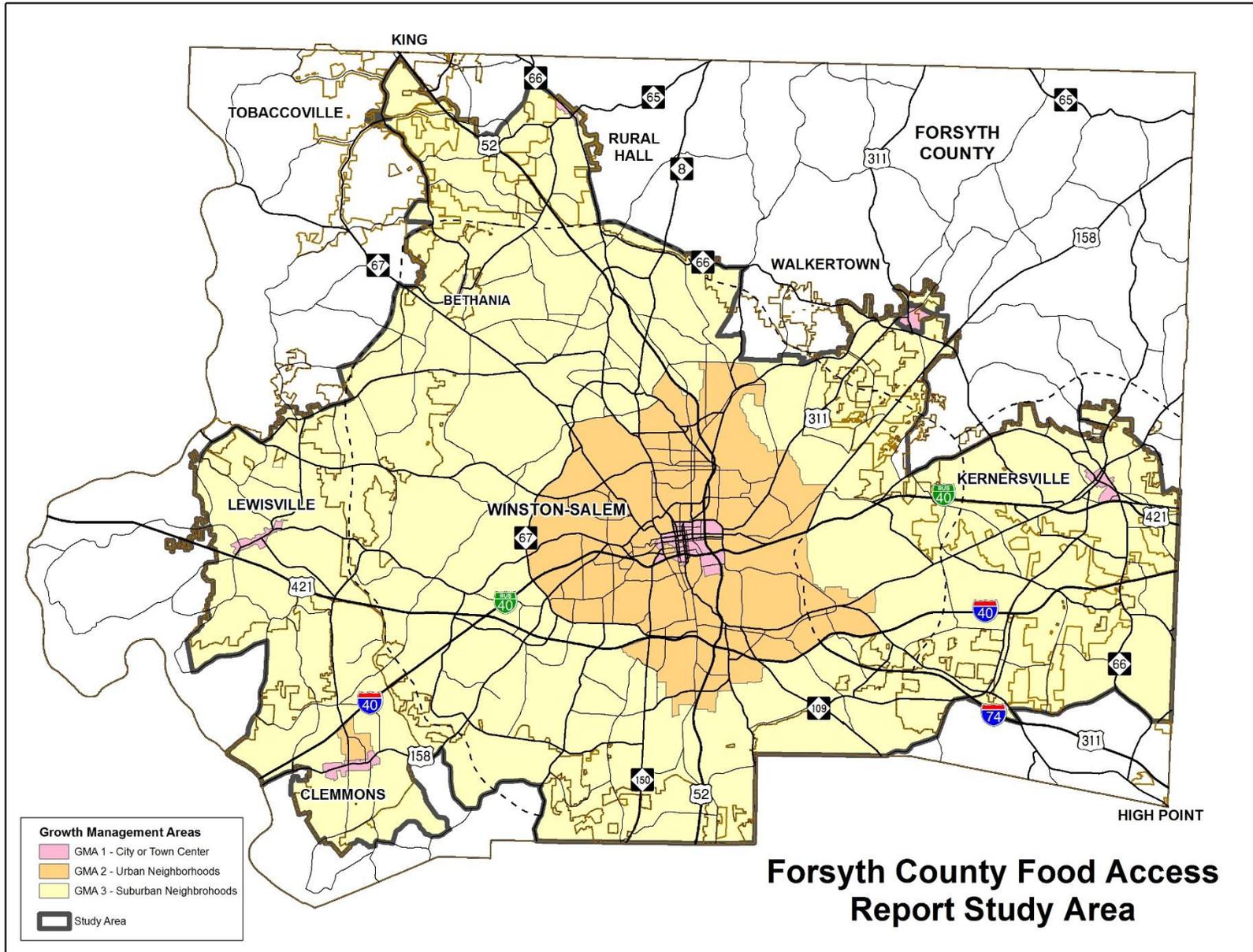
2013 Food Insecurity and Access Deficit Information

2013	<i>North Carolina</i>	<i>Forsyth County</i>	<i>Durham County</i>	<i>Mecklenburg County</i>	<i>Wake County</i>	<i>Guilford County</i>
Food Insecure Children	595,240	20,980	13,360	52,730	46,930	27,580
Food Insecurity Rate (Child)	26.1%	24.5%	21.7%	22.2%	19.6%	24.0%
Food Insecure People	1,801,940	61,090	50,380	165,780	133,460	95,040

