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### **Goal:**

This concept paper outlines the need for capacity building resources to support the expansion of efforts around resident engagement and leadership development; food access; and infrastructure and other quality of life improvements in 18<sup>th</sup> ward of Reading, focusing on Oakbrook Community.

### **Overview**

ReDesign Reading serves as a catalyst for revitalization in Reading, PA by contextualizing economic development goals within social equity and ecological resilience ethics. RDR supports projects that align with the STAR Communities local gap analysis and improve local quality of life, especially those that meet multiple sustainable community development goals. Our three-year strategic plan focuses on economic localization, local food systems, and equity and empowerment through strategic place-making initiatives. One of the target neighborhoods is the 18<sup>th</sup> Ward of southwest Reading.

Through our work in the 18<sup>th</sup> ward, both through food systems and 18<sup>th</sup> WONDER initiatives, we envision a Reading in which poverty is eliminated through the engagement of Reading citizens in initiatives that build community wealth, increase local self-reliance and economic resiliency, and promote social justice. We know that whether or not the people of a place feel like they can make a difference is a crucial piece of economic and community development.

### **Next Steps**

ReDesign Reading is requesting general operating support to manage the expansion of this evolving work in the Oakbrook Neighborhood. ReDesign, in collaboration with United Way of Berks County and other stakeholders, will lead efforts to engage with and empower residents to collaboratively create solutions for livability and equity needs, including but not limited to: increased access to fresh food; infrastructure changes to make the neighborhood more walk and bicycle friendly and increased access to community programs and services, like local library and literacy services.

First, ReDesign will support a team to research and interview residents and community stakeholders in an assessment process to outline an equity plan that evaluates current conditions in the community. Then, ReDesign will partner with residents and stakeholders to mobilize residents and leverage resources to expand initiatives that increase and improve food-access (Summer Meal Program; Penn Street Market; Berks Food Hub or others); create safe and green corridors for residents and support the implementation of ADA-accessibility improvements; and create improved access to vital services. Throughout this process, ReDesign will

structure fluid and creative leadership opportunities for local youth, young adults and adults.

**Specific deliverables will include:**

1. Design a survey with residents and volunteer input:

- Identify and train residents to conduct the door-to-door survey
- Summarize and analyze the data collected
- Share report findings with residents and other stakeholders

2. Leadership development for Oakbrook residents:

- Engage residents to participate in Regional Reading Food Policy and Action task forces and sub committees
- Provide technical assistance to participants of the Oakbrook Resident Association
- Support leadership opportunities within developed programs/efforts
- Introduce residents to civic opportunities i.e.: city council meeting attendance
- Support the creation and ongoing efforts of a new resident steering committee to give guidance to the Summer Meal Program

3. Food access and security:

- Increase food access and security for Oakbrook residents:
- Generate awareness for Penn Street Market and the utilization of incentive based programs
- Create and implement a promotions campaign to increase participation of the Summer Meal Program
- Place a program coordinator to ensure the continued success of the Summer Meal Program in Oakbrook

## **Background Information**

*Regional Reading Food Policy and Action Council:* is a local taskforce committed to ensuring that an adequate and nutritious food supply is available to all citizens; strengthening the economic vitality of the local food system; improving the quality of food available to all citizens; educating and encouraging citizens to accept and consume nutritious food; minimizing food-related activities that degrade the natural environment and limiting wasteful use of scarce resources needed for future food production and distribution. It includes representation from Reading Health System, Greater Berks Food Bank, The Food Trust of Philadelphia, Gayatri Wellness, Albright College, Alvernia University, Berks Community Health Center, Berks County Library System, and others. The collaboration brings together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop recommendations on how to improve it, with a specific focus on food access and food equity concerns.

One tangible example is the Summer Feeding Program, launched collaboratively in 2016 at the Oakbrook Community Health Center. The program is supported by the ReDesign Reading's local food system program, which connects Berks County producers with local business, institutions and residents, providing access to affordable, fresh food. ReDesign Reading also serves as the backbone institution for the Regional Reading Food Policy and Action Council (RRFPAC), which focuses on improving healthy food access and food security in the region through collaborative projects, and helped inform the Summer Feeding Program initiative. This is particularly important in the 18<sup>th</sup> Ward following the closure of the Bottom Dollar grocery store in 2014.

