AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF PLANNERS IN SUPPORTING LOCAL ACCESS TO GROCERY STORES

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN PLANNING

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

APRIL 2006

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of planners in supporting local access to grocery stores in Canadian cities. Grocery stores are an important neighbourhood feature—they not only provide access to nutritional food, they also contribute to neighbourhood vitality, acting as a hub for local economic activity and community life. In recent years, evidence has emerged that, as a result of grocery industry trends towards larger formats, access to grocery stores has diminished in areas of cities in North America and the United Kingdom. Planners have a role in ensuring that basic services—such as housing and water—are adequately provided. This thesis argues that grocery stores, as a basic service that contributes to individual and community health, warrant planning attention. However, grocery store access has not received systematic attention by the planning profession. There is little literature on the role that planners play in supporting grocery access. This thesis explores the opportunities and constraints facing planners in supporting local access to grocery stores. It is based on a review of relevant literature and on case studies of planning attention to grocery stores in Edmonton, Alberta and Vancouver, British Columbia. The research reveals that planners in these two cities recognize the importance of grocery stores and in some cases have undertaken efforts to improve grocery access. Typically, these efforts aim to address neighbourhood vitality rather than food access.

The Vancouver and Edmonton experiences reveal the influence of political context on planner involvement in grocery access. They also indicate that planners play a key role in promoting an accessible built environment and illustrate that planners are well-positioned to engage in community dialogue on grocery access needs; there is an opportunity to raise the profile of food access in discussions focused on neighbourhood vitality.

This thesis concludes that there is a need to increase the connections between social planning and land use planning. Planners can play an important role in drawing attention to grocery access within various planning processes.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to Peter Boothroyd and Wendy Mendes, my first and second reader whose input and encouragement made the successful completion of this thesis both possible and enjoyable. I am thankful for my SCARP friends and colleagues who have been the source of great inspiration, knowledge, motivation and laughter throughout this degree. Thank you to my ever-supportive family, especially my mother, Frances Wittgens. From the big ideas to the small details, her interest and enthusiasm have made a great contribution to this thesis.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Planners have to ensure there is water, shelter and sewage when they build a new subdivision. . . but nowhere does anyone say we really have a legal responsibility to make sure people have access to food. The dilemma is the city can’t tell stores where to go. You can’t say, there has to be a food store here because this is an area that doesn’t have one. It doesn’t work that way—Janice Etter, Toronto Food Policy Council (Carey, 2005).

1.1 Problem Statement

When the Safeway on the corner of Knight and Kingsway in Vancouver was shut down in 1993 there was sharp public outcry. According to accounts in local media, the closure of the grocery store marked the death of the neighbourhood to many nearby residents. Once a lively neighbourhood hub where residents could walk from their homes to run errands, the site soon hosted a flea-market which became a symbol of the area’s blight (Jones, 2004). A similar refrain was heard in Edmonton’s Highlands neighbourhood when, in the mid-nineties, the Safeway departed and was also replaced by a flea-market, leaving the area without a food store within a reasonable walk (Mahaffey, 2004).

The strong response to Safeway’s departure in both of these communities reflects the important role grocery stores play in many Canadian cities. Grocery stores are qualitatively different than a laundromat or bank or most other commercial services (Stouder, 2004). Food is a basic human need (Power, 1999). We must purchase food often and most North Americans rely, at least in part, on grocery stores. However, grocery stores do more than simply provide access to nutritional food. As the Edmonton and Vancouver examples illustrate, grocery stores can form part of a neighbourhood’s identity. They can serve as a hub for local economic activity, acting as an economic anchor for other businesses in a neighbourhood. It is a place for chance social interactions with others in the community. They are neighbourhood destinations to which people can walk (Moudon, 2006). As such, they contribute to vibrant neighbourhood centres.
These two grocery store closures in Vancouver and Edmonton were not isolated occurrences. The late twentieth century saw the dramatic growth of large-format stores in many industrialized cities. The population shifted to the suburbs, and development patterns were increasingly oriented around automobile travel (Eisenhauer, 2001). More and more, grocery stores were located on large plots of land located outside of neighbourhood centres. As the number of large supermarkets grew, grocery stores became geographically further apart. Conversely, the number of neighbourhood grocery stores declined (City of Vancouver, 1998; Stouder, 2004; Eisenhauer, 2001). In a number of North American cities, it became industry practice for supermarket chains to use restrictive covenants\(^1\) in order to gain competitive advantage (Haynes, 2005). In the nineties, evidence emerged that grocery stores were becoming more difficult to access, particularly for those without a car. This situation was especially problematic in areas with poor transit service. These trends had a disproportionate effect on those of low-income who were more likely to be transit dependent and live in underserved neighbourhoods (Wrigley, 2002a).

The planning profession aims to protect the public interest and support the quality of life for a community's citizens. Planners have a role in ensuring that certain basic services—such as housing, water and sewage— are adequately provided (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). This thesis argues that, as a basic service of urban communities that contributes to individual and community health, grocery stores warrant the attention of planners, particularly when faced with evidence that in some instances grocery stores are not accessible to all people (Wrigley, 2002a). Grocery store access also ties into broader planning agendas that offer further rationale for planners' involvement in this area:

Planning for walkable neighbourhood centres—There is now broad recognition in the field of planning that the auto-oriented urban form which has characterized development since the Second World War has had a number of negative environmental, economic

\(^1\) A restrictive covenant is an agreement between two landowners, placed on the deed of a parcel of land that limits the future use of that land. The limitation runs with the land, which means that when the land is sold to a new owner, the restriction remains. Historically, covenants have been used as a sort of private zoning, which can help conserve ecological features or protect an amenity, such as a view (Makuch, 1983). In the case of grocery stores, supermarket chains have used covenants when closing a store. They are able to sell the parcel with a covenant indicating that the land will not be used for food retail in the future or for a set period of time. This prevents the site of the former grocery store from competing with other outlets of the supermarket chain.
and social impacts (Beatley & Manning, 1997). In recent decades, planning literature has put forth alternatives to the prevailing auto-oriented development patterns that have emphasized the importance of more efficient land use patterns that foster alternatives to automobile travel. A walkable neighbourhood centre, characterized by a mix of land uses in which a wide range of daily activities are easily accessible on foot, is viewed as germane to this objective. Grocery stores are a key element in neighbourhood commercial areas. As such, planners with an interest in fostering a walkable neighbourhood centre also have an interest in understanding and supporting local access to grocery stores.

Planning for local food systems—There is an emerging body of literature that addresses the role of planning in supporting local food systems. Within this literature, grocery retail has been identified by planners as an area with high potential for further intervention, particularly because it touches on so many areas in which planners are already involved such as economic development, land use, transportation and neighbourhood planning (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000; Barbolet et al., 2005; APA, 2006). Food retail can contribute to food security by enhancing local self-reliance, ensuring equitable access to quality and competitively priced food, and providing choice through a variety of store types and formats. Planners who intervene to support the food system have an interest in understanding how grocery store access fits into that picture.

Although rationale for planners' involvement in supporting grocery access exists, traditionally, the profession's intervention in this area has been limited. Often grocery access is only addressed in the broader category of commercial retail planning without acknowledging the higher priority it may warrant receiving as a basic neighbourhood service (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). There are a number of possible reasons for this inattention. Several studies have identified that food is not perceived to be the 'turf' of the planner (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000, Bouris, 2004). This same perception may also constrain planners from supporting grocery retail access specifically. Aside from establishing commercial zoning, planners exert little direct control over the siting of grocery stores. Location decisions have historically been governed by market forces, which may limit the extent to which planners become involved (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000, Bouris, 2004).
As a basic service that contributes to individual and community health, grocery stores warrant the attention of planners. The goal of fostering access to grocery stores coincides with other planning agendas 1) planning for walkable neighbourhood centers and 2) fostering local food systems. However, the particular role that planners can or do play in supporting grocery access has not been well examined. The opportunities and constraints facing planners in supporting access to grocery stores are poorly understood.

1.2 Research Objectives and Contribution to Literature

There are two objectives of this thesis:

1. To understand how planners are currently involved in supporting access to grocery stores in their practice. This includes looking at how planners gain an understanding of grocery retail access in their communities, what status or importance it is attributed in planning processes, what criteria they use to determine the adequacy of grocery retail access and what mechanisms they use to address the gaps in grocery access.

2. To explore the potential for further involvement of planners in supporting access to grocery stores. This will include exploring whether there is need for further intervention. If so, in what areas is there opportunity for planners to play a larger role? Conversely, this thesis will also look at the barriers facing planners in supporting grocery access.

These two research objectives are brought together in an overarching research question guiding this thesis: What are the opportunities and constraints facing planners in supporting local access to grocery stores?

This thesis will make a contribution to existing knowledge in several ways. The bulk of the literature on grocery store access has been done in the United States or the United Kingdom. By focusing on two Canadian cities, this thesis will contribute to a small, but growing body of literature on grocery store access in Canada. There is a small amount of literature that addresses the role of the planner in supporting grocery access. However it primarily looks at grocery store access as a food issue. This thesis also addresses how the agenda to support local grocery stores intersects with the planning interest in fostering vibrant, walkable neighbourhood centres. A broader perspective allows us to expand our understanding of the ways in which planners can
intervene to support grocery access. There is evidence in recent planning literature that the purview of planners is expanding to look more directly at the social dimensions of physical planning decisions, such as health outcomes or food access (Frank et al., 2003; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). This thesis will offer insight into a concrete example of how these social dimensions are integrated into traditional planning practice.

Definitions

This thesis is exploratory and aims to gain insights into planners' perceptions of the role of planning in supporting access to grocery stores. Interview participants were not given a set definition of 'Planning', 'Access' or 'Grocery Store' within which to frame their answers. Their responses to the interview questions help to shed light on how they define these terms in their own professional practice. These are important findings in and of themselves. I did however undertake this thesis with guidelines on how I was broadly defining these terms, which in turn helped to define the scope of the research:

Planners--This thesis focuses on professionals in municipal/local functions who operate in a public-interest driven and community building capacity. This research is not, therefore, confined to those who have the job title planner.

Access--Planning has historically had an emphasis on making change in the physical world and built environment. This historical bias of planning is reflected in this thesis, which focuses on physical access to grocery stores—that is, the spatial distribution of grocery stores in our communities as well as the transportation network that determines the accessibility of grocery stores. Physical access includes an element of economic access—adequate physical access involves being able to get to a grocery store selling affordable food. However, this thesis does not look at economic access in terms of social programs or policies that may support the financial means of low-income residents to purchase food (e.g. food stamp or income assistance programs).

Grocery Store--A grocery store can be defined as a self-service food store selling a full range of food and household goods (City of Vancouver, 1998c). The focus of this thesis is on how planners can support neighbourhood grocery stores-- small and medium-sized stores that fit within the fabric of existing neighbourhoods, as distinct from large
supermarkets situated at the edge of communities where the automobile is prioritized (Typically greater than 40,000 square feet)\(^2\).

### 1.3 Thesis Structure

The second chapter of this thesis outlines the methods and methodology employed for this thesis. The third and fourth chapter elaborate the problem of grocery store access. In chapter three, the food retail trends that have shaped existing grocery retail access patterns will be reviewed. Literature describing the impact of these trends will also be discussed. Chapter three will conclude with a discussion of some of the limitations and challenges of how grocery store access has been framed in the existing literature. Chapter four will address why planners should care about grocery store access. Drawing on literature from New Urbanism, Smart Growth, sustainable development and food systems\(^3\), chapter four illustrates the relevance of grocery store access to the two planning agendas mentioned in this introduction- planning for walkable neighbourhood centres and food systems planning. Chapter five includes a review of literature from urban studies, food systems, urban geography as well as municipal reports that either directly or indirectly address the actions planners can take to support grocery access. This chapter gleans information from existing literature to begin to address the operational question of how planners can support grocery access as well as the barriers facing planners in supporting grocery access. Chapters six and seven

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\(^2\) This definition of grocery store excludes other formats of food retail (e.g. farmers markets, smaller specialty shops, small ethnic food shops) which also play an important role in local neighbourhood vitality and help to meet the food needs of the surrounding community. This thesis focuses on grocery stores because it is currently the dominant means by which Canadians acquire their food. Alternative food retail formats nonetheless interact with grocery store retail and can also serve an important community function. This will be briefly addressed in later chapters of this thesis.

\(^3\) In this thesis New Urbanism, Smart Growth, sustainable development and local food systems are defined as follows:

- **New Urbanism**- a set of urban design principles which draws heavily from traditional features of the design of pre-World War II communities to create neighbourhoods that reduce reliance on the automobile and foster greater social interaction amongst residents (adapted from Charter of New Urbanism, 1996).
- **Smart Growth**- a policy movement that aims to direct growth that is fiscally, environmentally and socially responsible and that recognizes the connections between development and quality of life (Smart Growth BC, 2006).
- **Sustainable Development**- a process in which communities anticipate and accommodate the needs of current and future generations in ways that reproduce and balance local social, economic and ecological systems and link local actions to global concerns (Berke 2002).
- **Local food systems**- local food system is one in which all aspects of the chain of food activities including production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal contribute to the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a locality (Bouris, 2004).
present the results from the case study analysis. Chapter six will give an overview of the City of Vancouver and the City of Edmonton policies and reports pertaining to grocery stores. Chapter seven will outline findings from the interviews. In chapter eight, the implication and conclusions from this research will be discussed.
CHAPTER 2:
METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this chapter is to describe the methodology, research tradition, research assumptions and design of this thesis. This thesis employed a qualitative and exploratory approach. The research tradition guiding the design of this study is largely interpretive, which relies on human perspectives and interpretation to develop knowledge on understanding the social world (Prasad, 2005). The research involved four phases: observation, development of a conceptual framework, primary data collection and data analysis. Primary data was collected using a case study strategy, which involved a document analysis and semi-structured interviews with planners in two Canadian cities: Edmonton and Vancouver.

2.1 Qualitative and Exploratory Research Approach

As a topic on which there has been little prior research a qualitative and exploratory research design was appropriate for this thesis. In contrast to quantitative research, which seeks to draw empirical conclusions by systematically isolating variables that represent aspects of the social world, qualitative research treats actions as part of a holistic social process and context. It seeks to interpret the meanings people make of their experiences in their natural settings (Payne & Payne, 2004).

The research approach is also exploratory. Researchers explore when there is a lack of scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity or situation but they feel there are elements worth discovering. The main goal of exploratory research is to generate inductively-derived generalizations about the group, process, activity or situation under study. As defined by Stebbins (2001):

Social science exploration is a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life.

Exploratory research may be guided by some theoretical notions; however, the theoretical framework primarily emerges through the empirical process. There is not an established theory and a set of hypotheses prior to the research (Stebbins, 2001).
2.2 Interpretive Research Paradigm

The research tradition behind this thesis is primarily interpretive. Interpretive research is:

The systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds (Neuman, 2000, p. 71).

It is practical in orientation and is concerned with ordinary people and the practical affairs of everyday life. The objective is to understand social life and how people construct meanings in a natural setting. The researcher achieves this by getting to know a social setting and attempting to view it from their perspective and understand their interpretations. The interpretive approach is sensitive to context and uses varied techniques to understand others' perspectives of the world (Neuman, 2000).

2.3 Key Research Assumptions and Biases

To enhance the understanding of research findings, researchers should be aware and acknowledge their own assumptions and biases (Payne & Payne, 2004). Perhaps the most transparent bias on which this thesis is premised is the notion that planners can play a positive role in supporting access to grocery stores. I believe that the land uses and built form of our communities impacts how we live: how we travel, where we shop, what we eat, how we interact with others in our community. I feel strongly that creating more walkable urban development patterns and reducing reliance on the car will contribute to social equity as well as environmental, individual and community health. There is growing evidence that the built environment impacts public health indicators—such as nutrition, obesity and levels of physical activity. I believe that planners have a role in addressing these emerging issues. The food retail literature illustrates how land uses are not always supportive of public health objective to assure access to food. Studying how planners can support grocery access is an opportunity to look at a concrete example of how planners can foster a built environment that allows for community vitality and offers opportunities for a healthy lifestyle for all.
2.3 Research Method and Process

Research Process

The research process undertaken for this thesis can be approximately divided into four main phases:

1. **Personal observation**—the research process began with the observation of the 'real-world' problem$^4$ that grocery stores are not always adequately provisioned in all neighbourhoods. Having witnessed several communities impacted by a missing grocery store resulting from a restrictive covenant, I developed a personal curiosity in the role that planners play in addressing this issue.

2. **Development of a conceptual framework**—I reviewed a range of literature from North America and the United Kingdom that describes the origin, nature, and impacts of grocery access problems as well as interventions to address this problem. The literature on the planning interventions to address gaps in grocery access was used to develop a framework through which to structure empirical findings. Literature on food system planning, as well as neighbourhood centres and community design was reviewed in order to develop preliminary ideas on the relevancy of grocery store access to planning agendas.

3. **Primary data collection**—a case study strategy was employed which involved both a document review as well as semi-structured interviews with planners in two municipalities, Edmonton and Vancouver. The case study method employed for this thesis will be described in greater detail below.

4. **Data analysis**—the data collected during the interviews was first transcribed and read to gain an overall understanding of the results. They were then read more systematically and coded by hand according to key themes that emerged in the text (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The frequency of particular responses was recorded. Coding differentiated between whether the respondents were from Edmonton or Vancouver and whether they were a social planner or from a traditional planning

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$^4$ I use ‘real-world’ problem as distinct from the ‘research’ problem. The real-world problem is a phenomenon that is not necessarily positioned within academic literature. The research problem refers to the gap in understanding or knowledge on a particular topic. For example, in this case, the research problem is that the role of planners in addressing grocery store access is poorly understood.
area, like community planning or policy planning. The interview questions were then used as a framework to categorize and report the results.