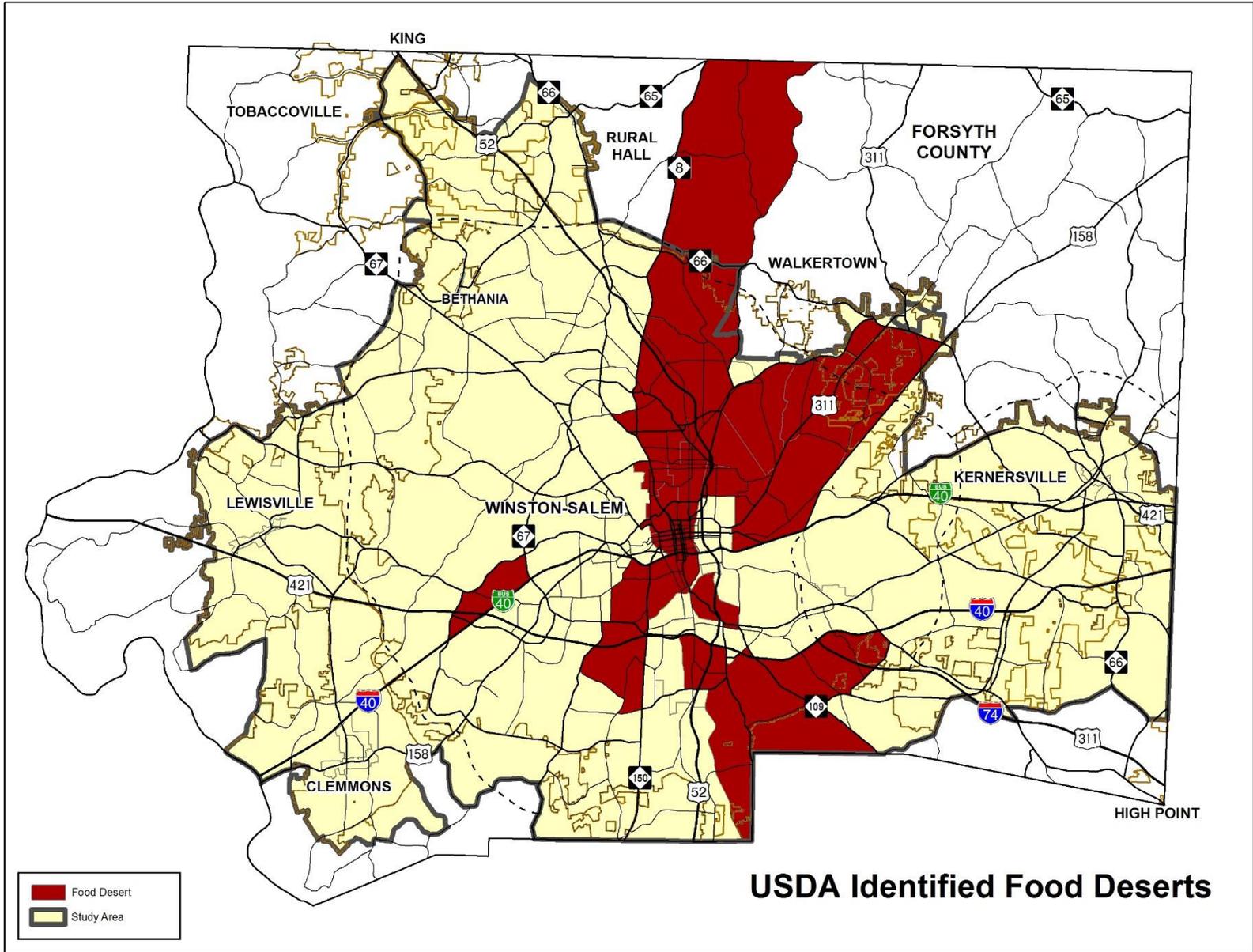
Source: Feed America

Despite the absence of grocery stores, other types of food access locations exist in some areas (see Other Food Access Sites in Forsyth County map, page 11). These sites include farmers markets, food pantries, and H.O.P.E. feeding sites. The food access sites that are located in county food deserts are primarily food pantries, feeding sites, or other forms of emergency food access. Because of this, the population there is subject to a higher risk of food insecurity. Farmers markets and food stands are largely absent in underserved areas and are scattered throughout the county.