The 18<sup>th</sup> WONDER Steering Committee includes representation from the private, public and nonprofit sectors, including: Tom Masano Auto Group, Reading Truck Body, Queen City Diner, SSM Group, Reading Redevelopment Authority, Reading Housing Authority, Reading Parking Authority, Greater Berks Development Fund, City of Reading Public Works, Berks Community Health Center, Alvernia University, Olivet Boys and Girls Club, Reading Health System, Berks Catholic, and Berks Nature Committed funding for projects currently underway:

- *DCED Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program (\$55,000)*. Funding supports a planning consultant to support the development of safe, green corridors to improve pedestrian and bike safety in the 18<sup>th</sup> Ward, laying groundwork for project implementation, with supplemental funding committed from Masano Auto Group.
- *Transportation Alternatives Program (\$445,000)*. The 18<sup>th</sup> Ward has been identified as a high-priority area of the City to achieve ADA-compliance. Hancock/East Wyomissing Blvd, specifically, is a wide thoroughfare presenting significant safety concerns for people walking and people on bikes. Partnering with 18<sup>th</sup> WONDER steering committee, the City of Reading will make pedestrian modifications, storm water improvements, and a bike-

friendly corridor to alleviate identified safety and accessibility concerns that support recent and proposed investments.

Initiated in 2015, the 18th W.O.N.D.E.R. Project brings together the public and private stakeholders in southwest Reading to identify and coordinate initiatives that improve the local quality of life. The primary strategy is to develop cross-cutting initiatives that address how the built environment impacts issues of economic development, accessibility, and health and safety for residential, business, and institutional stakeholders.

ReDesign Reading serves as the backbone institution for the 18<sup>th</sup> WONDER Steering Committee, providing technical assistance and managing its constituent taskforces. The Steering Committee has collectively spent \$11.5 million in the area and created over 280 full-time jobs over the last 3 years. In addition, the group plans to invest an additional \$30 million over the next 3 years on capital infrastructure for their respective companies/organizations. The group has raised over \$500,000 from state and federal sources for targeted planning and infrastructure activities, and has begun to expand its focus beyond physical Infrastructure to include social and community development initiatives by increasing residential involvement.

**Additional Articles/Resources**

**RRFPAC:** <http://www.redesignreading.org/rrfpac-f9yzz>

**STAR Communities:** <http://www.readingpa.gov/content/reading-pa-chosen-mentor-fall-2015-leadership-star-community-program>

**Summer Feeding Program:** <http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/free-summer-meals-program-expands-in-reading-school-district>

**Funding Request**

The Capacity Building Grant will allow ReDesign Reading to stabilize and expand these critical community initiatives and to increase collaborations with community partners like United Way of Berks County.

Technical assistance to provide supportive services, guidance and training to Program Coordinator position:  -Provide technical assistance and guidance to Regional Reading Food Policy and Action Council	\$17,000
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provide technical assistance to participants of the Oakbrook Resident Association</li> <li>-Introduce residents to civic opportunities i.e.: city council meeting attendance</li> <li>-Generate awareness for Penn Street Market and the utilization of incentive based programs</li> <li>-Create and implement a promotions campaign to increase participation of the Summer Meal Program.</li> <li>-Place a program coordinator to ensure the continued success of the Summer Meal Program in Oakbrook.</li> </ul>	
<p>Capacity building to create a Program Coordinator position in Oakbrook:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Design a survey with residents and volunteer input</li> <li>- Identify and train residents to conduct the door-to-door survey</li> <li>-Summarize and analyze the data collected</li> <li>-Share report findings</li> </ul>	<p>\$33,000</p>

<p>with residents and other stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Support leadership opportunities within developed programs/efforts</li> <li>-Support the creation and ongoing efforts of a new resident steering committee to give guidance to the Summer Meal Program.</li> <li>-Engage residents to participate in Regional Reading Food Policy and Action task forces and sub committees</li> </ul>	
<b>Total Request:</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>