The semi-structured interviews involved human subjects. As a result, the research procedures were reviewed and approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board.

**Case Study Research Methods**

This section will describe in greater detail the rationale and design of the multi-case study approach employed for this thesis. A case study is detailed enquiry into a single example (of a social process, organization etc) seen as a holistic unit (Payne & Payne, 2004). As described by Yin (2003) a case study:

> investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. . . you would use the case study method because you deliberately want to cover contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study (p.13).

In this instance, the unit of study is municipal planners in Canadian cities, Edmonton and Vancouver. Because planners are situated in a municipal context which can impact the range of activities in which they engage, a case study method is appropriate.

In order to attain a holistic perspective, case studies invariably involve multiple methods of data collection (Robson, 2002). For this thesis, two research methods were employed:

1. **Document analysis**—municipal policies and reports pertaining to grocery access were reviewed. Documents were either available online or attained through contact with municipal staff.

2. **Semi-structured interviews**—a series of semi-structured interviews were used to survey the perspectives and experiences of municipal planners in both of the case study cities.

Conducting research on more than one case (multiple case studies) contributes to the credibility of the results. If the same findings are uncovered in different cases or if contrasting results are found, but for predictable reasons, the results of the research are more believable (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) advised that multiple case studies should be
conceptualized as replicating an experiment. Once conclusions have been drawn under one set of experimental conditions, the experiment can be replicated to determine if the results can be duplicated. For this thesis, the two Canadian cities were selected because they share several key criteria. However, they also have noteworthy differences which allow conclusions to be drawn under slightly differing experimental conditions. The rationale for the selection of the case study cities will be described in the following section.

Rationale for Case Study City Selection

The City of Edmonton and the City of Vancouver were selected as case study municipalities because they share several selection criteria. First, both are major metropolitan areas in Canada. Second, there has already been baseline research done on the spatial distribution of grocery stores in each of these cities. This serves as useful context for a discussion of the planners’ role in supporting grocery access. Third, both the City of Edmonton and the City of Vancouver have recent experience with restrictive covenants. One of the interests of this thesis is to understand how planners address restrictive covenants that are perceived to interfere with local access to grocery stores.

In addition to the three selection criteria mentioned above, the City of Vancouver met a fourth, optional criterion: the presence of a food planning mandate. The City of Vancouver, under its social planning department has recently established staff positions which focus on the food system. The Vancouver case study may additionally shed light on how such innovative planning institutions play a role and may interact with traditional planning institutions in addressing grocery store access.

A final reason for selecting Edmonton and Vancouver as a pair of cities is that, although they share the three criteria mentioned above, anecdotal evidence suggests that these cities have been planned and developed very differently. Vancouver has constraints on available land and development has tended to be infill. In contrast, Edmonton development has been largely suburban in character. Additional insights arise from looking at the role planners play in these two different urban contexts.

The focus of this study is the municipal context; however it is worth highlighting that in British Columbia attention to food security has been heightened recently as a result of the provincial ActNow programming. In response to rising levels of obesity and inactivity, the ActNow program promotes healthy living, including better nutrition and physical activity. One aspect of the program involves working at the community level to identify measures and strategies to improve nutrition (ActNow Fact Sheet, 2005).
Interview Design and Process

The following section will describe the interview design and process. There were several criteria used to select interview participants. The individual must a) work for the municipality of one of the case study cities b) work in a capacity which may somehow impact or address grocery store access and c) occupy a position which conforms to the definition of planner outlined in chapter one of this thesis: professionals in municipal/local functions who operate in a public-interest driven and community building capacity.

Purposive, snowball sampling was employed to identify interview participants. Purposive samples are not aimed at being statistically representative. Instead, individuals are selected because their experience is judged by the researcher to be of interest to the research objectives. Snowball sampling, which can be seen as a particular type of purposive sampling, involves using individuals from the population of interest to identify other members of the population who become participants and also identify further potential participants (Robson, 2002). The initial interview participants were identified through online documents and reports. Snowball sampling was used in order to identify additional planners who have experience relevant to the research topic. All interview participants were first approached over email with a letter of introduction and description of research.

Ten interviews were conducted in total, seven of which were with planners from the City of Vancouver; three were with the City of Edmonton. The reason for the larger sampling in Vancouver is two fold. First, proximity to planners in Vancouver allowed for more opportunity to identify research participants. Second and more importantly, Vancouver has been more involved with grocery store access and, as a result, there were more individuals with whom to discuss the topic.

The backgrounds of the participating planners were varied, including policy planners, social planners, community planners, development services planners and food system planners. Table 2.1 shows the distribution of the planners’ areas of focus. The total number of interviewees shown below sums to greater than ten because some planners self-identified as having a background in more than one planning area. Their experiences in various realms of planning shaped their perspectives on grocery store access.
A semi-structured interview process was used. Based on the literature review, a series of questions were developed in order to gain insights into three key areas:

1. **Planners’ perceptions of grocery store access in their community**—Questions addressed whether there were perceived issues with grocery store access in their municipality and how they defined grocery access.

2. **Perspectives on the role planners play in grocery store access**—Several questions aimed to understand how planners currently treat grocery store access. Interview participants were asked to describe the ways in which they, or others in their planning area, were involved in grocery store access.

3. **Perspectives on the potential for further planning involvement**—Interview participants were asked to reflect on how or whether planners could (and should) be more involved in supporting grocery store access as well as whether there were barriers preventing further involvement in this area.

An example of the interview instrument typically used in these interviews is included in Appendix A. The wording and ordering of the questions employed in each interview varied somewhat depending on the experiences and specialization of the interviewee. All of the Vancouver interviews took place in person. With the exception of two coffee-shop interviews, they took place at the interviewees’ workplace. All of the Edmonton interviews took place over the phone. Generally the interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes.

**Limitations of the Research Design**

If time had permitted, this research could have been strengthened by expanding the interviewees to include non-planners such as community-members, grocery retailers and politicians. However, given the exploratory nature of this study, beginning with planners’ perspectives on their own work is a rational starting point.
Trade-offs between depth and breadth must be made when designing research. The case study design allowed for a detailed understanding of the range of ways planners in Edmonton and Vancouver are involved in grocery store access. Additional insights into planning involvement in supporting grocery store access could be gained by exploring the experiences of a smaller number of planners in greater detail.

2.4 Reliability and Validity

The credibility of a study is determined by the reliability and validity of the research methods (Robson, 2002). Reliability refers to the extent to which the results of research are replicable provided the basic conditions remain the same. That is, if the same methods were used, could a study be repeated and yield similar results. Validity refers to the ability of the research techniques to capture the characteristics of the concepts being studied (Payne and Payne, 2004). For this thesis, an audit trail of research activities, such as interview transcripts, coding and data analysis, contributes to both the reliability and validity of the research by reducing the threat of researcher bias (Robson, 2002). The validity of the research is improved through triangulation; multiple sources of data (i.e. document analysis and semi-structured interviews) were used to enhance the rigour of the research (Robson, 2002).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology and research design employed for this thesis. Research methods were selected for this study to reflect two primary considerations: 1. There has been little research conducted on this topic thus far. 2. Human perceptions and contextual conditions are relevant to the research objectives. A qualitative and exploratory approach guided by the interpretive research tradition was employed. The research was loosely comprised of four main phases which included observation, development of a conceptual framework, primary data collection and data analysis. A case study strategy was selected in order to allow for an exploration of contextual conditions which may influence research findings. Credibility of the study results are supported by the multi-case study design, an audit trail and data triangulation.
CHAPTER 3:
THE CHANGING FOOD RETAIL LANDSCAPE AND IMPACTS

Before exploring the ways in which grocery store access is relevant to planning, it is first important to look at the trends that have shaped the current grocery retail landscape. The objective of this chapter is to review existing literature on grocery retail access. First, changes in the grocery industry in the second half of the twentieth century will be described; second, the impact of these changes on grocery retail access will be discussed and third, some of the limitations and challenges of the existing grocery store access literature will be identified. This discussion will foreshadow some of the ways in which planners can contribute to grocery store access.

3.1 Changes in the Grocery Industry Post World War II

In the second half of the twentieth century, the food retailing industry experienced a dramatic transformation. After World War II, as populations in North American and Europe began to shift from central cities to the suburbs, many retail uses, grocery included, began to move from city centres to edge-of-city locations (Eisenhauer, 2001). Development patterns in this period were heavily influenced by the mobility associated with the automobile. Those with cars were able to travel further distances to shop and as a result, the trade areas for grocery stores increased in size. Parking demands also increased, in order to serve the car-borne customer. By building on large, edge-of-city plots of land, retailers were able to hold greater inventory and provide ample parking. This trend can be evidenced in average store size which, since the seventies, increased from about 20,000 square feet to over 50,000 square feet (City of Toronto, 1996). Highway access became a far more influential factor in store location decisions, supplanting pedestrian traffic and transit service, which had historically been important determinants of store location. (City of Toronto, 1996; Gottlieb et al., 1996).

Larger stores offered other benefits to grocery retailers in an industry in which the profit margins are notoriously low. They afforded retailers economies of scale, which allowed them to lower their prices relative to smaller neighbourhood grocery stores (Eisenhauer, 2001). The large parcels also allowed supermarkets the space to develop new profit centers within their stores-- such as banks, pharmacies, bakeries and deli-counters-- that have higher margins than traditional grocery items (Bolen & Hecht,
Increased product selection resulted in larger average purchases per customer which also benefited the supermarkets' bottom line (Cummins & MacIntyre, 1999).

Building new large stores in the suburbs also proved to be more convenient than building or maintaining inner-city grocery sites (Bolen & Hecht, 2003). In-city stores were associated with greater shrinkage\(^6\), higher taxes, complicated city-permitting, and a less efficient distribution network, all of which led to higher operating costs relative to suburban stores (Gottlieb et al., 1996). They often served customers with lower than average household incomes and, as a result, there was a perception that sales were lower. The store lots tended to be smaller and therefore there was less space to accommodate higher margin non-food items, resulting in a lower profit per square foot than larger suburban locations (Gottlieb et al., 1996). In some cities, this resulted in the total abandonment of low-income inner-city locations (Eisenhauer, 2001).

As grocery store formats were becoming larger, the industry was also becoming increasingly concentrated until only a few major players controlled the industry. For example in Canada, by the mid-nineties, ten food distributors controlled eighty-five percent of supermarkets. The top five food distribution companies accounted for 70% of food retail market share (Ferguson as cited in City of Toronto, 1996). In 1950, Canadian supermarket chains had only 30% market-share of the food-dollar. By 1990 this had grown to 81%. High levels of concentration allowed supermarkets to benefit from economies of scale in the distribution network, which exerted pressure on independent stores (City of Toronto, 1996).

In many North American cities, it became industry practice for supermarket chains to use restrictive covenants in order to gain competitive advantage. A restrictive covenant is a legal condition a property owner can put on the title of a piece of land which limits the future uses of that piece of land. When closing a grocery store and selling a piece of land, supermarket chains have used restrictive covenants to limit future food retail on the site of the closed grocery store. The chain can simply sell the land with a covenant on the title indicating that future uses of that parcel cannot include a grocery store. This prevents a grocery store from opening that could compete with other supermarkets owned by that same chain (Haynes, 2005). Sometimes covenants are placed on a title for a particular duration and other times they are indefinite. Because grocery stores have particular site requirements, in densely developed areas there are few sites that can accommodate a full-size grocery store (City of Vancouver, 1998).

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\(^6\) Shrinkage refers to loss of inventory from employee theft or shoplifting.
When a grocery store is closed and has a covenant placed on it, there may be no other alternative land parcels in the neighbourhood to replace it.

Across North America, residents and municipal staff alike have argued that this practice conflicts with land use planning objectives, has a negative impact on the vitality of the community, restricts free market competition, diminishes quality of life, and leads to blight and lost tax revenue (City of Vancouver, 1998, Haynes, 2005, City of Edmonton, 2005). A 1998 City of Vancouver study revealed that of the 14 supermarkets that had closed between 1980 and 1998, 6 had restrictive covenants placed on them. The report decried the impact of restrictive covenants on the surrounding community: "By restricting the opportunity for other food retailers to locate on these sites... covenants negatively affect the future viability of neighbourhood shopping streets."

Although the use of covenants has garnered negative attention in a number of North American cities, (SEE, 2005, Courier, 2001, CBC, 2004a, 2004b) the supermarket chains are totally within their rights to implement such restrictions. The City of Chicago has recently taken an aggressive stance by passing an ordinance indicating that covenants cannot be used to restrict grocery or drugstore uses (Haynes, 2005). The Chicago officials involved in drafting the legislation cited that covenants slowed community growth by forcing residents to shop at more distant locations, imposing large vacant buildings on a neighbourhood and interfering with the potential for a new employer to fill the vacant site, otherwise well-suited for a grocery store. Peter Skosey-Vice President of the Metropolitan Planning Council argued that: "even though the practice itself is legal and supported by the U.S. Constitution and years and years of case law and practice, some things that are legal are just bad for the public good" (Haynes, 2005, p 36). However aside from the Chicago example, there is limited evidence that restrictive covenants have been successfully challenged legally and they remain a common industry practice.

In summary, in the latter half of the twentieth century, the grocery industry underwent dramatic change, fueled by increasing concentration within the grocery industry and the rise of auto-oriented, suburban development patterns. The physical manifestations of this transformation were the size and location of supermarkets. Larger parcels of land conveniently located near highways or major roads outside of neighbourhood centres became attractive locations. They could accommodate larger
inventories and parking while allowing for economies of scale and higher profit margins associated with a more efficient distribution network and expanded product line. The use of restrictive covenants by large chains to limit competition put the independent neighbourhood grocers at a further disadvantage relative to the chains. The net result was a decline in the number of grocery stores located in city neighbourhoods and an increase in the number of large, highway-oriented superstores located outside of neighbourhood centres (Guy, 1996). These trends are summarized in Table 3.1.

### Table 3.1 Trends in the Grocery Retailing Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grocery Retailing Trend</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Grocery stores shift to suburban locations based on car access.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Increase in average store size based on a driving trade area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Expanded product lines allowing for higher margins, but requiring larger stores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increased industry concentration allows for economies of scale amongst chains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decline in the number of neighbourhood grocery stores.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Impacts of Industry Trends - the Emergence of the Food Desert Debate

This section will discuss the emergence of the academic literature on grocery store access in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. In the mid-nineties concern surfaced that the large-format, auto-oriented supermarkets described in the previous section, were difficult to access, particularly for those without a car. Transit, often planned around commuter patterns, was not necessarily designed to serve shopping destinations well. In areas with low vehicle-ownership and poor transit service, getting to the grocery store could involve long waits, multiple transfers and long walks to and from the transit stop (Gottlieb et al., 1996). The links between diet and health were well established. Evidence grew that the spatial restructuring of the grocery industry was diminishing the accessibility of nutritious food and, as a result, opportunities for healthy living. Changes in the food retail landscape had a disproportionate affect on those of low-income, who were less likely to have access to a private automobile and, by many accounts, were more apt to live in underserved neighbourhoods. In this way the

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7 Under-nutrition is linked to the growing obesity endemic (Schaffer, 2002). Diet is implicated in over 30% of both cardiovascular and cancer deaths (WCRF/AICR 1997 as cited by Wrigley, 2002 p 2030).
new food retail geography became linked with increasing health inequalities (Wrigley, 2002).

**Grocery Store Access in the United Kingdom**

The early research on grocery retail access emerged in the United Kingdom. Tied to discussion of social exclusion, grocery access was the subject of a number of government-funded academic studies. Many of the United Kingdom’s low-income neighbourhoods lacked basic public and private services and were plagued by unemployment, poor health and crime. There was concern that the growth in edge-of-city supermarkets had led to the creation of areas where nutritious and affordable food was only accessible to those with a car or those able to pay the costs of public transport, if transit service was even available. (Wrigley et al., 2003). The term *food desert* was coined to refer to low-income areas that 1. lacked food retailers selling nutritious foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables and 2. were characterized by low car-ownership and poor transit service (Guy and David, 2004).

To study their prevalence in the UK, government agencies began defining *food desert* as an area without access to food retail within 500m. This criteria was in turn used to evaluate the existence of food deserts within a number of cities. For example, the 500m-radius standard was employed in a study of Seacroft and Whinmoor in Leeds revealing that as many as 90% of households were considered to be out of range of a grocery store (Wrigley et al., 2003). The average distance traveled to go food shopping was 2.5km, in an area where car ownership was low.

**Grocery Access in the United States**

Although there is less peer-reviewed academic literature on food deserts and grocery access in the United States, there have been a number of studies that give evidence that low-income areas are often underserved by grocery retail outlets. A 1995 study of 21 medium and large cities across the United States revealed that supermarkets in 19 of those cities were inequitably distributed. Of those 19 cities, there were 30% fewer stores per capita in the lowest income postal codes relative to the highest income postal codes. In the majority of these 21 cities those postal codes with the fewest supermarkets per capita also had the lowest percentage of vehicle
ownership. In Philadelphia there were 156% fewer supermarkets in the lowest-income neighbourhoods relative to the highest-income neighbourhoods (Cotterill & Franklin, 1996 as cited in Gottlieb et al., 1996). Further study of Philadelphia has revealed that those neighbourhoods without a supermarket were characterized by higher rates of diet-related deaths than the rest of the population (Burton, 2004).