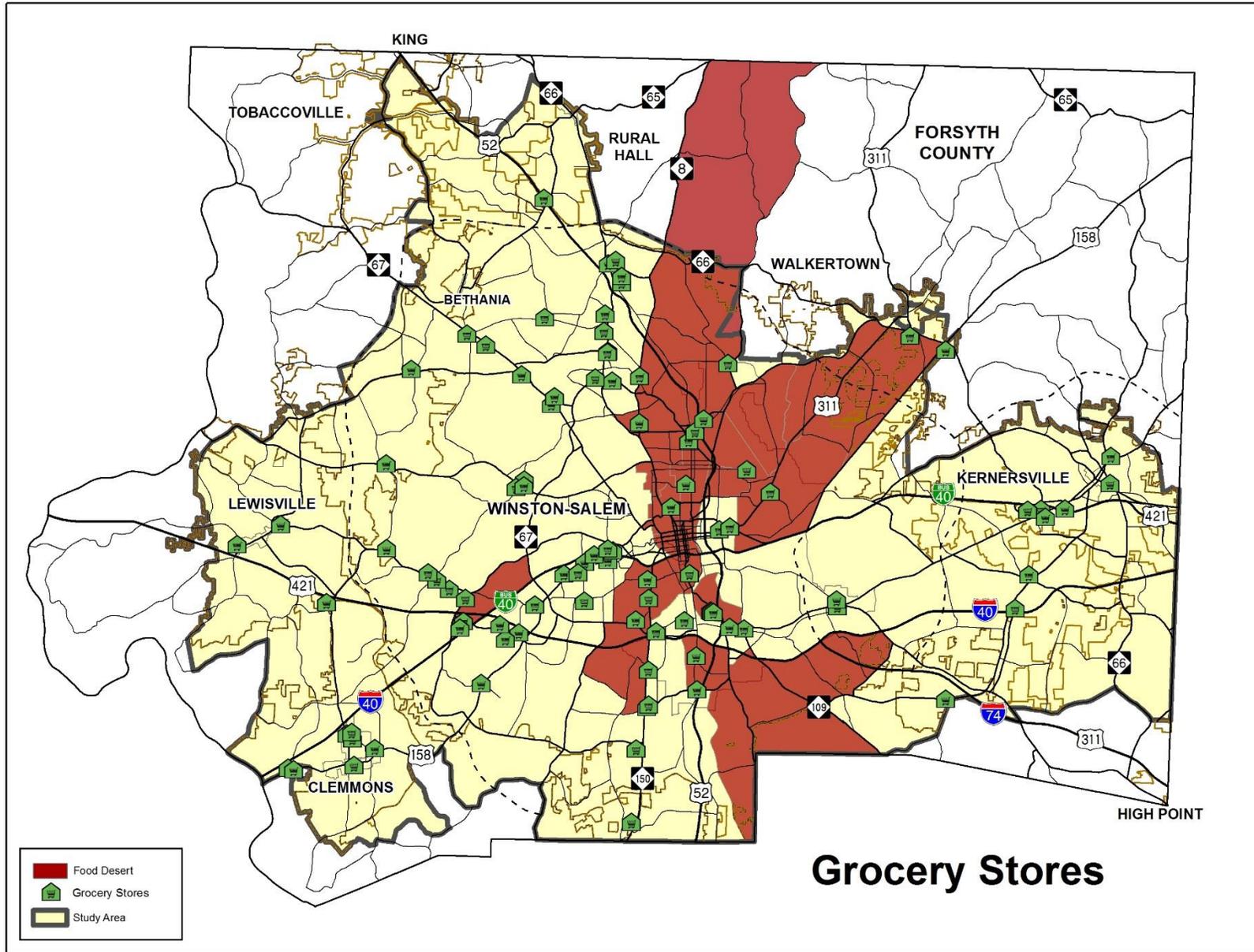
The lack of transportation options has been identified as a barrier to food accessibility. Consumers need reliable transportation options to access goods. A correlation exists between the location of food deserts in the county and the areas that have the highest number of households without private vehicle access, (see 2009-2013 Households without Vehicle Access in Forsyth County map, page 12). In many of the identified food desert tracts, 11% or more of households do not have access to a private vehicle, compounding the rate of food insecurity in these areas.



