



Memorandum
City of Long Beach

Office of Councilmember Steven Neal
Councilmember, 9th District

Date: March 22, 2011

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Steven Neal, Ninth District *SN*
Councilmember Robert Garcia, First District *RG*
Vice Mayor Suja Lowenthal, Second District *SL*
Councilmember Dee Andrews, Sixth District *DA*

Subject: Neighborhood Market Conversion Program

Recommendation:

Respectfully request the City Manager to develop a "Neighborhood Market Conversion" program, within 60 days, that provides incentives for local corner stores and liquor stores to provide healthier food options and improve the overall neighborhood experience. This program should include standards that hold the following:

- Offers incentives for small businesses to improve and enhance their interiors and exteriors
- Encourages and provides healthier food and beverage options in communities
- Limits alcohol and tobacco signage
- Encourages signage to promote healthier foods and beverages
- Promotes child and family-friendly environments
- Encourages stores to decrease the availability or visibility of items such as alcohol, tobacco or junk foods

Fiscal Impact:

There should be minimal impact to the general fund. This program shall be funded by existing city programs or additional grant funds.

Background:

Nationally and locally, society as a whole is getting heavier at an alarming rate. Since 1990, adult obesity rates in California have more than doubled. In the US, obesity rates have more than tripled among children ages 6-11 in the past 30 years. **In Long Beach, 22.4% of children are obese, and 68% of adults are classified as obese or overweight.** Obesity is also a key risk factor for most chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and hypertension.

Numerous and complex factors contribute to the growing rates of obesity. In addition to individual factors such as levels of education and income, studies have linked the obesity epidemic to several environmental factors, including: increasing exposure to fast food, lack of physical activity opportunities in schools and communities, and limited access to supermarkets, farmers' markets and other venues that carry affordable fresh food and produce in low-income neighborhoods. Research shows that individuals living in areas with numerous fast food restaurants and convenience stores as compared to supermarkets and produce vendors have a higher prevalence of obesity and diabetes. **In Long Beach, there are 5.8 times as many fast food restaurants and convenience stores as supermarkets and produce vendors, as compared to 4.18 times as many in California.**

A newer approach to addressing obesity at the community level is through corner store conversions, or healthy corner store projects. "Corner stores" are the small neighborhood liquor and/or convenience stores that many residents frequent on a daily or weekly basis in order to purchase their every day needs, particularly where there is no large supermarket. Corner store conversion projects focus on bringing healthier food and beverage options to neighborhoods. They are being conducted to help improve the physical environment of neighborhoods, particularly in lower-income areas, and to help improve the food environment especially in areas where there is an abundance of these liquor stores and small convenience stores. Many corner stores sell primarily alcohol, tobacco and prepackaged convenience "junk" foods, and few offer fresh produce or healthier options such as low-fat dairy and whole grain products. Their emphasis on alcohol and tobacco

often makes them magnets for litter, loitering, and drug dealing. Improving the product selection at corner stores is also a way to address these safety concerns as well as access to healthier foods.

Corner store projects are currently taking place in several cities across the country, such as Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Seattle. Some of the interventions include exterior improvements such as façade and structural enhancements, and interior improvements such as assistance in stocking more produce, marketing and promotion of healthier items and infrastructure changes.