A study of Los Angeles revealed a strong racial dimension to the gap in grocery provision. In postal codes with 0-10% of the households living under the poverty line, there were 200% more grocery stores per household as there were in postal codes with 40% of households below the poverty level (Schaffer, 2002). The study concluded that the greater the concentration of whites, the greater the number of supermarkets. Conversely, higher concentrations of African-Americans and Latinos were associated with lower concentrations of grocery stores. Similar results were found in other cities. Morland et al. (2001) looked at the distribution of grocery stores in Mississippi, North Carolina, Maryland and Minnesota and confirmed a higher concentration of grocery stores in wealthy, white neighbourhoods. They found that in the predominantly white areas the ratio of supermarkets to residents was 1:3,816 as compared to 1:23,582 in mainly black neighbourhoods.

Although North America and the United Kingdom have experienced similar grocery retail trends in recent decades—including consolidation of the grocery industry and shifts toward larger format stores, the geography of grocery access is different between the United Kingdom and the United States (Tomic, 2006). In the United Kingdom, inner-city areas have better access to grocery retail. Access has been more problematic in suburban areas. In contrast, the research from the United States reveals that grocery store access problems are far more pronounced in the inner-city (Eisenhauer, 2001). While it is not the objective of this thesis to explore the reasons for differences in the grocery landscape in the United Kingdom and the United States, it is worth highlighting some possible causes. Tomic (2006) suggests that international differences in regulations, transportation, urban growth patterns, economic development, and societal forces affect local land rent, operational costs, and consumer behaviour which ultimately impacts the distribution of supermarkets within cities. She also indicates that less extreme economic polarization and better transit service may allow spatial differences in purchasing power in the city to be less pronounced in the United Kingdom which may lead to a more even distribution of supermarkets. Central and local...
government role in revitalizing inner-city areas has also been identified as a possible factor leading to the greater presence of central city grocery stores in the United Kingdom (Wrigley et al., 2002).

Evolving Definition of Food Deserts

Initially the definition of food desert focused the spatial distribution of food stores relative to high-need populations. Over time the definition of food deserts in the United Kingdom and United States evolved to also include the quality and price of foods available in low-income and underserved neighbourhoods (Guy & David, 2004). Some researchers found that not only were food stores less available in lower income areas, those that existed often sold higher priced and less nutritional food. As a result of diminished local supply of full-service grocery stores, many residents without a vehicle may be forced to rely on nearby convenience stores that tend to offer foods of lower quality with less nutritional value. The higher prices may be attributed to store-size; small convenience stores do not benefit from the economies of scale of larger supermarket chains and therefore may have higher prices (Chung & Meyers, 1999). Some have argued that low-income areas experience higher prices because there is less competition and as a result grocery stores are able to charge more (Gottlieb et al., 1996). In higher income neighbourhoods, with a more mobile population, competition ensures a fair price. The nutritional impacts of inadequate grocery store access are compounded by the greater availability of fast food in low-income neighbourhoods (Bolen & Hecht, 2003; Schaffer, 2002).

In summary, grocery store access initially emerged as an issue in the United Kingdom and subsequently, the United States. There was concern that the trends in the grocery retailing industry, outlined in the previous section, had led to areas of cities that lacked adequate access to food stores. Food deserts came to refer to low-income areas of cities that lacked a grocery store, where transit service was poor and vehicular ownership low. It is not simply the presence or absence of a food store, but also the quality and cost of food in these areas that was viewed as problematic.

3.3 Grocery Store Access- Evidence from Canada

Research in Canada on grocery retail access is not as well developed as it is in the United Kingdom and the United States. There have been studies of a handful of
cities across Canada including Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Montreal and Saskatoon. This section will describe key findings from these studies. Collectively, they suggest that gaps in grocery access may not be as pronounced as they are in the United States and the United Kingdom. A City of Toronto report on food retail access in Toronto’s low-income neighbourhoods hypothesized that food access is generally better in Canada than in the United States because of public policies that have promoted mixed-income neighbourhoods and have helped to prevent the development of areas with a highly concentrated low-income population (City of Toronto, 1996). As a result, the dominant food system is more likely to reach inner-city areas. There are, nonetheless, a handful of studies that indicate that there is a gap in food retail provision in areas of some Canadian cities (Barbolet et al., 2005, City of Vancouver, 1998c, City of Toronto, 1996, Apparicio et al., 2004, Woods, 2003). The existing research suggests that the Canadian grocery access landscape resembles that of the United Kingdom where access issues are more apt to occur at the periphery of the city rather than in the inner-city.

**Toronto**

One of the early studies on grocery access in Canada was a 1996 discussion paper produced by the Food Policy Council in Toronto entitled “Food Retail Access and Food Security for Toronto’s Low-Income Citizens”. The study concluded that in many areas of the City, food retail provision is adequate; however several particular neighbourhoods were identified as deficient. Bathurst Quay and East Downtown—two areas with a high concentration of social housing—were both cited as areas with poor food retail access. Transit service is poor and vehicle ownership is low (60%). At the time of the 1996 report, a grocery store was the most requested new service.

More recent research has revealed that the North-East, North-West and North Central parts of the Greater Toronto Area are deficient in food retail. A group of non-profit organizations, including Toronto Public Health and St. Michael’s Hospital, collected a range of health information, including the walking and transit distance to grocery stores, convenience stores and fast food outlets. Findings from these efforts were recently cited in an article in the Toronto Star. The maps show that there are many places in the city in which it takes more than 30 minutes each way to get to a grocery store. Fast food outlets, on the other hand, are within walking distance of every area of
the city. A Toronto Councillor, Shelley Carroll, described the situation in her own
neighbourhood at Don Mills and Sheppard Avenue, a low-income area with a high
percentage of seniors where five food stores have closed down: “I have kids in my ward
in public housing who have Pringles and milk for breakfast... They go to Shoppers Drug
Mart and that’s what they can get” (Toronto Star, 2005). As in the United Kingdom, it is
not simply an inner-city issue. As parts of downtown Toronto have gentrified, low-
income populations have been pushed into the suburbs like Scarborough and North
York, which never had neighbourhood grocery stores (Toronto Star, 2005). These areas
were designed for middle-class residents with access to cars, rather than a transit-reliant
population.

Montreal

A Montreal study, which mapped the accessibility of supermarkets, also revealed that declining access was more pronounced outside of the city centre. The study developed a multi-dimensional measure comprised of several factors that reflect grocery store access 1) average distance to the nearest supermarket, 2) average
distance to three different types of supermarket (to measure food choice) 3) total area of
commercial space devoted to food retail. This measure was cross-referenced with a
measure of neighbourhood disadvantage to assess where diminished supply of food
retail stores coincided with restrictions to mobility. It was found that accessibility
decreased from the central neighbourhoods to the peripheral neighbourhoods.
Generally, the outer neighbourhoods are characterized by less choice than in the central
city. Forty percent of residents experience poor access to supermarket. However, only
20% of people live in both a region of poverty and diminished accessibility (Apparicio et
al., 2004). Again, gaps in food retail access appear to exist more often in peripheral
locations in neighbourhoods which were not built for pedestrian or transit access.

Vancouver

Findings from Vancouver indicate that grocery access has changed in recent
decades in some areas of the city. A 1998 study by the City of Vancouver that tracked

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6 The study focused on large supermarkets because they are of significant size and offer variety
and competitive prices compared to small groceries. They represent about 80% of food sales
and therefore are the dominant means for people to acquire food.
changes in the type and spatial distribution of supermarkets between 1980 and 1998 revealed that geographically the number of grocery stores in Vancouver had thinned, particularly on the east side. Notably, the number of small and medium-sized stores had declined between 1980 and 1998. There had been a corresponding increase in the number of large stores. In 1980 there were seven grocery stores in small neighbourhood nodes but by 1998 there were only four. There were no supermarkets in industrial areas in 1980 but by 1998 there were four large mega-outlets. Overlap in the trade areas of supermarkets had declined, signifying a decline in the level of choice of food retailers. The report concluded that it was a concerning trend that warranted monitoring but at that time did not warrant implementing a city-wide policy (City of Vancouver, 1998c).

More recently, Simon Fraser University's Centre for Sustainable Community Development, with support from the City of Vancouver, undertook an extensive assessment of Vancouver's food system. One component of the analysis looked at food retail (Barbolet, et al., 2005). By looking at grocery store densities and the percentage of nutritionally vulnerable populations, the report identified several areas that may have deficient grocery access. The average ratio of people to grocery stores is 1,687:1 across the City of Vancouver, while in Arbutus Ridge and Oakridge where there are a high percentage of seniors, these ratios are 7,300:1 and 11,796:1 respectively. In Hastings-Sunrise there is a significant low-income population, yet a relatively low density of grocery stores (4,151 people for every store). As with the Montreal study, it was found that in Vancouver there is a high density of food retail, in the urban core (Downtown Eastside, Downtown and Strathcona) and declining densities in surrounding neighbourhoods. This analysis revealed that lower-income areas tend to have more stores than the higher-income areas. For example, the Downtown Eastside has the highest density of food stores with 194 people for every store. Lacking a supermarket chain altogether, in the Downtown Eastside food stores tend to be small and are accessible to pedestrian populations. However, the quality is not as consistent; residents may instead suffer from diminished access to quality food choice.

The study also compared prices in food retail outlets across the city and found no evidence that those in low-income neighbourhoods were paying more for a healthy basket of food. Small stores tended to be approximately 10% more expensive than larger stores. To the extent that populations in low-income areas of Vancouver such as the Downtown Eastside rely more on small stores, the food there may tend to be more
expensive (Barbolet, et al., 2005). Thus, the studies of grocery access in Vancouver suggest there is relatively good access overall, but point to some problem areas where there are high concentrations of low-income or seniors. Problems may stem, not simply from the absence of a grocery store but also from the quality of the food that is available at the food outlets.

**Edmonton**

In Edmonton a study done by the University of Alberta aimed to evaluate spatial access to supermarkets in order to understand whether high-need and/or inner-city neighbourhoods have reduced access to grocery stores relative to the rest of the city (Tomic, 2006). They identified three high-needs groups: elderly, low-income and those without vehicles. The study concluded that areas with relatively high access to grocery stores tended to house more of the high-need populations compared to low-access neighbourhoods. The study also concluded that the inner-city tended to house more of the high-need population relative to the rest of the city; however access was also higher in the inner-city. They concluded that there are six potential food-desert Neighbourhoods in Edmonton. In these areas, residents were required to travel between 2.1 km to 2.5 km to the nearest supermarket, relative to the city median distance of 1.4 km. Interestingly, even the median distance to the grocery store in Edmonton is well above the 500 metre standard typically used to define an acceptable walking distance. While there are only 6 neighbourhoods that meet the two criteria of relative high need and relative low access, it is possible that other areas of the city would be identified as having diminished access to grocery retail if an absolute measure of access were used.

**Saskatoon**

The Community-University Institute for Social Research conducted a qualitative study of grocery access. It targeted an area identified as a food desert in Saskatoon to understand food-buying behaviour in an area of diminished access. The study included interviews with 37 households in a low-income neighbourhood in central Saskatoon in which several grocery stores had recently closed. At the time of the study, there was no full-service grocery store in the neighbourhood. Over 50% of participants indicated that
transportation to the grocery store was a barrier to purchasing food. Those households without a vehicle relied more heavily on expensive or inconvenient modes of transportation, reflecting the lack of local food choice. Carrying groceries home, weather conditions, the expense of a taxi, or the inconvenience of public transportation influenced their decisions. The study also revealed that price and store quality were still important determinants factoring into food shopping decision, suggesting that physical access is not the only factor shaping food-shopping behaviour.

In summary, the literature from Canada on grocery store access is less developed than in the United States and the United Kingdom. However the studies that have been conducted suggest that, although the problem is not necessarily extreme, there are some neighbourhoods in which access may be diminished. The nature of access problems in Canada appears to resemble the pattern seen in the United Kingdom where access deficiencies are more pronounced outside of the city core. This suggests that suburban land use patterns may contribute to access problems.

3.4 Challenges Facing Grocery Access Research

The previous section discussed the existing literature on grocery store access, which has generally focused on food deserts - extreme cases in which a lack of adequate supply of grocery stores in an area is combined with a concentrated low-income population. The result is a situation in which those without access to a private vehicle have difficulty acquiring nutritious and affordable food. The term food desert is a powerful image that helps to convey the problems associated with acquiring food in neighbourhoods underserved by grocery retail. There are, however, some limitations and challenges associated with the grocery store access literature as it is currently positioned. These limitations and challenges are summarized at the end of this section in Table 3.2.

Defining and Measuring Food Deserts

One of the greatest challenges of the grocery access research is the difficulty associated with defining and measuring food deserts. At a simple level, food desert research has aimed to measure the accessibility of grocery stores in deprived areas.
Researchers have differed in how they have empirically approached "accessibility", "grocery stores" as well as "deprivation". Defining these terms has required making certain assumptions about the determinants of accessibility. By exploring these assumptions we can better understand how the empirical studies have shaped our understanding of grocery store access.

**Measuring Accessibility**

Empirical studies have looked at both absolute as well as relative measures of accessibility. Absolute measures of accessibility have tended to use 500m as the distance deemed an acceptable walking distance. Researchers have typically mapped food retail outlets and then drawn circles of a 500m radius to determine the proportion of households not within 500 metres of a grocery store (Clarke et al., 2002). Although the 500m standard does represent a walkable distance for most adults, it does not capture qualitative features of the physical environment that also shape the viability of walking, such as perceptions of safety, quality of the pedestrian environment or connectivity of the street network. A 500 metre radius does not necessarily indicate a 500 metre walk to the grocery store. Winding roads or fenced off housing developments may make the actual walk to the grocery store much longer and less attractive. Most of us have seen large superstores situated in highway commercial areas where traffic signals are timed to keep cars moving fast and not necessarily to allow for a comfortable street crossing. Even when located within 500 metres of a household, the conditions may make walking an unattractive or even unsafe alternative. Thus, the 500 metre, absolute measure of accessibility is a rather blunt measure and does not capture the ease with which an individual can walk to the store.

A large number of studies of grocery retail gaps have looked solely at relative measures of accessibility. A food desert is typically defined as an area where there is the coincidence of high need and low access relative to other areas of the city (Tomic, 2006). As previously discussed, grocery access is viewed as a problem when there are notably low levels of grocery store provision in low-income areas of social deprivation, when compared with higher-income neighbourhoods.

Cummings and Macintyre (1999) who studied the relative provision of grocery stores in low and high-income neighbourhoods in Glasgow, determined that there is not a significant difference in the affordability or provision of food in low-income and affluent
neighbourhoods. This study led them to question the validity of the concept of 'food desert' altogether (Cummings and Maclntyre, 2002b). They argued that there is insufficient hard evidence to support the claim that affordable food is more accessible in more affluent neighbourhoods while food sold in low-income neighbourhoods is less available, of poorer quality and more expensive.

However there is a risk in focusing on relative measures of food accessibility. Even without a relative difference between high-income and low-income areas, average distance to the nearest grocery store has dramatically different implications in a low-income neighbourhood with low vehicle ownership, than it does in a high-income neighbourhood where residents are more apt to have access to the private automobile. So even if the average distance to the nearest store is the same across the city, it is important to think about the implications of the absolute measure of distance for those both with and without access to a car. Additionally, relative measures do not address the needs of those people who are not living in areas defined as low-income, but may still have mobility constraints that require a nearby grocery store in order to access food. By focusing on relative measures, one may also overlook barriers to access which may be city-wide, for example in Edmonton where the median distance to the nearest grocery store is 1.4 km. Although barriers may have a greater impact for those who are not afforded the mobility of the private automobile, they also affect the experience of living in the city for all residents.

The use of relative measures may have stemmed from how food deserts have been conceptualized. A food desert suggests that there is an identifiable area which suffers from poor grocery access. Food deserts were generally attributed to the food retail industry's response to the spatial distribution of low-income people in the city. That is, as the more affluent and car-driving population shifted to the suburbs, grocery stores left low-income areas in order to build larger stores, with easy highway access serving a broader, car-bound, suburban trade area. The implication is that a food desert is a definable low-income area which is poorly served relative to other higher-income areas. However, diminished grocery access may not always be a result of the grocery retail industry 'abandoning' a particular area in order to serve more affluent areas. Access can also be reduced because of the prevalent auto-oriented development patterns that put many destinations, including grocery stores, out of walking distance. The diminished accessibility of grocery stores stems not always from differential availability of grocery stores between low and high-income areas, but rather differential access to the private
automobile. The impact of urban form on grocery store access has not been explicitly treated in the literature.

What Kind of Grocery Store?

There is a wide range of grocery retail formats. Another challenge facing grocery store access researchers is to devise methods that incorporate the diversity of formats into our understanding of grocery access. Different formats of grocery stores will have varied ability to provide access to healthy and affordable food. Consumer needs and preferences for store type also vary over time and from one person or community to the next. Empirical studies have tended to focus on the accessibility of supermarket chains because they are perceived to offer the best combination of affordable and nutritious foods. However, a large supermarket is not, unequivocally, the best or only solution to grocery store access.

Guy and David (2004) argue that supermarket chains offer the best access to well-priced nutritious food. Strategies should therefore focus on improving access to these stores. They examined the price and availability of a list of healthy foods in neighbourhoods in Cardiff, Wales that had been identified as deficient in food retail and that also had high levels of poverty and social deprivation. Overall, the study concluded that in order to access a wide range of items at the lowest price, a trip by car, taxi or public transport to a supermarket chain was necessary. While chains stocked all items on the list, independent stores typically stocked just under half. A comparison of prices revealed that although the small independent stores were competitive on some items, particularly vegetables, the large chains were the cheapest source of food on 70% of items (Guy and David, 2004). In this context, opening a new supermarket chain would be of perceived benefit to grocery access.