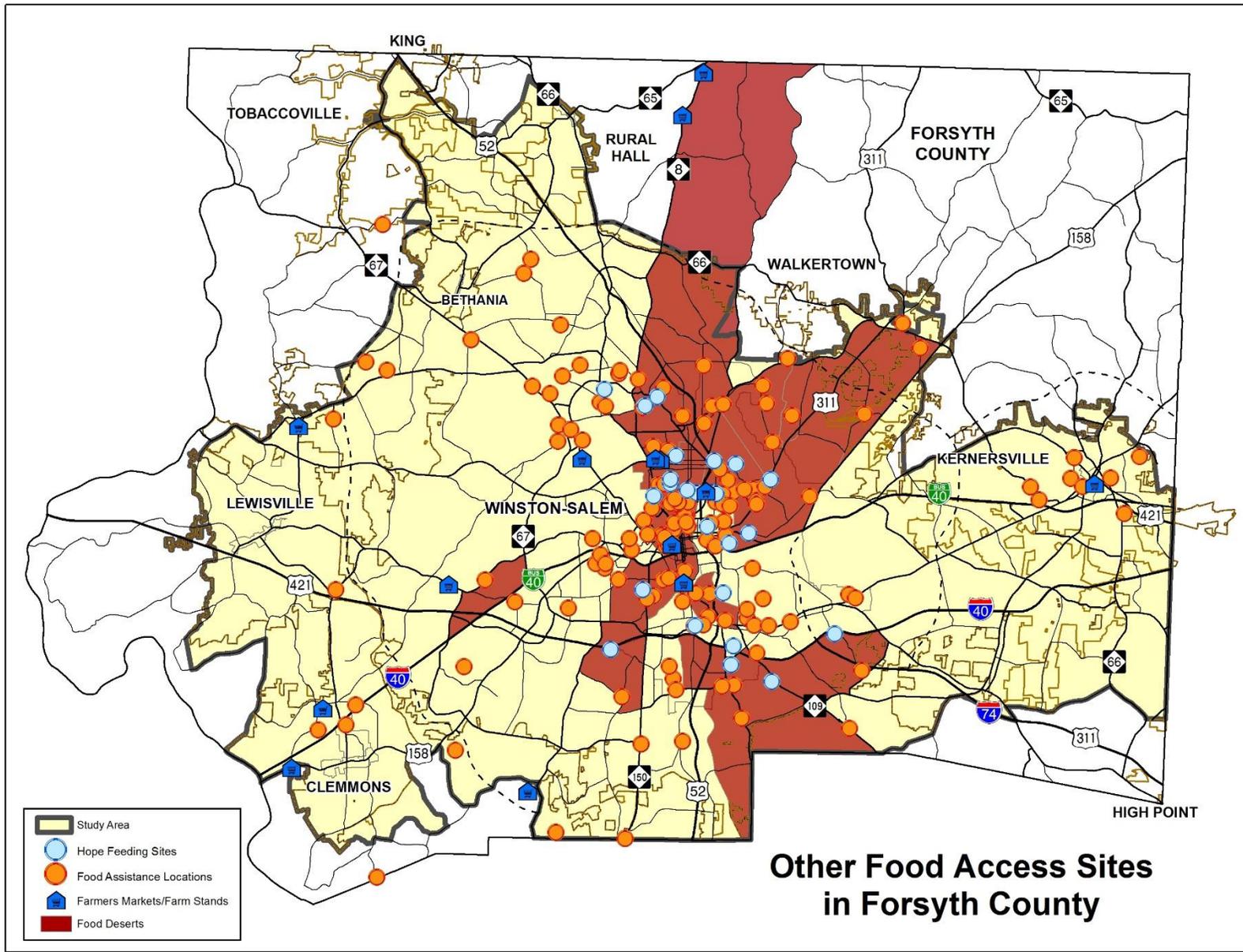
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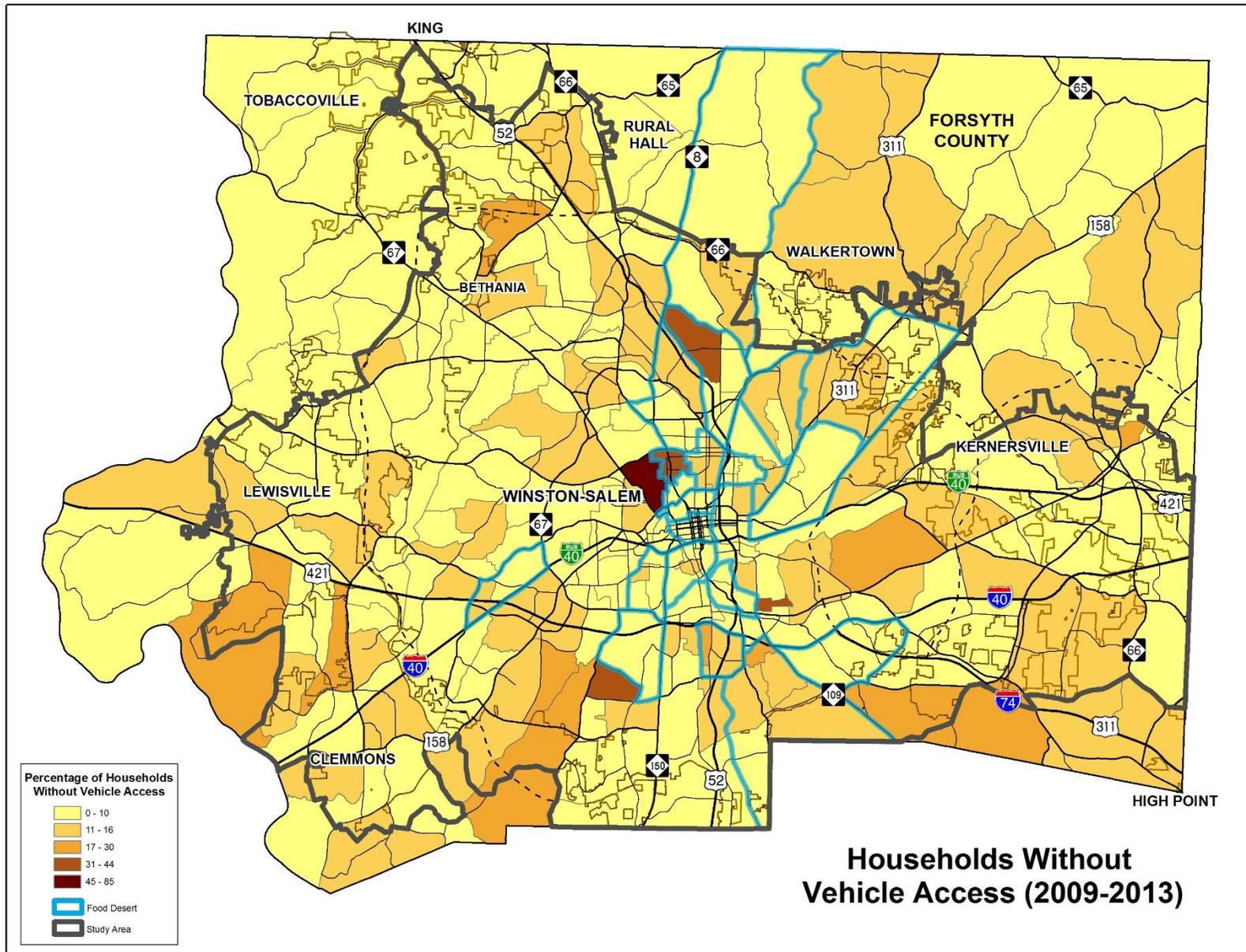


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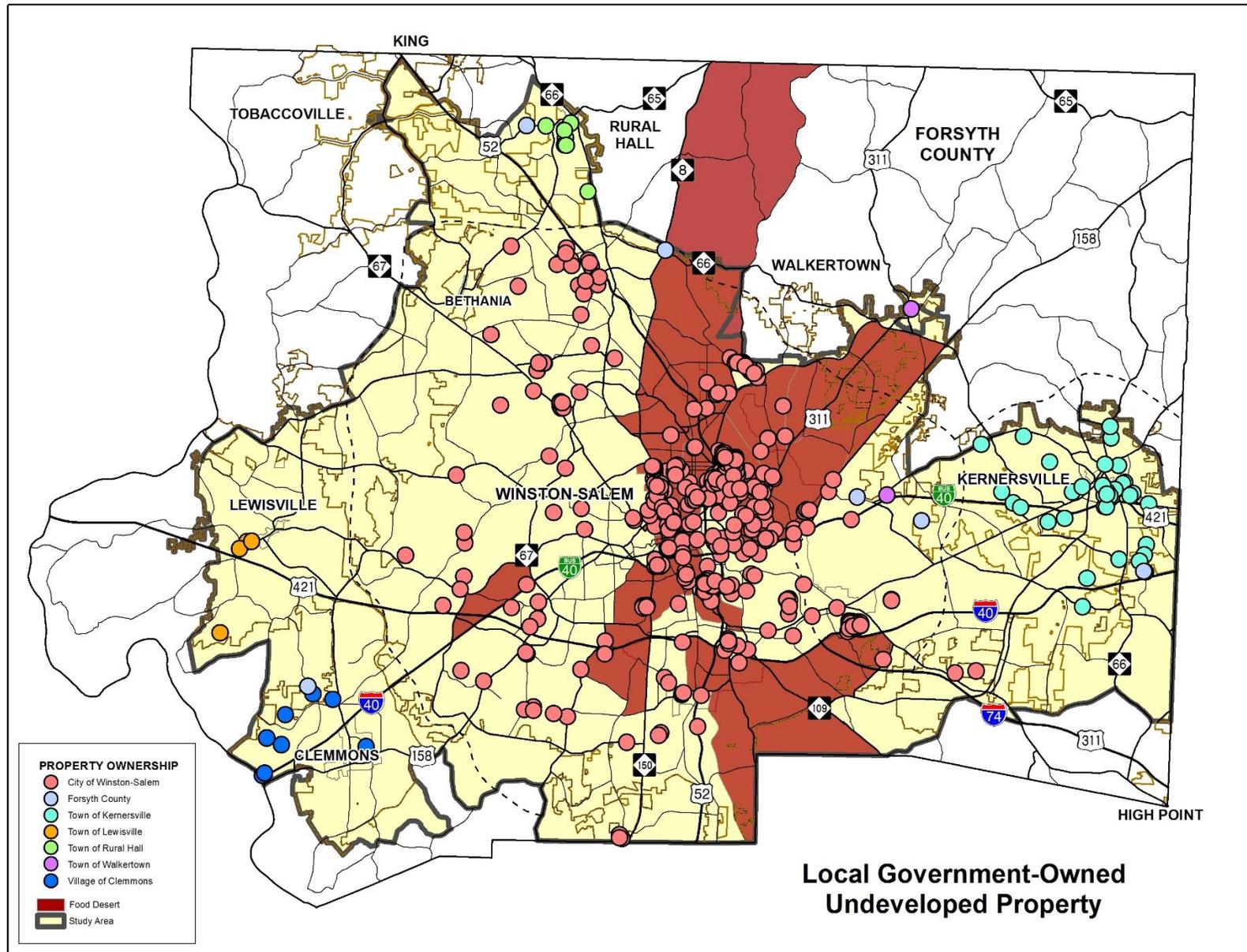