However, opening a chain store in the middle of a ‘food desert’ is not necessarily the best solution. Large supermarket chains operate to serve a driving trade area. As a result, it is not possible for all residents to have pedestrian access to a large supermarket chain; the market would not support it. Additionally, a new chain store could negatively impact existing stores and exacerbate food access problems. Some retailers have concluded that a combination of smaller stores could be a better solution (Clark et al., 2002).
Thus, there is a tension between the recognition that large chains are viewed as the best source of affordable and nutritious food and the reality that, by their structure, chains are not accessible by all and can have a damaging affect on food access for those without ready access to a car. The literature on food deserts has not fully explored how other food resources such as farmers markets, community gardens, coop groceries, or ethnic specialty stores may play a role in alleviating the need for a large chain store. There is a need to acknowledge the attractiveness of supermarket chains while also recognizing the potential for other food retail formats and community food resources to play a role in supporting access to food (Schaffer, 2002).

Focus on Food Access in Low-Income Areas

The food desert literature has generally focused on the individual health impacts of diminished access to food in low-income communities. Studies of food deserts have been restricted to areas of social deprivation on the assumption that grocery store access is only a policy concern in areas with a less mobile population (Clarke et al., 2002). This raises the question—is a diminished supply of grocery stores problematic if it is a predominantly middle or high-income area? The evidence from Vancouver and Edmonton suggests that gaps in grocery retail do appear outside of low-income communities. Focusing purely on access to food, one might conclude that in areas with high vehicular ownership, the spatial distribution of grocery stores is not a problem. Food is always a car-ride away. This approach overlooks not only the environmental implications of auto-dependency but also other contributions grocery stores make to a community.

A grocery store can serve as a meeting-ground, an opportunity for regular interaction between a community’s residents, a place to access a range of services to meet their everyday needs. When a neighbourhood grocery store closes, the community may also lose this social interaction as residents are pressed to go to farther-flung grocery outlets (Stouder, 2004). People must shop for food regularly. As a result, grocery stores bring a steady and predictable flow of customers to commercial areas. As such, they often are the anchor business in neighbourhood commercial centres, contributing to the viability of other businesses in the area. Relative to other commercial uses, grocery stores employ a large number of employees per square meter and therefore bring job opportunities to nearby residents (Eisenhauer, 2001).
disappearance of a grocery store in an area can weaken the economic fabric of a
neighbourhood (Stouder, 2004). Neighbourhood grocery stores allow residents,
irrespective of car-ownership, to choose to walk instead of drive. Foot-traffic to
neighbourhood grocery stores can also contribute to the vibrancy of other businesses in
the area. Creating walkable neighbourhoods offers both individual and community
benefits. Individuals may experience health benefits associated with regular physical
activity, while the community benefits include the alleviation of congestion and air
pollution associated with reduced reliance on the car. The other impacts associated with
disappearing grocery stores have not been well-examined in the existing literature on
grocery store access. These can manifest themselves in all neighbourhoods, not just
the ones with high concentrations of low-income people, low-vehicle ownership and poor
transit service.

Is Physical Access a Strong Determinant of Healthy Eating?

The premise of the food desert literature is that increasing physical access to
grocery stores, will improve accessibility of nutritious food, which ultimately will support
health. Empirical studies have given evidence that physical access to a grocery store
can influence diet particularly for those with mobility barriers (White et al., 2004).
Evidence from the United Kingdom reveals that physical access has the most dramatic
improvement in diet amongst those who are classified as having the poorest diet and
being the most at risk nutritionally. These results are particularly noteworthy because in
the past individual interventions to improve diet have failed to reach those with the
poorest diet (Wrigley et al., 2003).

However, it is worth noting that physical access to grocery stores is not the only
or even most important determinant of healthy eating. Dietary knowledge, age, lifestyle,
cultural and socio-economic factors have also been shown to be key factors in healthy
eating. Having a nearby grocery store does not guarantee that people will eat well.
Furthermore, the importance of physical access will vary for different population sub­
groups⁹. A challenge facing researchers is to understand the nuances of how physical

⁹ A series of focus groups conducted in an underserved, area of Leeds revealed that the elderly
are much more likely to report physical access as problematic. In contrast, younger women were
more likely to be concerned with cost and less concerned with physical access issues. Having
access to affordable food, irrespective of distance, was a higher priority than having a nearby
store. Physical access was not a strong determinant of diet (Whelen et al., 2002).
access improvements relate to other factors—such as economic access, education, or culture—which also impact eating habits (White et al., 2004). As the focus of this thesis shifts, in subsequent chapters, to look at the role of planning in supporting access to food through grocery stores, it is important to acknowledge that although land use can play a role in supporting a good diet, it is but one of a number of factors that can influence eating habits.

Dynamic Character of Grocery Retail Industry

In spite of the surge of large format stores in the eighties and nineties (to which food deserts are oft attributed) there is evidence that supermarket chains have begun to reconsider neighbourhood and central-city locations. There are several things that may account for this trend: suburban areas may have become saturated and retail chains are looking for new opportunities. With an increase in residential growth and gentrification in some inner-city areas, the market opportunity has improved for grocery stores. Supermarkets may also be adapting to new physical and cultural contexts (Pothukuchi, 2004). There is also evidence that independent neighbourhood groceries have experienced renewed strength in some cities, particularly those stores that have carved out a niche such as organic or specialty foods. Seniors tend to be less price sensitive and more attuned to quality and convenience. As a result, some argue that as the population ages, the demand for neighbourhood grocers will increase. (Canadian Grocer, 2005; Courier, 2005).

The improved prospect for neighbourhood and independent grocers highlights the dynamic character of food access. It is not simply an inner-city or suburban problem. The retail and socioeconomic geography of cities changes and along with it, the character of grocery store access.
Table 3.2 Challenges Facing Research on Food Access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining and measuring accessibility of grocery stores</td>
<td>A 500m radius, typically used to measure the adequacy of grocery retail provision, does not necessarily reflect the walkability of the environment. The use of relative measures of access (i.e. identifying where there is high need and low access relative to other areas of the city) may overlook city-wide access issues. A large supermarket is not, unequivocally, the best or only solution to grocery store access. Literature on food deserts has not fully explored the role of other food resources (e.g. farmers markets, community gardens, coop groceries, or ethnic specialty stores) in food access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on food access in low-income Areas</td>
<td>Studies of food deserts have been restricted to areas of social deprivation on the assumption that grocery store access is only a policy concern in areas with a less mobile population. Approach overlooks environmental implications of auto-dependency as well as contributions grocery stores make to a community (e.g. economic vitality, neighbourhood focal point).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical access is not the sole determinant of healthy eating</td>
<td>It is important to acknowledge that there are limits to the impacts of physical access on diet. There are a number of other factors, aside from land use, that determine eating habits such as dietary knowledge, age, lifestyle, cultural and socio-economic factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic character of food access in cities</td>
<td>There is evidence that supermarket chains have begun to reconsider neighbourhood and central-city locations. It is important to acknowledge that the retail and socioeconomic geography of cities changes and along with it, the character of grocery store access.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Conclusion

In summary, concern emerged in the nineties that changes in food retail geography had resulted in diminished access to healthy food and ultimately health inequalities. Academic literature in this area initially originated in the United Kingdom and the United States. The term food desert was coined to describe areas of cities in which there is a low provision of grocery stores selling nutritional and affordable food
and a high concentration of low-income people who are less likely to have the mobility afforded by the private automobile. Empirical studies revealed that access to food was indeed problematic in a number of cities in the United Kingdom and the United States. These problems had a strong socio-economic and racial dimension. In Canada, grocery access issues may not be as pronounced as they are in the UK and United States; some have attributed this to public policies that promote mixed-income neighbourhoods. However, there is evidence that there may be gaps in provision in some areas. Often characterized as an 'inner-city' issue, evidence from the United Kingdom, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver suggests that suburbs can also experience deficiencies in grocery store access. Findings from Vancouver and Edmonton also reveal that some neighbourhoods with higher concentrations of elderly experience diminished access to groceries, suggesting the need for attention to extend beyond low-income neighbourhoods, historically the target of the grocery access literature.

A review of the literature reveals certain limitations and challenges associated with the existing academic literature on grocery store access.

1. Defining and measuring grocery access problems is complex and requires certain assumptions about the factors shaping accessibility. Empirical studies have tended to focus on the distance to the nearest grocery store without looking at any other aspects of the built environment that may impact the feasibility or attractiveness of walking—such as the existence of sidewalks. A large number of studies have focused simply on relative measures of accessibility, comparing access in low and high-income neighbourhoods. This approach risks overlooking problems that are city-wide, which may stem from urban form.

2. Research in this area has also not thoroughly considered the diversity of food retail formats and how they can support access to food. Supermarkets have been the focus in the literature to date. As the grocery industry and consumer preferences change there will be the need to better understand how other food retail formats fit into the picture.

3. Finally, because the literature has focused on food access in low-income neighbourhoods, the other contributions grocery stores make to all communities have not been fully explored.

The aim of this chapter was to review existing literature on grocery retail access as a context for the discussion of the planner's role in this area. The discussion revealed that
grocery retail access has been an issue in a number of cities in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. The three limitations and challenges highlighted above suggest areas in which planners may be able to contribute to grocery access. These will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: GROCERY STORE ACCESS AND THE PLANNING AGENDA

The previous chapter described how the academic literature on grocery retail access emerged. This chapter aims to position grocery retail access on the planning agenda. Grocery store access is a topic that is not always explicitly treated by the planning profession. However, it does intersect with multiple planning agendas. This chapter will look at two planning agendas to which local access to grocery stores is germane.

1. In recent decades, planning literature has highlighted the importance of developing walkable neighbourhood centres.
2. There is a growing body of literature that argues that planners have a role in supporting a local food system in which food security exists.

A look at these agendas will illustrate the pertinence of grocery retail access to professional planning and will also give indications of the spheres in which planners can intervene to address grocery access issues.

4.1 Walkable Neighbourhood Centres

The objective of this section is to explore how grocery store access figures into the planning objective to create walkable neighbourhood centres. There is increasing recognition in the field of planning that the auto-oriented\textsuperscript{10} urban form which has characterized much of North American development since the Second World War has had a host of negative environmental, social and economic impacts: diminished air quality as a result of automobile dependence, loss of animal habitat and green space due to consumptive land use patterns, rise in infrastructure costs associated with serving low-density development and a decline in community life also attributed to dispersed land use and auto-reliant lifestyles are several ills associated with development patterns of the last half century (Beatley and Manning, 1997). New Urbanism, Smart Growth and sustainable development represent three of the major frameworks guiding contemporary urban planning which, in recent decades, have put forth alternatives to the prevailing

\textsuperscript{10} Auto-oriented development refers to low-density, dispersed development, in which commercial, residential and industrial land uses are segregated and in which the street and road network is optimized for travel by the car rather than the pedestrian (Beatley and Manning, 1997).
auto-oriented development patterns (Godschalk, 2004; Knaap & Talen, 2005). Although there are significant differences between these paradigms (discussed briefly below), they share a number of principles including the importance of more efficient land use patterns that foster alternatives to automobile travel. A walkable neighbourhood centre, in which a wide range of daily activities is easily accessible on foot, is viewed as central to this objective.

The following discussion will be divided into three parts: The first part will briefly define New Urbanism, Smart Growth and sustainable development and position walkable neighbourhood centres within those frameworks. In the second part, the importance of grocery stores to walkable neighbourhood centres will be discussed. The third section will look at how the objective to create walkable neighbourhood centres contributes to an understanding of grocery store access.

What is the Agenda to Create Walkable neighbourhood centres?

The phrase walkable neighbourhood centre as it is used in this thesis, synthesizes several ideas shared by Smart Growth, New Urbanist and sustainability literature. There is no set definition of it, but here it refers to:

a commercial area that is embedded within a neighbourhood, is characterized by a safe and attractive pedestrian environment and meets many of the daily needs of nearby residents (Lund, 2003, Knaap & Talen, 2005, Berke, 2002).

The terms New Urbanism, Smart Growth and Sustainable Development are used heavily in planning literature and policy. Elements of these frameworks have influenced contemporary theories on urban development and informed planning policy in recent decades. However, they lack a fixed definition and therefore mean different things to different people—a working definition of how each is employed in this thesis is offered below. The objective of this section is not to explore New Urbanism, Smart Growth and Sustainable Development in depth. Rather, aspects of these frameworks are used selectively here to describe how 'walkable neighbourhood centres' emerge as an objective in planning thought and practice.

Evidence of this is found in the City of Vancouver's CityPlan policy or the City of Edmonton's SmartChoices program, both of which are discussed in later chapters of this thesis.
New Urbanism

Established by a group of architects in the nineties, New Urbanism is a set of urban design principles which draws heavily from traditional features of the design of pre-World War II communities to create neighbourhoods that reduce reliance on the automobile and foster greater social interaction amongst residents (Charter of New Urbanism, 1996). New Urbanism is premised on the notion that urban form and neighbourhood design impacts how we travel and how we interact with others in our community (Lund, 2003, Handy & Clifton, 2001). By building communities with a high quality pedestrian environment and nearby retail services we can make walking a more viable mode of transportation. If residents enjoy walking in their neighbourhood there will be greater opportunity for social interaction which, in turn, builds community. A commercial centre, embedded within the neighbourhood fabric, can serve as a focal point of neighbourhood activity and community life. Developing a neighbourhood core within walking distance of residences reduces the need for non-work travel. In densely-built communities, the distance between destinations is shorter. As a result, even without any mode shift, the amount of driving is reduced (Lund, 2003).

New Urbanism prescribes high-density neighbourhoods that are compact and not dispersed, pedestrian-friendly rather than auto-oriented, and where commercial, residential and institutional uses are mixed together and not segregated. According to New Urbanist principles, neighbourhoods should be clearly defined areas in which the activities of daily living are within walking distance. Concentrations of civic institutional and commercial activity should be embedded in a neighbourhood core. The pedestrian environment should be human-scaled and create a sense of place—that is, buildings, streets, sidewalks and public spaces should be visually interesting and reflect, as well as contribute to, the neighbourhood character (Charter of New Urbanism, 1996).

It is worth noting that the New Urbanist paradigm places a strong emphasis on physical design, community character and sense of place. Although New Urbanism has been lauded by some for preserving open space, the movement does not place a strong emphasis on the ecological dimensions of community design (Berke, 2002). The New Urbanist principles outlined in the Charter of New Urbanism address multiple scales—from the block to the region (Charter of New Urbanism, 1996). However, the emphasis in New Urbanist designs has been on the neighbourhood rather than on the regional
context (Berke, 2002). The regional perspective is more fully addressed by Smart Growth, which is discussed in the following section.

**Smart Growth**

Smart Growth, which also developed in the mid-nineties, shares with New Urbanism, the recognition of the importance of walkable neighbourhood commercial areas. However Smart Growth focuses more on *policy* rather than *design*. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Smart Growth is “development that serves the economy, the community, and the environment.” (as cited in Knapp & Talen, 2005, p 107). In response to the inefficient growth patterns of the late twentieth century, Smart Growth’s overarching objectives are to advance growth patterns that enhance quality of life, protect environmental resources and use tax resources wisely. There are ten smart growth principles that aim to direct growth that is fiscally, environmentally and socially responsible and that recognize the connections between development and quality of life (Smart Growth BC, 2006). Similar to New Urbanism, *Smart Growth advocates for compact and pedestrian-friendly neighbourhood commercial areas in which people can easily access a range of daily activities.*

Smart Growth places greater emphasis on the regional perspective than New Urbanism. A key target of the Smart Growth agenda is the spread of large format suburban retail stores. The critique is manifold: Big box retail perpetuates sprawling land uses, automobile reliance and the consumption of large tracts of land outside of urban centres. It pulls retail activity out of central areas to the urban edge, diminishing the vitality of neighbourhood commercial areas. Residents must rely increasingly on the automobile to reach retail stores contributing to congestion and air pollution. To accommodate parking requirements, the big box format requires large parcels, typically available on green field sites. As a result, big box development leads to expansive, impermeable paved surfaces which eat into productive agricultural land and can be disruptive to sensitive animal habitats (Curran, 2002).

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Smart Growth points to city-wide and regional policies that can be used to foster walkable neighbourhood centres. For example, community plans can stipulate that development should be focused in existing commercial and residential areas. Municipal design standards can be used to give planners the mandate to deny a development application if it does not support community goals to promote pedestrian-friendly environments or preserve features of a community’s urban design. Land use policies that specify square footage limitations can also be effective tools for managing big box development. In turn, these policies can serve as the basis by which planners and local governments make land use decisions that will contain big box development and minimize community impacts (Curran, 2002).

Both New Urbanism and Smart Growth emphasize the links between quality of life and the built environment. They also both aim to reduce automobile reliance through community design and land use. Smart Growth places a stronger emphasis on a regional perspective and the ecological dimension of land use decisions than New Urbanism (Godschalk, 2004). The Smart Growth literature highlights that creating a walkable neighbourhood centre is not merely a matter of neighbourhood design; it also involves creating city-wide and regional policy that contains development in areas that may reduce the viability of neighbourhood commercial.

**Sustainable development**

Sustainable development shares Smart Growth’s concern for developing in a manner that takes into account economic, ecological and social impacts—to this end, creating compact, walkable neighbourhoods with vibrant commercial areas is consistent with sustainable development principles. Sustainable development\(^\text{13}\) has been attributed a wide range of definitions. In this thesis it is used to refer to a process in which communities anticipate and accommodate the needs of current and future generations in ways that reproduce and balance local social, economic and ecological systems and link local actions to global concerns (Berke 2002).

What sets sustainable development apart from New Urbanism and Smart Growth is its explicitly holistic orientation—in addition to balancing, ecological, economic and social

\(^{13}\) The term first emerged in the 1987 United Nations report by the World Commission on the Environment and Development Our Common Future which states that: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (as cited in Berke, 2002).
interests, it adds a dimension of intergenerational equity and takes into account multiple geographic scales from the local to the global. Further, it emphasizes, not the end state, but also the processes and system of governance by which a particular end is achieved (Berke, 2002). Sustainable development literature places emphasis on an open and inclusive process of development and not simply outcomes (Berke, 2002); it is far less prescriptive than either New Urbanism and Smart Growth.

The holistic nature of the term can make it difficult to determine, what, practically speaking, sustainable development looks like. However, attempts to articulate local practical principles of sustainability have generally shared with New Urbanism and Smart Growth the value of compact, mixed use, pedestrian-oriented environments (Beatley and Manning, 1997; Berke, 2002).

As sustainability has come to be integrated into local planning efforts, it has marked a shift from considering simply land use compatibility to looking more holistically at the ecological, environmental and social functioning of a community (Beatley and Manning, 1997). This has allowed the social dimensions of the built environment to come into play. Within a framework of sustainable development, land use patterns should respond to the needs and aspirations of local residents, account for the needs of vulnerable populations and foster equitable access to social and economic resources (Berke, 2002). In addition to the ecological and community building considerations described already, walkable neighbourhood centres, in which nearby residents can walk to basic services, also diminishes transportation inequities and has the potential to contribute to a stronger, more self-reliant local economy.

In summary New Urbanism, Smart Growth and sustainable development frameworks highlight the environmental, economic and social benefits of developing walkable neighbourhood centres -- commercial areas embedded within a neighbourhood

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14 Berke and Manta-Controy (2000) developed six operational performance principles that shed insight into what sustainability looks like at a local scale: 1. Harmony with nature- land use and development activities support essential cycles and ecosystems 2. Livable built environment-physical environment creates a sense of place and is adapted to desired activities of inhabitants. 3. Place-based economy- local economy operates within natural system limits. 4. Equity- land use patterns address the needs of the least advantaged 5. Polluters pay- those responsible for negative community wide impacts bear the costs 6. Responsible regionalism- communities should not act in their own interest such that they negatively impact other areas.

15 Berke and Manta-Conroy (2000) found in their evaluation of thirty municipal comprehensive plans that, in practice, municipalities have been slow to truly embrace a holistic perspective in planning efforts. Their analysis found that comprehensive plans continued to reflect the traditional planning emphasis on quality of life rather than embracing other sustainability principles such as equity or ecological concerns.
residential area, characterized by a high quality pedestrian environment that meets many of the daily needs of nearby residents. These areas serve as a focal point for community-life, have the potential to increase walking and reduce reliance on the automobile, contribute to a local economy that meets the needs of nearby residents and create greater access to important goods and services for all.

**Grocery Stores and the Agenda of Walkable Neighbourhood Centres**

The preceding discussion described how walkable neighbourhood centres figure into planning thought, drawing on elements of New Urbanist, Smart Growth and sustainability thought. How then do grocery stores figure into this objective? The following section will position grocery stores within the agenda to create walkable neighbourhood centres. It will reveal that grocery stores are important to neighbourhood commercial areas in several ways: First, as an important local walking destination, second as a neighbourhood land use feature that contributes to health and third as an element of an equitable transportation system.

**Grocery Stores as an Important Walking Destination**

There are several studies that highlight the importance of grocery stores, relative to other retail uses, in creating walkable, neighbourhood commercial centres. In a study of local shopping behaviours in neighbourhoods in Austin Texas, Handy and Clifton, (2001) found that residents of traditional neighbourhoods with a high quality pedestrian environment and nearby stores were three to four times more likely to walk to the store than residents of other neighbourhoods with less local shopping. Grocery stores were identified as the most frequently visited commercial service (Handy and Clifton, 2001), positioning grocery stores as an important element of walkable neighbourhoods.

These findings are supported by the forthcoming publication of Moudon et al. (2006) who analyzed neighbourhood features associated with walking. The study looked at a series of neighbourhood destinations such as restaurants, parks, post offices, banks and cafes and found that participants walked to grocery stores most often—45.9% of participants walked to the grocery store on a weekly basis. The second most visited destination was restaurants at a frequency of only 23.0%, again illustrating the importance of grocery stores as a determinant of neighbourhood walking. The
proximity of a grocery store was strongly correlated with greater levels of walking. The study paints a portrait of walkable neighbourhoods focused on food-related and daily retail needs and asserts the importance of grocery stores to fostering vibrant neighbourhood commercial areas.

**Grocery Stores and Auto-dependency—a Caveat**

Although local access to grocery stores has been shown to generate more walking, the empirical studies on local services and car dependency have not conclusively shown that local access to grocery stores significantly reduces car travel. Studies that have looked at local shopping as a strategy for reducing automobile travel have shown that, aside from proximity, there are a number of factors that influence shopping decisions. Residents may appreciate the option to shop locally, however their needs are rarely fully met by the stores immediately available (Handy and Clifton, 2001).

Handy and Clifton (2001) looked at food shopping decisions in several neighbourhoods in Austin and found that residents frequently used a store other than the closest one for at least some of their trips. Very few residents shopped at only one food store, regardless of whether they shopped at the closest store. When asked which factors influenced their decisions to shop, residents revealed that proximity was important, however price, quality of product, pleasant atmosphere, selection and crowds also figured prominently in food shopping decisions (Handy and Clifton, 2001). With residents willing to by-pass nearby stores for the selection of more distant stores, there is no guarantee that local shopping will reduce the vehicle kilometres traveled or overall auto-reliance. Handy found that it was unclear whether increased walking in neighbourhoods as a result of local shopping would replace automobile trips or whether they were simply increasing the number of overall walk trips (Handy, 1992). The grocery store trip is often combined with other trips to a regional centre. Moving the grocery trip closer to home does not necessarily cut down on the overall vehicles kilometers traveled if individuals continue to travel to regional centres for other shopping purposes.

Although local shopping may not reduce auto-reliance per se, residents still value having the choice to walk to stores for some trips and perceive it to enhance their quality of life (Handy and Clifton, 2001). This finding helps to contribute to a more subtle understanding of the role a grocery store plays in communities. According to Handy
(1992), people like food retail choice and will often choose to drive anyhow, but having a grocery store close to home is a valued local feature and contributes to quality of life.

**Grocery Store Access as a Determinant of Health**

Earlier in this chapter it was recognized that local planning considerations have been expanding to look at a broader range of social issues associated with land use decisions. One such social consideration is the growing recognition of the links between community design and health. Research in the field of urban planning has revealed associations between levels of physical activity and features of the built environment. Research in this field has intensified as a result of the dramatic rise in obesity and other health conditions associated with a sedentary lifestyle such as type-two diabetes and heart disease. Active modes of transportation, like biking and walking, are thought to be a promising means to achieve the levels of physical activity prescribed by public health experts (Frank et al., 2003). Research looking at the effect of environmental influences on our willingness to bike or walk typically focuses on several key dimensions of urban form—density and mix of land use, the connectivity of the street network, the existence of bike paths and sidewalks as well as the character of the street design. The empirical studies have revealed people tend to walk and bike more when the built environment supports these activities. Further, features of the built environment have been shown to be negatively associated with obesity and other health conditions (Frank et al. 2003)

As the links between the built environment and travel behaviour have become clearer, the opportunities for planners to promote public health through fostering a built environment that supports an active and healthy lifestyle have crystallized. These findings are pertinent to this study for two reasons. 1. In light of the evidence cited earlier that grocery stores are an important local shopping destination (Handy and Clifton, 2001, Moudon et al. 2006), they are an important feature of a built environment that promotes opportunities for an active lifestyle. 2. If planners have a role in fostering a community design positively correlated with key health outcomes such as physical activity and negatively associated with obesity, this role could logically be extended to include

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16 Historically health has not been the jurisdiction of municipal government. However, there is growing recognition that many contemporary economic, environmental and social issues require action at the local scale. As the role of cities has begun to expand, there is also acknowledgement of the need for greater intergovernmental collaboration in order to bridge between the local scale and higher levels of government where the jurisdiction actually resides (Bradford, 2002).
grocery store access which is also an element of community design positively associated with a key determinant of health: diet.

**Grocery Stores and Transportation Equity**

A final connection between, on the one hand, grocery store access and, on the other hand, planners’ interest in shaping a walkable neighbourhood centre, pertains to transportation equity. As mentioned in the previous section, planners have an interest in developing walkable neighbourhood centres in order to foster equitable access to essential goods and services. For those who have ready access to a car, it is easy to get to a grocery store. However, as a result of diminished local supply of these basic services and lack of personal transportation resources such as the private vehicle, low-income families can face significant barriers in meeting basic needs in their daily lives (Clifton, 2003). Increasing the viability of local shopping can support nutritional health as well as enhance quality of life by alleviating the need for extraordinary efforts to acquire food.

**Contributions to our Understanding of Grocery Store Access**

The previous section described how grocery store access fits into the planning objective to create walkable neighbourhood centres. However the planning agenda to create walkable neighbourhood centres can also contribute to our understanding of grocery store access:

1. **Refining what Grocery Access Means**— The literature on neighbourhood design can offer a more nuanced understanding of accessibility and the factors shaping grocery store access. Empirical studies that have looked at the correlates of walking have shown that there are features of the pedestrian environment that are positively associated with walking. For example, the existence and continuity of the sidewalk, perceived safety of the intersections, and the pleasantness of the surroundings can all determine whether or not somebody chooses to walk to the grocery store (Frank et al., 2003). Thus, the literature illustrates how elements of the pedestrian realm can impact access. The previous chapter showed that in many empirical studies of grocery access, accessibility has been measured using a simple radius of 500 meters. By understanding how the pedestrian environment, not simply distance, can
impact the accessibility of a particular destination, planners can bring a more fine-tuned approach to understanding grocery store access.

2. **Access may mean different things to different people**— For example, the travel patterns of seniors have been shown to be more sensitive to features of the built environment than other age groups. That is, the willingness or ability of seniors to engage in walking as a mode of transportation is more influenced by features of the built environment, such as distance, intersection safety, personal security and sidewalk quality (Cunningham & Michael, 2004). As the population ages, it will be increasingly important to be attentive to features of the built environment that will maximize the accessibility of neighbourhood destinations, such as grocery stores, for people of all ages.

3. **Fostering access at multiple scales.** Fostering walkable neighbourhood centres involves planning action at multiple scales: at the neighbourhood scale, it involves fostering an attractive public realm and fostering development that puts key goods and services near or within residential areas. At a city-wide or regional scale it involves developing policies that focus development in neighbourhood centres and contain development that will detract from the viability of walkable neighbourhood centres, such as edge-of-city big box development. Grocery stores are just one of a number of retail uses that have adopted large store formats. Food shopping can be combined with other shopping trips. In deciding where to shop for food, a consumer may be influenced by the location of other retail destinations and vice versa. Thus, the agenda to foster neighbourhood grocery stores cannot ignore the regional retail context.

4.2 **The Emerging Agenda of Food System Planning**

There is a growing body of literature that argues that, as a profession chiefly motivated by the public interest and geared at improving the future livability of human settlements, planners have a place in addressing the food system. Food is a basic human need, and an important urban system; however it is only recently that it has begun to garner attention by a small number of urban planning professionals (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). The literature argues that planners can play a positive
role in supporting the sustainability of the food system.\textsuperscript{17} The argument for greater planning involvement in the North American food system\textsuperscript{18} rests on two premises: First, planners have a role in advancing urban sustainability. As discussed earlier, sustainability involves balancing economic, environmental and social priorities as well as the needs of current and future generations. Second, the existing globalized food system is unsustainable.\textsuperscript{19}

In contrast, a local\textsuperscript{20} food system is one in which all aspects of the chain of food activities including production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal contribute to the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a locality. A local food system achieves food security,\textsuperscript{21} enhances self-reliance and minimizes harmful ecological and social externalities, supporting health and nutrition, while developing community capacity (Bouris, 2004).

**Grocery Access in a Local Food System**

The food system literature is not prescriptive about the nature of grocery access in a local food system. However the principles of a local food system can be applied to reach the following assumptions about grocery retail objectives:

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\textsuperscript{17} The food system is defined as "the chain of activities connecting food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management as well as all the associated regulatory institutions and activities" (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000).

\textsuperscript{18} This thesis focuses on the North American context. A number of cities in the southern hemisphere have long been addressing food access issues, frequently in response to hunger and poverty crises (Koc et al., 1999).

\textsuperscript{19} Bouris (2004) summarizes some of the evidence that the current, globalized food system is unsustainable: Although agricultural productivity has dramatically increased, millions of people are either undernourished or hungry. Globally, the area of land suitable for agriculture is declining. The income of farmers continues to decline, making it less viable as a livelihood. Water and soil are contaminated by chemicals used in food production. Our fossil fuel dependent food system is threatened by rising energy costs. Corporate consolidation in food production, processing and distribution has concentrated power in the food industry. Obesity and malnutrition associated with over-consumption are on the rise. Consumers are physically and psychologically disconnected from the source of their food, which travels extraordinary distances from production to consumption.

\textsuperscript{20} The food system is not one discrete entity; rather it is a series of systems nested, one within the other, from the household to the global (Bouris, 2004). In this respect, the local food system does not exist apart from the globalized food system, but rather is embedded within it (Campbell, 2004).

\textsuperscript{21} Food security occurs when every community member has access at all times to food that is safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate and personally acceptable from non-emergency sources (cited in Bouris, 2004).
1. *Enhance local self-reliance*-- In the dominant food system, supermarket chains have minimal local ties and can easily come and go (Toronto Food Policy Council, 2000). Local control can be enhanced through: fostering a retail structure that allows for alternative food distribution, such as farmers markets, food coops, field-to-table programs, supporting local food retail as well as local producers. Food retail access should reflect the needs and resources of local residents. Evidence from across Canada suggests that food-related social enterprise can play a strong role in increasing food security and local economic vitality (Barbolet et al. 2005). Social enterprise may also play a role in enhancing local control and food retail access.

2. *Ensure access to quality and competitively priced food retail for all*-- In a sustainable food system, all areas of the community should be adequately served by food retail. Particular attention should be paid to nutritionally vulnerable groups such as people living in poverty, children, people with disabilities, seniors, First Nations citizens, pregnant women and the homeless (Toronto Food Policy Council, 2000).

3. *Fostering a variety of food retail formats*-- There is a wide array of food retail formats such as green grocers, supermarkets, ethnic specialty stores, which are necessary in order to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. A community’s food retail should respond to the needs of the local population.

**Why Planners should be Involved in Local Food Systems**

Because the food system intersects with planning activities in many different ways, planners are already involved in the food system (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). Protecting agricultural land, zoning for grocery stores, promoting food-related economic development and facilitating community gardens are just several ways that planners touch on food issues. However, planners’ roles in food issues are not typically proactive and comprehensive. They do not recognize the links between food and other urban systems. Instead they tend to be reactive and piecemeal (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). Pothukuchi & Kaufman (2000) surveyed 22 planning agencies, to determine their level of involvement in food systems. They asked participants whether they were involved in a range of food issues, for example, farmers markets, community gardens, agricultural land preservation etc. Location of food retail topped the list, with twenty of the agencies reporting some involvement in grocery store siting. However their
involvement tended to be in the course of land use and zoning responsibilities and was
done case by case rather than with a holistic approach to food access.

Food system literature puts forth a number of reasons why planners should be
more comprehensively involved in the food system that can be summarized in the
following five points:

1. *Food is linked to the overarching goals of the planning profession.* Food is a public
good and a basic human need (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). Because planners
are concerned with creating places that meet people's basic needs and protecting
the quality of life within a community, they necessarily should be concerned about
the food system (Abel, 2001). Planners are concerned with creating healthy, livable,
environmentally sustainable and economically vibrant communities. The food
system is important to all of these objectives- it is an important part of the economy,
it is a major source of employment, has direct impacts on individual health, and has
major environmental implications (Campbell, 2004).

2. *The food system is connected to a number of domains with which planners are
regularly involved such as transportation, employment, economic revitalization and
land use.* (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). Food choices account for 20% of all retail
sales, 20% of all service jobs as well as 20% of all car trips (Roberts, 2001).

3. *Planning focuses on important urban systems including their physical, economic,
natural and social dimensions and interconnections.* Land use, housing, the
environment, the economy are all systems to which planners devote attention. The
food system is an unexplainable and noteworthy absence (Pothukuchi & Kaufman,
2000).

4. *Planners who are not aware of food issues will have a negative, not simply neutral,
effect on the food system* (Pothukuchi, 2004). By not paying attention to food,
planners may allow development patterns to take shape that will damage the
sustainability of the food system by, for example, allowing development to cut into
agricultural land.

5. *Planners have the competencies to strengthen community food systems.* Planners
bring an interdisciplinary perspective to food systems. They are trained to think
holistically and analyze the interconnections within and between systems, including
the spatial, social and economic dimensions. They are skilled at engaging the
community in dialogue about their needs and are well-equipped to facilitate, mediate
and build consensus through community-based group processes. Planners are
accustomed to addressing problems at the community-scale (as opposed to the individual or household scale) (Pothukuchi, 2004).