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Data Source: 2009-2013 5 Year American Community Survey (Block Groups)
Printed: 6/23/2016



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Summary and Recommendations

As previously stated, *Legacy 2030* includes action items that address the role of food access policies in the development of a healthier, more equitable community. To complete the vision of the plan, recommendations related to the four action items previously discussed need to be addressed:

- **Urban Food Access (8.5.6)**
- **Study Vacant City/County Property (8.5.4)**
- **Food Retail Access (8.5.10)**
- **Healthy Food Access and Transit (8.5.11)**

Based on the findings of this report, Planning and Development Services staff recommends the following items related to improving local food access:

Goals for the next Fiscal Year

- Review current urban livestock regulations to ensure that controlled, small-scale food production is allowed.
- Identify sites for expanded food access, including grocery stores, corner stores and community gardens, in identified food deserts through the area planning process.

Ongoing Goals

- Promote local food access opportunities in identified food deserts by working with stakeholders and groups like the Forsyth Community Food Consortium.
- Make staff available as a technical resource to individuals or groups who may wish to propose additional ordinance amendments to expand the scope of urban agriculture uses or activities.
- Provide support to communities and retailers interested in launching programs like mobile markets, grocery shuttles, and grocery delivery to improve access to foods in general, and specifically, in vulnerable populations, such as the elderly.
- Encourage WSTA to continue to consider retail food access as a key component of all future transit routes and to expand transit options in identified food deserts to create more opportunities and possibilities to access food retailers.
- Access to healthy food retailers should be considered in future transit route updates and in other transportation planning efforts, including bike route planning and sidewalk construction prioritization.
- Work with the Forsyth County Cooperative Extension to complete an evaluation of City- and County-owned properties for suitability to be used for community gardens.
- Consider the expansion of access to healthy food options as a factor in rezoning and other land use decisions.
- Consider access to grocery stores and other healthy food retailers when planning bicycle routes and prioritizing sidewalk construction projects.

Goals for Future Fiscal Years

- Work with the City's Real Estate and Community and Business Development Departments to establish a formal process for requesting community gardens on City-owned property.
- Collaborate with the City Attorney's Office and the Utilities Department on developing a standard lease agreement for community gardens to determine liability and maintenance responsibility.
- Consider requiring food-related businesses receiving City economic development funds to purchase local products and directly invest in the local food economy.
- Work with the Community and Business Development Department on exploring additional ways of encouraging new retail food outlets in food deserts through offering financing assistance available to help address perceived risk or profitability issues in these areas.