Applying these ideas to the literature discussed in the previous chapter reveals the potential for planning's contribution to grocery store access specifically. Planners have the capacity to be able to consider, holistically, how a grocery store is positioned within a particular community. As discussed earlier, there are a range of grocery store types as well as alternative food retail formats, such as farmers markets, ethnic specialty food stores, or commercial streets with a concentration of food retail uses that together may alleviate the need for a full-service grocery. Planners are well-suited to engage in community-based processes to collect information, analyze and communicate the particular needs and preferences of a community without applying the assumption that a chain supermarket is always the best alternative.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how grocery store access fits into two planning agendas: 1. Fostering walkable neighbourhood centres and 2. Food system planning. Table 4.1 summarizes the connections between grocery access and these two planning agendas. The discussion reveals that perspectives from these agendas can complement the existing literature on grocery retail access. Planners are well-positioned to engage the community in a discussion of grocery retail needs and preferences. They bring a holistic approach which allows for a more careful consideration of the role particular grocery store formats play in communities and, increasingly, the social impacts of land use decisions. They also can contribute an understanding of the community impacts of urban form. The strong relationship between proximity to a grocery store and walking suggests that planners who have an interest in fostering a walkable community also have an interest in supporting local access to grocery stores. Planning perspectives on the neighbourhood design elements that influence walkability can be applied to develop a more nuanced understanding of accessibility which can help to improve access to nutritious food and, more generally, quality of life.

The objective of this chapter was to explore how, theoretically, grocery stores can be situated in planning thought. Subsequent chapters will look at how planners actually address grocery retail access and will build a more applied understanding of how grocery stores figure into planning practice.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walkable Neighbourhood Centre</th>
<th>Food System Planning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the agenda?</strong></td>
<td>Foster a food system in which all aspects of the chain of food activities contribute to the local environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of the locality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How is grocery store access positioned within the agenda?</strong></td>
<td>Grocery stores are an important destination in a walkable neighbourhood. They contribute to health and a more equitable transportation network in which those without vehicles can access important goods and services.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What does the agenda contribute to our understanding of grocery store access?</strong></td>
<td>Elements of the pedestrian environment can shape grocery access. Access will mean different things to different people.</td>
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<td>It is important to consider the regional retail context when considering grocery store access.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Planners have the capacity and are in a function to be able to consider holistically how a grocery store is positioned within a particular community.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>They are well-positioned to engage in community-based processes to understand particular food retail needs.</td>
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CHAPTER 5:  
WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS ON HOW PLANNERS CAN SUPPORT GROCERY ACCESS

Chapters three and four have offered rationale for why planners should be involved in supporting grocery store access. The objective of this chapter is to look at evidence in the literature on exactly how planners can play a role in this area. What are opportunities and constraints facing planners in supporting local access to grocery stores? The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will review the actions planners can take to support grocery access—the findings amount to a series of operational strategies that planners can employ to support grocery store access. The second section will focus on the barriers facing planners in supporting local grocery access. Documents from the City of Edmonton and City of Vancouver were excluded from this chapter as they will be reviewed in greater depth in the subsequent case study chapters.

The literature on the planner's role in grocery store access is far from plentiful. The handful of studies that do exist can be classified into three main types:

1. **Municipal studies and reports** produced in order to discuss a perceived problem with grocery access in a particular city. For example, Madison, Wisconsin and Cambridge, Massachusetts both produced studies that suggest strategies for maintaining adequate neighbourhood grocery stores.

2. **Academic studies that look directly at the role of the planner in facilitating grocery retail.** Literature in this category is minimal and looks mainly at how planners can support grocery access in low-income inner-city neighbourhoods.

3. **Academic research from which we can extrapolate the role of planner in supporting grocery access.** For example, research from the field of food systems planning, addresses the role of the planner in food planning generally. Some of these conclusions can be applied to grocery store access more specifically.

5.1 Opportunities for Planner Involvement in Grocery Access

The literature reveals that the types of activities planners engage in to support grocery access are varied and include information gathering, facilitation, negotiation,
regulation, policy-making and implementation, as well as urban design. From the existing literature on how planners support grocery store access, the role for planners can be grouped into three main categories:

1. Establishing a mandate/policy context for planner involvement in grocery access.
2. Understanding grocery store access.
3. Intervening to address grocery store access.

Each of the interventions identified in the literature will be classified and discussed according to these categories. Table 5.1 summarizes the interventions identified in the literature and discussed in this chapter.

Establishing a Mandate and Policy Context

Because grocery retail access is not a traditional area of focus for professional planners, the literature suggests that formalizing planners' mandate to support grocery access through policy may facilitate their involvement in this area.

The Smart Growth literature offers perspectives on how city-wide or regional policy can be used to shape the accessibility of local retail, including grocery stores. Establishing urban growth boundaries and square footage limits on large format stores are ways in which food retail can be concentrated in neighbourhood commercial areas. These policies give planners the regulatory framework to pursue a compact and accessible urban form.

The literature offers examples of municipal policies that attribute special status to food and legitimize planners' involvement in grocery store access. The Toronto Food Policy Council has argued for food retail to be identified as an 'essential service' in the Official Community Plan. This would effectively elevate the status of grocery above that of other commercial services, allowing planners to pay particular attention to grocery store accessibility during the development of a new area or redevelopment of an existing area. If viewed as a mandatory part of developments, planners would then be justified to take measures to address the gaps (Toronto Food Policy Council, 2000).

The establishment of standards for grocery retail access is another mechanism identified in the literature by which planners can define their responsibility to protect local access to grocery retail (Portland Food Policy Council, 2003). Planning standards exist for other services and amenities, like parks and community centres. Neighbourhood
grocery access standards would help set expectations of a minimum level of grocery service and allow planners to integrate them into ongoing planning efforts. The literature offers examples of indicators that can be used to monitor the accessibility of grocery stores, and other basic services. Travel time and distance to bus stops can be used to determine the convenience of traveling to the grocery store. For example, indicators can look at the proportion of people within a ten minute walk of a bus stop, the proportion of people who can get to a food store within forty-five minutes or the proportion of people who are within 500 metres of a food store (SEU, 2003). Setting concrete standards gives planners the leverage to raise grocery access as an issue during planning processes and can act as a measure of success when standards are met.

The literature also pointed to neighbourhood-specific policy which would support grocery access in problematic zones of the city. A study of grocery access in Cambridge suggested establishing districts in which grocery stores are identified as a priority. Within these areas, planners would have the mandate to employ special tools, such as fiscal incentives, to attract retailers (City of Cambridge, 1994).

Building community capacity for citizens who care about food access is another way in which planners can entrench their mandate to address grocery store access (Campbell, 2004). This can be achieved by engaging citizens in planning processes that discuss grocery store access. Many of the initiatives discussed in the following category, understanding grocery store access, would serve the dual function of raising the visibility of grocery access in the community and therefore increase its prominence in the public debate.

Finally, the literature identified organizational structures and institutions that can be created to formalize planners' mandate to address grocery access. For example, a number of cities in North America have established a Food Policy Council with the objective of providing a system of governance through which food access issues can be addressed (Stouder, 2004).

Understanding Grocery Store Access

Pothukuchi (2004) asserts that many planners are not well informed about the grocery retail market in their region and therefore are not equipped to influence grocery access. An important way planners can intervene to support grocery retail is simply by gathering, analyzing and communicating information regarding the grocery industry and
the nature of grocery access issues in their community. Food systems literature highlights that planners are well-positioned to engage the community in a dialogue about local grocery needs. They can therefore become involved convening stakeholders in order to share information and build an understanding of grocery retail issues and actions that can be taken to support the viability of neighbourhood grocery (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000; Burton, 2004).

A number of the interventions discussed in the literature are geared at collecting data and information to assess the needs of the community. This may involve undertaking quantitative studies of the distribution of grocery outlets to identify grocery access gaps in the city. Alternatively, it may involve a qualitative study of the specific needs of a particular area within the city or a sub-population that may be disproportionately impacted by gaps in grocery access (Pothukuchi, 2004). For example, a study done on supermarket access in Cambridge, Massachusetts recommended working with the Council on Aging to assess transportation needs of seniors (City of Cambridge, 1994).

The literature revealed that planners can also build an understanding of grocery access by conducting analysis or organizing processes to identify strategies to support grocery access. Burton (2004) describes how the Food Marketing Task Force was convened in Philadelphia in order to give members of the public and the private sector an opportunity to exchange ideas on strategies to create a positive environment for grocery retail in the inner-city. The objective of the Task Force was to produce a report which recommended short and long-term policies to increased food access in areas of the city presently underserved by food retail (Burton, 2004). Through the multi-stakeholder process, the Task Force was able to identify a range of initiatives that would enhance the public sector's (including planning's) contribution to food access. Recommendations included: working with real estate developers to assemble land, reducing the regulatory barriers to developing in the city and identifying and promoting target market areas to real estate developers and the supermarket industry as high-potential grocery store locations.

The literature revealed that planners can also build an understanding of grocery access by collecting market data and information on the local and regional context for grocery access concerns. For example, studies on the regional and local grocery retail markets will help planners understand and communicate the opportunity for increasing access to grocery. Pothukuchi & Kaufman (2000) recommended planners become
involved in analyzing how existing municipal policies affect elements of the food system such as grocery. They also recommend developing a greater understanding of how food retail relates to other areas of planning. For example, transportation data on the number of shopping trips can offer insight into the importance of grocery retail to transportation volumes. Economic data on the food industry can illustrate the role that grocery retail plays in the local economy.

Intervening to Support Grocery Access

Although planners have limited power to require a grocery store to be established, there are a number of ways in which planners can influence grocery store access. The following section will outline a number of ways identified in the literature that planners can take action to support grocery store access.

Planners can facilitate grocery access through fostering an attractive development environment. Literature suggests that by making available market and demographic information to developers, planners can draw attention to a market opportunity and thereby facilitate grocery retail development. Some studies have critiqued that the market analysis techniques used by the real estate market are conservative and risk averse. Cities may be able to develop methods for market analysis that better capture the retail potential in low-income areas (Stouder, 2004).

The surrounding commercial environment will also impact where a retailer chooses to locate. Planners can become involved in supporting grocery access by fostering a physical environment that supports neighbourhood commercial activity. Along these lines, planners can address issues of safety, security, traffic circulation, parking and other city services that may otherwise pose barriers to a flourishing commercial area (City of Cambridge, 1994).

Development costs and regulatory hurdles have also been cited as barriers to grocery retail development (Burke, 2004). The literature indicates that planners can create a positive development environment through streamlining the development processes and alleviating some of the costs of developing (Stouder, 2004, City of Cambridge, 1994). A Cambridge study recommended providing assistance to developers during the planning and consultation phases of the project in order to alleviate some of the perceived bureaucratic hassles associated with city development. Planners can also help make the permitting process more efficient. A Madison study
discussed the possibility of establishing a permitting category for grocery stores that would expedite the development process.

The literature indicates a number of ways that planners can provide development incentives in underserved areas to offset some of the costs associated with developing in the city. Municipalities can develop incentive packages in order to attract grocery retailers (Pothukuchi, 2004). For example grants, property tax breaks or interest free loans can be offered for grocery retail projects in blighted areas (City of Cambridge, 1994; Bolen & Hecht, 2003). Municipal funding can be made available for equipment upgrades, or for facade improvements (Stouder, 1994). The literature also suggested allowing for the transfer of development rights of some portion of the grocery store floor space, or allowing for some exclusions from the gross floor area calculations to make grocery development more cost-effective (Cambridge, 1994). In some cases there may already be economic development programs in place that planners can use in order to encourage grocery stores. For example, the Madison study discussed the possibility of using Tax Increment Financing Districts to foster infrastructure, such as parking, that will support grocery retail in an area of need (Stouder, 2004). Regardless of the particular fiscal mechanism used, the interventions discussed in the literature aim to make grocery retail development more attractive through alleviating development, and sometimes operational costs.

A number of studies highlighted that a major barrier to developing grocery stores in neighbourhood commercial areas is the availability of parcels of adequate size to accommodate a full-size grocery. Thus, planners can facilitate grocery access through making more land eligible for grocery store development. Strategies discussed in the literature include zoning more land for commercial uses, or assembling land in order to allow for larger parcels suitable for supermarkets (City of Cambridge, 1994).

As discussed earlier, restrictive covenants have been cited as a factor limiting the availability of land for grocery stores. Recently Chicago passed an ordinance which disallowed the use of covenants to limit future grocery uses (Haynes, 2005). Planners can assist in freeing up more land for grocery stores by challenging restrictive covenants that currently limit grocery use on parcels previously used for food retail.

The literature discusses several creative solutions for adding capacity for grocery stores in a neighbourhood. Supermarkets are typically built on large parcels of land. The minimum parcel-size required is in part determined by municipal land use by-laws
which set minimum parking requirements for retail establishments. For example, the City of Los Angeles' planning regulations require supermarkets to provide at least four parking spaces per thousand square feet of retail floor area. As a result, the parking lot for a full-size supermarket can occupy about 57% of the total lot size (Gottlieb et al., 1996). Planners can recommend modifying parking requirements for grocery stores in order to allow grocery stores to open on smaller parcels of land (Stouder, 2004). Gottlieb et al. (1996) discuss how, by agreeing to reduce the parking requirements planners may be able to negotiate with the developer for some other benefit that will also increase access to grocery stores, such as a van service to drive customers to and from the supermarket.

Supermarket chains typically have a standard store format that requires a particular parcel shape and size. The literature suggests that if parcels for grocery stores are in short-supply, municipalities can encourage retailers to adopt alternative formats that will more easily integrate into existing neighbourhoods. Two-story formats and rooftop parking can also help make more land eligible for grocery store development. In Dallas the municipality convinced a chain supermarket to open up several small stores throughout the city rather than one large one (Stouder, 2004).

While the previous interventions have focused on fostering new grocery retail development, the literature reveals that planners can also play a role in increasing the accessibility of existing grocery retail. Special transit routes can be planned to address the needs of the nutritionally vulnerable—particularly in neighbourhoods with low vehicle ownership—connecting neighbourhoods with low grocery access to commercial areas with greater food retail choice (Stouder, 2004; Gottlieb et al., 1996, Bolen & Hecht, 2003). In Los Angeles the City developed a special local shuttle system that aimed to service non-commuter needs in 16 targeted neighbourhoods. Available at a reduced cost of 25 cents, the shuttle routes were established to address the concern that mass transit was high priced and inconvenient for local intra-neighbourhood trips (Gottlieb et al., 1996). In Knoxville Tennessee, the municipal transit agency contributed a full-sized bus to the Food Policy Council which was fitted with shelves for grocery bags. The resulting "grocery bus" serviced low-income housing areas and seniors complexes. The grocery bus proved to be just a short-term solution. Eventually route planning for the grocery bus became too complex. Extending an existing bus route to include a low-income neighbourhood proved a more effective way to improve grocery accessibility. Long-term, the transit agency and the Food Policy Council began working together on
transit route planning (Gottlieb et al., 1996). The literature revealed that similar municipally run grocery services have also been developed in Austin, Texas as well as Boulder, Colorado (Gottlieb et al., 1996).

In some cases, a grocery store may already be accessible by transit, however residents are simply not aware of the transportation options available to them. Stouder (2004) suggests that municipalities can develop outreach programs to educate community members on the transportation alternatives available.

The interventions discussed so far aim to facilitate grocery store access without actually directly requiring that a grocery be located in a particular area. However, the literature also reveals that in some instances planners may be able to have a direct hand in grocery store siting. In the case where redevelopment of a site is already occurring, the municipality may have a natural opportunity to negotiate a grocery store during the rezoning process. (Stouder, 2004). A Toronto study discussed how a grocery store had been negotiated as an amenity during the rezoning process using Section 37 of the Planning Act. Section 37 allows developers to receive density or building height in excess of what is permitted, as of right, in the land use by-law. In exchange, the developer agrees to provide a community benefit. Typically it is used to negotiate parks and community centers or other such amenities during the rezoning process; it has also been used to require a grocery store during the development process (Austin et al., 2004). However these mechanisms may only be used if a site is already being redeveloped and the planner is already at the negotiating table so-to-speak.

There was some discussion in the literature of radical interventions to free up land for a grocery use. If a grocery store is deemed to be in the public interest in an area, a municipality can acquire land and recruit a grocery tenant to lease the land. For example, the Cambridge study discussed the possibility of using a land-taking in order to have access to adequate land for a grocery store in underserved areas (Cambridge, 1994). Similarly, the Madison study discussed the possibility of using eminent domain to condemn a piece of land for the public good, acquire it, prepare it for redevelopment and try to attract a grocery tenant (Stouder, 2004). This is potentially problematic terrain for planners simply because it involves such direct intervention in the private market and involves public investment in a retail use which would compete with private interests.

The literature also offered examples of how municipalities can become involved in supporting existing grocery resources through, for example, providing financial
support for the ongoing operation of a food retail establishment, or providing a loan for a
grocery expansion (Stouder, 2004). In areas in which there are convenience stores that
lack healthy food options, planners can work with retailers to *increase the quality of the
offering at existing stores*. A San Francisco area project by the California Food Policy
Advocates worked to improve the food access for seniors. They identified a retailer
willing to consider offering fruits and vegetables in addition to the existing packaged
convenience goods already sold. They then supported the storeowner by providing
technical expertise, training and equipment to facilitate offering a more nutritional and
fresh line of products (Bolen & Hecht, 2003).

There are several indirect ways that planners can take action to support grocery
access. Some of these interventions are policies or interventions that may have other
primary community objectives but, as a by-product, support access to grocery stores.
For example, developing policies to support traditional neighbourhood shopping streets
may have the affect of increasing the viability of neighbourhood grocery as well. It is an
explicit policy goal of Toronto's Official Plan to protect and enhance vigourous
commercial retail streets that include food shopping and are accessible by foot or transit
(Toronto, 1996).

| Table 5.1 Planning actions to support local access to grocery identified in the literature |
|---|---|---|
| **Category of Action** | **Strategy** | **Examples** |
| Establishing a mandate and policy context | Develop city-wide policy | - Establish an urban growth boundary.  
- Establish retail square-footage limits.  
- Include as an essential service in OCP.  
- Create grocery access standards.  
Develop neighbourhood policy | - Establish grocery zone where grocery stores are a priority.  
Build community capacity | - Engage in community processes to identify grocery access needs.  
Create organizational structures and institutions | - Establish a Food Policy Council.  
Understanding grocery access | Assess needs | - Map grocery outlets across the city.  
- Study the needs of a particular at risk group (e.g. Seniors). |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify strategies</th>
<th>Convene task force of public and private interests to identify ways to increase municipal involvement in grocery access.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Collect market data and information on local and regional context | Assemble information on the local and regional grocery markets.  
- Analyze how existing municipal policies impact grocery access.  
- Collect transportation data on the number of shopping trips.  
- Collect economic data on the role of grocery retail in the local economy. |
| Intervening to support grocery access | Foster an attractive development environment  
- Raise awareness of market opportunity.  
- Improve surrounding commercial area.  
- Streamline the development process.  
- Provide development incentives in the form of grants, tax breaks etc. |
| Making more land eligible for grocery store development | Zone/assemble land for grocery uses.  
- Challenge restrictive covenants.  
- Reduce parking requirements for grocery stores.  
- Encourage alternative store formats. |
| Increase the accessibility of existing food stores | Develop special transit routes.  
- Subsidize delivery service.  
- Conduct outreach to educate residents on transit alternatives.  
- Improve the pedestrian environment. |
| Negotiate a grocery store during rezoning | Negotiate a grocery store as an amenity during rezoning processes. |
| Acquire land for grocery store | Employ a land-taking or eminent domain to acquire land and develop a grocery. |
| Support existing grocery resources | Provide technical assistance and support to convenience stores willing to expand product lines to include healthier foods. |
| Indirect actions to improve access | Foster dense, mixed-income neighbourhoods. |
5.2 Barriers to Planner Involvement in Grocery Access

Although there are a range of strategies to support grocery access, the literature reveals there are also a number of reasons planners are not already more involved in this domain. The following barriers were identified which constrain or are perceived to constrain planners in becoming involved with grocery store access:

1. **Planners lack a clear mandate to become involved in grocery access.** Planners are not funded by the federal government to administer food planning and therefore may not perceive that it is within their realm of responsibility. There is a perception that the market will take care of grocery access and therefore there is no need for planning intervention (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Because grocery retail is typically governed by the market, planners may have difficulty offering fiscal supports which may be perceived to put public and private funds in direct competition (Austin et al., 2004).

2. **Food issues are not seen as urban issue.** Unlike housing or transportation, food is frequently viewed as a rural issue. As a result of the globalized food system, there is no immediate connection between loss of nearby farmland due to sprawl and the food that appears on the grocery shelves. In the minds of many, production and distribution are completely disconnected. Technological advances and efficient transportation networks have allowed food to come from more distant places as agricultural land has been consumed by development. As a result, food is not framed as an urban problem and it is not necessarily a high priority for planners (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999).

3. **Planners lack a centralized organization to address grocery access.** Grocery store access touches on a range of planning areas—land use, transportation, economic development, food systems. However, it does not fit neatly into the area of any one type of planner. There is a lack of a central agency in municipal government to facilitate collaboration amongst planners on grocery access (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999).

4. **Planners lack industry expertise and knowledge of the food system.** Planners may be unfamiliar with the grocery industry and therefore not aware or hesitant to proactively influence grocery store location decisions (Pothukuchi, 2004). The food system is not part of a planner's education. Because it is not an area in which planners have historically been formally involved, the food system is not part of the
mainstream planning curricula. As a result, planners may not feel qualified to become involved in food issues (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000).

5. **Grocery or food access is not a perceived problem.** The dominant food system appears to function just fine. There is adequate food on the shelves in the grocery store; there are emergency food sources for those who cannot afford to buy their own. There is no immediate evidence of a problem (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). In the case of grocery stores, most households own a car and are able to get to the grocery store, even if it is a few miles away. Grocery access is not always a widespread community concern. Unless residents raise food as an issue, planners have enough other more pressing priorities (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000). Because grocery access can tend to have a disproportionate impact on socially disadvantaged groups, there may not be a mobilized community to raise the issue.

6. **The data required to understand grocery access is difficult to collect and maintain.** The information needed to understand grocery access can be time intensive to collect and maintain. Planners may be constrained by the lack of available data. There are few agreed upon standards to determine when grocery access is a 'problem'. Further, there is often no data available on the local pedestrian environment that helps to determine the accessibility of local destinations (Handy & Clifton, 2001).

### 5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a range of actions planners can take in order to support grocery store access, as well as barriers that may impede their involvement in this area. The planning interventions discussed can be grouped into three main categories: 1. establishing a mandate and policy context 2. understanding the issue and 3. taking action to support grocery access. These groups are more permeable than the categorization likely suggests. For example, a planner would continually be refining his or her understanding of grocery access. It would also be easy to assume that there is a sequence to those three categories: first one must have a mandate and then understand the issue before finally taking action. This is likely never the case. In most instances grocery store access is not being treated so exhaustively or systematically to allow for such a structure. The particular strategies appropriate for a community would depend on the local context and objectives.
It is worth highlighting that many of the initiatives discussed above require some level of political will, that is, direction from council, before a planner could move forward. Some interventions are integrally tied to the political process, such as a rezoning, or establishing a new institution like a Food Policy Council. A planner, alone, cannot guarantee that certain strategies will be pursued. They are one agent amongst many in the realm of municipal planning. The extent to which any of these strategies could be achieved would greatly depend on the political context. Sometimes the grocery access strategies involve creating new programs, institutions, processes or organizational structures. However some of the strategies discussed can be implemented using existing tools already at planners’ disposal. For example, a number of studies discussed the possibility of using municipal incentive programs already in place in order to encourage the development of grocery stores. Similarly, Section 37 of the Planning Act in Toronto has been used to negotiate a grocery store as an amenity, illustrating how existing planning tools can be used creatively to support grocery store access.

A number of the interventions suggested are strategies to address dramatic gaps in food access in low-income areas. The subsequent case study chapters will shed light on additional strategies that support local access to neighbourhood retail when the grocery access gaps are less extreme.
Chapter 6: A Review of Municipal Policies and Documents

Chapters five and six discuss the findings from the empirical research undertaken for this thesis. The empirical component of this research is comprised of 1) a review of documents and policies in Edmonton and Vancouver either directly or indirectly related to grocery retail and 2) interviews with planners in both Edmonton and Vancouver. The objective of this chapter is to review the findings from the document and policy review. This will contribute to an understanding of how grocery access has been treated by planning in each of these cities and will serve as useful context for the discussion of the interview findings in chapter six. Before the discussion of empirical findings, a few sentences on the Edmonton and Vancouver demographic context are provided.

Edmonton and Vancouver are both major Canadian cities located in Western Canada. Located in the southwest of mainland British Columbia, the City of Vancouver has a population of 545,671 according to the 2001 census and sits in a region of more than 2 million people (StatsCan, 2001). Vancouver is the largest city in the province of British Columbia. It covers an area of 114 square km. Vancouver is surrounded by water on three sides—Burrard Inlet, English Bay and the north arm of the Fraser River. The city's land has been fully developed for many years. Population growth, largely from immigration, averages 6,000 every year. New housing is created primarily through redevelopment of industrial lands and infill (City of Vancouver, 2006). The population of the City of Edmonton is 666,104 in a region of approximately one million people. It is predicted to grow at a rate of 1% in coming years. Located in the prairies in the geographic centre of Alberta, the total area of Edmonton City proper is about 700 square kilometers of which approximately 8.6% is undeveloped. The total Edmonton Metropolitan area is 9,532 square kilometers (City of Edmonton, 2006). Thus, Vancouver is a geographically constrained, more densely developed city with population growth pressures. Edmonton is geographically less constrained and has developed less densely than Vancouver.
6.1 City of Vancouver Documents Pertaining to Grocery Access

The City of Vancouver documents pertaining to grocery store access can be loosely grouped into two categories: 1. policies and regulations that establish directions pertaining to grocery stores and 2. studies and reports that contribute to existing knowledge on the nature of grocery access in the city.

City of Vancouver Policies and Regulations on Grocery Stores

Zoning for Neighbourhood Grocery Stores

The earliest document found that addresses grocery stores is a 1979 report to Council on Neighbourhood Grocery Stores by the Director of Planning (City of Vancouver, 1979). In this instance, neighbourhood grocery was defined as a small store of 1200 square feet of retail or less, selling groceries as well as convenience goods and services in a residential zoned district. At the time of the report, residential zones throughout Vancouver did not allow commercial uses including neighbourhood grocery stores. This is in keeping with the prevailing approach to zoning at that time, to segregate rather than mix uses. Existing neighbourhood grocery stores were in place prior to the zoning by-law and therefore were legal nonconforming uses. However, because they were nonconforming uses, major renovation and replacement was not allowed and the stores were falling into disrepair or disappearing altogether. Through neighbourhood planning processes, citizens had voiced support for maintaining and upgrading the existing stores. The report laid out several zoning alternatives to support neighbourhood grocery stores and ultimately recommended amending selected residential zoning schedules in order to make existing neighbourhood grocery stores a conditional use.

In describing the rationale for supporting existing neighbourhood grocery stores, the report identified a number of social, economic and environmental benefits associated with this format.

Neighbourhood grocery stores are an asset to the City and to the neighbourhoods within which they are located. They provide convenience goods and services close by; provide income opportunities for family cooperative ventures; and reinforce a conserver society by maximizing use of existing buildings and minimizing use of cars for the convenience buying trip. They also have a historical presence in Vancouver and are an integral aspect of this City's "character". As such, neighbourhood grocery stores should be retained and accommodated.
The report also acknowledged that many local residents—especially the elderly and people without cars—depend on the neighbourhood grocery store for convenience "essentials". Further, the neighbourhood orientation of the stores allowed the services to be tailored to the needs of the surrounding community.

The format of the stores discussed in the report is smaller than the 'full-service' grocery store, which is primarily the focus of this thesis. However, it nonetheless highlights the City’s recognition of the important contributions that grocery stores make to community when they are integrated into the fabric of the neighbourhood: they play a role not merely in the provisioning of food, but also in local economic and community development. The report positions grocery retail on the planning agenda and illustrates that planners have played a role in fostering a regulatory context that allows these uses to flourish. It also points to the emergence of sustainability ideals of fostering development that takes into account social, environmental and economic interests.

CityPlan- Supportive City-wide Policy

In 1995, the City of Vancouver adopted a city-wide policy, CityPlan, which guides city directions and provides broad support for the objective of fostering neighbourhood access to grocery stores. CityPlan provides a broad framework for deciding City programs, priorities, and actions over a twenty-year timeframe (City of Vancouver, 1995). In developing CityPlan, the City engaged Vancouver citizens in a dialogue about the future of their city. One of the key conclusions was that Vancouverites want to live in a city of neighbourhoods, each with its own character. The vision saw neighbourhood centres as the heart of each community (City of Vancouver, 1995). Developed around lively neighbourhood shopping streets, these centres would be places where:

people will find shops, jobs, community services, public places, and housing for various ages and incomes. . . they will . . . attract people from the surrounding area to shop, work, meet with neighbours and friends, and participate in community activities.

The vision also indicated that jobs will be closer to where people live; more office, service, and retail jobs will be located in neighbourhood centres; and walking, cycling, and transit will be prioritized ahead of cars.
Although not mentioned explicitly, grocery store access is aligned with a number of objectives for neighbourhood centres outlined in CityPlan. They are an important retail service and therefore, according to CityPlan policy, should be conveniently located in neighbourhood centres; they can add to a neighbourhood's individual character and local economic vitality, while contributing to a walkable built environment.

*Community Visioning and Implementation - Grocery Access at the Neighbourhood Scale*

The importance of grocery stores to neighbourhood centres was made more explicit through the Community Visioning process. Initiated in 1997, the Community Visions program was developed in order to apply the CityPlan Policy at a neighbourhood level. Using the directions identified through the CityPlan process, City staff work with community members in order to develop a vision for each of Vancouver's neighbourhoods that reflects that community's needs and aspirations. City planners organize and facilitate the process rather than determine the vision. Planners assist community-members in developing a list of options for policy directions that reflects their vision for their neighbourhood. The directions that receive significant support from the community are brought to council for endorsement (City of Vancouver, 2005b). A map of the Vancouver neighbourhoods which have undergone the Community Visioning processes are found in Appendix B.

Of twenty-three neighbourhoods in Vancouver, so far there have been eight Community Visions developed and endorsed by council. The Community Visioning process allowed communities to develop specific policy pertaining to grocery stores. All the completed Community Visions indicate that the City has a role in either retaining existing stores or facilitating the development of new ones (City of Vancouver, 1998, 1998b, 2002b, 2002c, 2004b, 2004c, 2005, 2005d). Table 6.1 summarizes the approved directions from the Community Visioning process. Typically, the policy recognized the key role that grocery stores play in a neighbourhood as community feature and an economic anchor. The detrimental effect of restrictive covenants and big box retailing on neighbourhoods was also widely recognized.
Table 6.1 Approved Directions in City of Vancouver Community Visions on Grocery Stores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood</th>
<th>Policy Direction</th>
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| Dunbar                 | - Retain supermarkets in Dunbar Centre (around 28th) and Dunbar South (around E 41st Ave).  
- Do not permit big box stores which sell groceries, clothing, and other daily needs, where they will negatively impact existing commercial areas. |
| Kensington-Cedar Cottage| - Attract a large grocery store or supermarket at Knight and Kingsway.  
- Do not permit big box stores which sell groceries, clothing, and other daily needs, where they will negatively impact existing commercial areas. |
| Victoria               | - Maintain existing supermarkets and grocery stores.  
- Retain Safeway on Kingsway at Tyne Street (between Kerr Street and Boundary Road) and in Champlain mall (E 54th Ave and Kerr Street). |
| Fraserview Killarney   | - The City, in consultation with the neighbourhood, should work with supermarket owners to identify, assemble, and rezone an adequate site for a conventional size supermarket, in a mixed use development, with adequate parking provided on Victoria Drive  
- The City should act to discourage restrictive covenants from being placed on grocery store sites.  
- Shopping malls, and ‘big box’ stores which sell groceries, clothing, and other daily needs, should not be permitted to locate where they will harm the economic health of the Victoria, Kingsway or Champlain Mall shopping areas. |
| Sunset                 | - The City, in consultation with the neighbourhood, should work with supermarket owners to help ensure a conventional supermarket can stay on Fraser.  
- The City should act to prevent restrictive covenants from being placed on grocery store sites.  
- Major shopping malls, and ‘big box’ outlets which sell groceries, clothing and other daily needs, should not be permitted to locate where they will harm the economic health of the Fraser and Main shopping areas. |
| Hasting-Sunrise        | - The City, in consultation with the neighbourhood, should work with supermarket owners to identify, assemble, and rezone an adequate site for a conventional size supermarket in a mixed use development, with adequate parking provided in the Vancouver Heights shopping area (on Hastings between Cassiar and Boundary).  
- Major shopping malls, and ‘big box’ stores which sell groceries, clothing, and other daily needs, should not be permitted to locate where they will harm the economic health of Hastings Sunrise/North (on Hastings from Semlin to Renfrew), First and Renfrew, Vancouver Heights, or other local shopping areas in Hastings-Sunrise. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Renfrew-Collingwood | - The City should act to discourage restrictive covenants from being placed on grocery store sites.  
- The Safeway supermarket at Kingsway and Tyne is an important anchor for the shopping area and is relatively newly built. The site should be improved to make it more of a neighbourhood focus.  
- In Norquay village (along Kingsway between Nanaimo and Earles) the City, in consultation with the neighbourhood, should work with supermarket owners to identify, assemble, and rezone an adequate site for a smaller supermarket (e.g. Capers, Choices, Marketplace), in a mixed use development, with adequate parking provided.  
- The City, in consultation with the neighbourhood, should work with supermarket owners to identify, assemble and rezone an adequate site for a conventional size supermarket in a mixed use development, with adequate parking provided at three neighbourhood commercial “mini-nodes” (Rupert and 22nd, Rupert and 29th, and Renfrew and 22nd).  
- Major shopping malls, and ‘big box’ stores which sell groceries, clothing, and other daily needs, should not be permitted to locate where they will harm the economic health of the shopping areas at Kingsway/Joyce, ‘Norquay Village’, and the three ‘mininodes’. |
| Arbutus Ridge/Kerrisdale/Shaughnessy | - A supermarket should be added in the Kerrisdale shopping area.  
- A supermarket should be retained in the Arbutus Shopping Centre  
- Major shopping malls, and ‘big box’ stores which sell groceries, clothing, and other daily needs, should not be permitted to locate where they will harm the economic health of the existing shopping areas |
| Riley Park/South Cambie | - Add a conventional supermarket along Main Street, Fraser Street, and Cambie (16th-19th)  
- Additional major shopping malls, and ‘big box’ stores which sell groceries, clothing and other daily needs, should not be permitted to locate where they will harm the economic health of the local shopping areas in Riley Park South Cambie. |

**Community Vision Implementation**

The Visioning process reveals that grocery stores are an important community concern and offers some insight into perceived grocery retail needs in each neighbourhood centre. However it does not reveal how exactly the vision will be achieved. The implementation of the Community Visions is achieved through a separate process. After council has adopted the Community Vision, an action plan is developed. Only Dunbar, Kensington-Cedar Cottage, Victoria/Fraserview/Killarney, Sunset and Hastings/Sunrise have an action plan developed. Of these, only the latter three
reference supermarket development. They indicate that development proposals should be monitored for supermarkets; site-specific rezonings should be considered in order to encourage supermarkets in areas identified as being in need of a supermarket (City of Vancouver, 2005b). Thus, the implementation strategy pertaining to supermarket policy is relatively passive, no specific tools for implementing that aspect of the vision are indicated.

A second way that the Community Visions are brought to life is through the Neighbourhood Centres Delivery Program (City of Vancouver, 2006a). All the Community Visions had directions pertaining to improvements to key shopping areas as well as new housing types. The Neighbourhood Centre Delivery Program looks at these directions together under the banner “Neighbourhood Centres.” The Kingsway and Knight Neighbourhood Centre was the first area to undergo the Delivery Program process. Through extensive public consultation a housing plan and public realm plan were adopted for the area. There is no reference in these plans to supermarkets or grocery stores. The second neighbourhood centre to be implemented is the Norquay Village Neighbourhood Centre in Renfrew-Collingwood. This process is only recently initiated; the kick-off public meeting was held March 25, 2006. The preliminary documents available on the City of Vancouver’s website suggest that grocery may be addressed through this process. The documentation indicates that the Neighbourhood Centre program will provide assistance to business owners and engage residents in special planning for the 2400 Motel site (City of Vancouver, 2006b). This site was identified in the Renfrew Collingwood Vision as a special neighbourhood site and potential location of a grocery store. However, the documentation does not identify what role the City will play in this process and whether the site will indeed include a supermarket.

Policies Guiding Major New Developments

Grocery stores are also discussed in the policy documents for major new developments that undergo a comprehensive planning exercise, such as Southeast False Creek or the East Fraserlands, illustrating that the City has had a hand in shaping grocery retail in new neighbourhoods as well.
Southeast False Creek

Southeast False Creek (SEFC) is an area of approximately 80 acres of former industrial land near downtown Vancouver (Figure 6.2). It is being developed as a primarily residential community that will support the principles of a model "sustainable community". According to the vision documents for SEFC:

Southeast False Creek (SEFC) is envisioned as a community in which people live, work, play and learn in a neighbourhood that has been designed to maintain and balance the highest possible levels of social equity, livability, ecological health and economic prosperity, so as to support their choices to live in a sustainable manner (City of Vancouver, 2004d).

The vision for SEFC includes ensuring goods and services are within walking distance as well as housing that is nearby local jobs. The aim is to develop a complete community which will foster local reliance by having a range of services and activities located within the area to meet daily needs. Once again, neighbourhood access to grocery stores is closely aligned with these objectives.

In the Official Development Plan for SEFC there are several specific provisions about grocery stores. A grocery store is identified as a requisite feature of the future community, both as an important retail use and a generator of jobs and economic

(City of Vancouver, 2005)
opportunities for local residents (City of Vancouver, 2005d). The ODP identifies a specific sub-area in which a grocery store between 858 square metres and 2790 square metres is desired. The size specification illustrates the possibility of using planning policies to direct grocery store formats that remain consistent with community objectives. The plans for SEFC also include provisions for alternative food distribution, such as farmers markets and opportunities for urban agriculture, illustrating the potential for planning policies to take a more holistic approach to food access when identifying the food retail needs in an area.

**East Fraserlands**

The East Fraserlands is also a former industrial area in southeast Vancouver which will be developed over the next twenty years (Figure 6.2). The current vision for the area is a predominantly residential community of approximately 10,000 people. The Policy Statement for the East Fraserlands illustrates how grocery retail can be incorporated into commercial land use objectives for major new developments. A key objective for the area is to develop a commercial area that acts as the “heart” of the community with shops, jobs and neighbourhood services. The policy states that retail should be sized and located to adequately serve many of the daily shopping and grocery needs of the whole Fraserlands area as well as provide employment opportunities for residents. The policy further specifies that although the retail may service adjacent areas to some extent, retail uses which are destination-oriented and draw from a wide area should not be located in East Fraserlands, unless their primary function is local-serving (such as a mid-size grocery store) (City of Vancouver, 2004a).

The policy identifies that a food store should be the major anchor of the commercial area that would be a maximum of 35,000 square feet. A retail study of the East Fraserlands found that the viability of local-serving retail would increase if a grocery store was first developed. Therefore, the policy states that the food store should be developed early in the process because it will be key to attracting residents to the area and other local-serving commercial uses. The store should have its main entrance opening onto the high street in order to strongly reinforce pedestrian and transit access from the high street. Good auto access must be maintained as well (City of Vancouver, 2004a). The East Fraserlands policy illustrates that grocery stores can be used as a tool to make a new neighbourhood. Once a food store is in place, other elements of the
community can fall into place. As with the SEFC ODP, the policy is prescriptive regarding size and format in order to ensure new developments meet the community objectives of developing primarily local serving retail and maintaining a high quality pedestrian environment. Because the East Fraserlands is located in former industrial lands at the edge of the city, it would be a natural location for big box development to occur. The policy documents for the East Fraserlands restricts large format development by characterizing the nature of the food retail that is envisioned for the area.

Figure 6.2 East Fraserlands
Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

(City of Vancouver, 2004a)

Highway Oriented Retail

City of Vancouver policy on big box development has given particular attention to grocery retail. The two Highway Oriented Retail (HOR) areas of Vancouver are along Marine Drive between Yukon and Main Streets (Figure 6.3), and in the
Grandview/Boundary area, on Grandview Highway (Figure 6.4). In 1999, the City adopted a Highway Oriented Retail policy, the objective of which was to provide some limited opportunity for HOR development while continuing to protect the industrial lands. Both policies include special provisions for grocery stores. The initial policies for both Grandview Highway and Marine Drive dictate a special process for big box food stores (City of Vancouver, 1999, 2002). Recognizing the important role that grocery stores play in neighbourhood centres the policy stipulated that any HOR development including the sale of food or clothing required a retail impact study.

In 2002 the Marine Drive HOR policy was modified to remove food retail as a possible HOR use:

The types of uses suited to the HOR area are those not normally found or appropriate in a neighbourhood centre. Neighbourhood centres, usually developed from existing shopping areas, are the "heart" of a neighbourhood. It is here that people find shops, jobs, neighbourhood-based services, public places that are safe and inviting, and a place to meet neighbours and join in community life. . . The proposed use should not undermine the role of nearby neighbourhood centres by drawing customers away from local stores. Food and clothing retail often form the basis of local shopping areas and it is probable that large-scale retailers selling these products will find themselves at odds with City policy. Therefore food retailing is no longer considered as a potential use. . . All types of retail use, except the sale of food (i.e. grocery store), will be considered (City of Vancouver, 2002).

The City of Vancouver has recognized through its Highway Oriented Retail policy that some big box development is more harmful to neighbourhood centres than others; because food retail acts as an economic anchor to neighbourhood centres, permitting big box food retail outlets will have much larger community impacts than, for example, a big box pet store or electronics store. As a result, big box food retail establishments warrant special consideration.
Figure 6.3 Marine Drive Highway Oriented Retail Area
Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

Figure 6.4 Grandview/Boundary Highway Oriented Retail Area

(City of Vancouver, 2002)

(City of Vancouver, 2006)
The policies discussed so far in this chapter address grocery store access in the context of fostering vibrant neighbourhood centres. The City of Vancouver has also become more active in food system planning, which provides additional policy context for grocery store access. In July of 2003, the City of Vancouver passed a motion which formalized a municipal commitment to the creation of a just and sustainable food system.\textsuperscript{22} To move towards this objective a Food Policy Task Force was struck, comprised of councilors as well as representatives from a wide range of municipal and regional government organizations and community groups, many of whom had a long standing involvement in food-related programs in the area. The Task Force developed an Action Plan, approved by council December 2003, which included three main recommendations (City of Vancouver, 2003):

1. Create a Vancouver Food Policy Council (VFPC).
2. Adopt an interim work plan including pursuing a city-wide food system assessment, rooftop gardens, community gardens, farmers’ markets, coordinated food processing and distribution facility for low-income citizens.
3. Creation of City staff positions to support food system goals.

The existence of City policy pertaining to the food system offers support for the importance of food retail. However, grocery stores were not mentioned as a focal point of the Action Plan.

The Vancouver Food Policy Council, which grew out of the Task Force recommendations, developed a number of priority work areas, one of which was "increased access to groceries for residents of Vancouver". According to the Food Policy Progress Report of October 2005, the objective of this work area is to:

- identify and investigate the barriers to grocery access in Vancouver and provide policy recommendations for future actions that can address gaps in food access.
- This may include an exploration of food access issues including the effects of restrictive covenants (placed on former grocery store sites) on retail food access in Vancouver. (City of Vancouver, 2005c).

\textsuperscript{22} A just and sustainable food system is described in the Food Policy Task Force Action Plan (2003) as one in which food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place.
The progress report did not indicate any specific actions that the VFPC in this area except to note that the recently completed Food System Assessment identifies a number of opportunities and gaps in food access and will be used by the VFPC to direct policies and programs.

Vancouver Studies and Reports

The previous section outlined a range of policies that direct City of Vancouver action on grocery retail. City of Vancouver planning staff, in both community planning and social planning, has also produced several reports and studies that address grocery store access. Typically these reports aim to understand the grocery retail context in the City of Vancouver and identify strategies to address grocery retail needs. This section will review these reports and studies.

Report to Council on Supermarkets in Vancouver

In 1998, planning staff developed a report on the distribution of grocery stores in the City (City of Vancouver, 1998c). Spurred by a rezoning application, council had asked staff to report back on the loss of supermarkets in the City, as well as the status of restrictive covenants limiting new supermarkets on sites that have been vacated. The result was a planning report which outlined changes in the food retailing industry in Vancouver between 1980 and 1998. The report, discussed briefly in chapter three of this thesis, concluded that between 1980 and 1998 supermarkets had thinned out particularly on the east side of the City. The presence of grocery stores in neighbourhood nodes had also declined from seven in 1980 to four in 1998. The number of supermarkets in industrial areas had increased from zero in 1980 to four mega-stores in 1998. Of the 14 supermarket sites that had closed during the study period, six of them had restrictive covenants on them. Although the report noted that the trends were concerning, it did not recommend any city-wide supermarket policy at that time. The report offers evidence of planners interest in monitoring the nature of grocery retail in the city including, physical location, size and type of retailer.

Grocery Industry Interviews and Conference

Through the CityPlan process citizen interest in neighbourhood grocery stores had become apparent. In order to better understand the grocery industry and to identify
strategies on how the City could support that aspect of the visions, the Planning Department hired a consultant to hold a series of interviews with representatives of the grocery industry. These interviews were documented in a City report in May of 2000 (City of Vancouver, 2000b). This initiative illustrates an attempt to look at grocery retail access from the perspective of retailers in order to understand the factors influencing the feasibility of conducting business in neighbourhood centres. Participants were questioned on what the City or the local neighbourhoods could do to help the viability of current or future grocery stores.

The responses from the interviews reveal that retailers see a role for the City in improving the commercial environment in neighbourhood centres. They looked to the City to address garbage collection issues, improve safety and security through policing, as well as address difficulties with parking, including creating more spaces and better enforcement of regulations. The costs and hassles associated with commercial development in neighbourhood centres can be reduced by lowering property taxes and by making the zoning and licensing processes more understandable and more efficient.

Following the interviews with the retailers, the City held a mini-conference on grocery retailing in order to bring retail representatives together with some local residents and city staff to exchange ideas on how the City and community might encourage grocery retailing as a neighbourhood service (City of Vancouver, 2000a). The conference proceedings identify a number of ideas that were generated which are summarized in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Key Findings from City of Vancouver Grocery Retail Conference May 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Can the City encourage grocery retailing as a neighbourhood service?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assess how parking impacts grocery stores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Undertake comprehensive research regarding barriers to neighbourhood grocery retailing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regulatory</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improve parking in neighbourhood centres (e.g. better enforcement, allowing parking during rush hours, reducing store parking requirements, reviewing residential only parking requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Allow more residential density above grocery stores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rezone suitable lands to accommodate neighbourhood commercial uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Zone larger parcels to accommodate grocery stores.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Take an active role in addressing restrictive covenants.
- Rezone potential sites to compensate for grocery deficiencies resulting from covenants.
- Improve appearance, safety and security in neighbourhood centres.

_Procedural Improvements_
- Simplify the redevelopment process (eg. zoning and building by-law requirements, permits)

_Fiscal Supports_
- Lower property taxes for small businesses.
- Reduce development cost charges.

_Capacity Building_
- Foster greater consumer awareness through 'Buy-local' campaigns.
- Improve the links between the retailer, the City and the community.

_Transportation Related_
- Improve transit access to grocery stores.
- Improve non-motorized infrastructure, such as bike racks.
- Link greenways and bikeways to grocery stores.

**Food System Assessment**

The Food System Assessment, which grew out of a recommendation of the Food Task Force, is another example of research that has been done by the City to understand grocery retail in Vancouver. The Assessment offers a broad picture of Vancouver’s Food System. The research aimed to develop a food system assessment in Vancouver by looking at the availability, accessibility and acceptability of food provided through the charitable, community and retail food sectors. The report also offers recommendations to guide and support the Vancouver Food Policy Council and other organizations involved in food-related work in the City in moving towards a more sustainable food system (Barbolet et al., 2005). Food retail recommendations were one aspect of the report.

The food retail recommendations highlighted in the report include improving access to retail food through the development of community-based programs that support food access such as co-operative food stores and food-buying clubs; the report also outlined strategies to enhance mobility in order to improve food access including mobile stores, store shuttles and healthier food vending. A number of suggestions were made on how to make the fresh and inexpensive produce of Chinatown more accessible.
to the non-Chinese market surrounding neighbourhoods through better signage and education and outreach which introduces customers to unfamiliar foods.

Aside from the analysis and recommendations specifically focusing on food retail, the report also offers an overall portrait of Vancouver's food system which is pertinent to a discussion of grocery store access. It indicates where food resources are concentrated and where there are gaps. Additionally, it highlights which neighbourhoods rank high in socioeconomic indicators related to food insecurity (e.g. Strathcona/Downtown Eastside, Grandview-Woodlands, Downtown and Renfrew Collingwood) and helps to identify where fostering grocery access may be a higher priority. The report places a strong emphasis on community economic development and the role of community action and social enterprise in addressing gaps in the food system, which may also be able to inform strategies for addressing inadequacies in grocery retail.

In summary, a review of the documents and policies from the City of Vancouver suggests that grocery stores have long been a consideration in municipal planning. The report from 1979 illustrates that planning has acknowledged the important role that grocery stores play not just in provisioning food, but also in reducing the need for travel and fostering community life. Community planning documents from both new and existing neighbourhoods reveals that grocery stores have also been identified as neighbourhood economic anchors and key community features. Between 1979 and present day planning documents have placed an increasing emphasis on the value of mixed use, neighbourhood commercial areas that serve as the heart of community centres. The next section will look at City of Edmonton documents and policies that address grocery stores.

6.2 City of Edmonton Policy and Document Review

The SmartChoices Policy

The City of Edmonton has not generated any policies or reports pertaining directly to grocery store access. However, SmartChoices, a relatively recent policy, offers broad support for land use and transportation decisions that would contribute to local access to important neighbourhood services, such as grocery stores. Adopted by council in March 2004, SmartChoices is a policy to intensify development. It grew out of
concern that growth pressures would compromise the quality of life of Edmonton’s residents (City of Edmonton, 2002).

Although grocery stores are not directly mentioned in the SmartChoices documentation, there are a number of directions included in the policy that lend support to neighbourhood access to grocery stores. The policy objectives include developing a comprehensive transit-oriented development strategy, considering pedestrian-friendly alternatives when making infrastructure and development decisions, developing a neighbourhood re-investment program, as well as developing an approach to redevelopment of underutilized commercial and industrial lands. As the findings in the next chapter will illustrate, the development of the SmartChoices agenda will allow more natural opportunities for neighbourhood grocery access to arise in public discussion.

Restrictive Covenants Council Report

The only City of Edmonton document that directly addresses grocery stores is a recent report to council that was requested by a councilor who, in response to the closure of the Safeway in the Highlands Neighbourhood (Figure 6.5), wanted to better understand restrictive covenants. At an October 2005 City Council meeting, Councillor J. Melnychuk inquired whether the City can apply to the courts to have a restrictive covenant varied or discharged on the grounds that it conflicts with land use planning goals. The councillor also inquired whether a municipal council can request a change in provincial legislation to limit the impact of restrictive covenants on community revitalization.

The resulting report from Planning and Development determined that, according to the Land Titles Act, a Court may order the discharge or amendment of a restrictive covenant if it conflicts with a land use bylaw or a statutory plan and it would be in the public interest to do so. However, the Courts have generally adopted a restrictive approach. In order to prove that there is a conflict between the land use bylaw or statutory plan and the restrictive covenant, the applicant must show that a landowner could not obey the restrictive covenant without violating the land use bylaw or statutory plan. That is, unless the land use bylaw indicated that there must be a grocery store on a site to which the restrictive covenant applies, the covenant is not violating the bylaw. Because land use bylaws and statutory plans do not mandate development, this would almost surely not be the case. The report also concluded that there is no legal reason
preventing the City of Edmonton from requesting that the province change the legislation in order to allow the Courts to discharge restrictive covenants on the grounds that it conflicted with redevelopment goals. However, in order for such a change to be made, there would need to be sufficient political will.

Figure 6.5 City of Edmonton and Highlands Neighbourhood

(City of Edmonton, 2006)

6.3 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to review policies and documents pertaining to grocery retail in both Vancouver and Edmonton. Although there is no overarching grocery retail policy for the City of Vancouver, there are a range of policies and reports that address grocery retail in the City, at a number of different scales. City documents have long explicitly recognized the key role that grocery retail plays in neighbourhood
centres as well as the role that the City plays in developing a regulatory context in which these uses can flourish. At a city-wide scale, CityPlan provides broad policy support for creating vibrant neighbourhood centres with key services close to home. The Community Visions documents illustrate how grocery retail is an important component of realizing the CityPlan visions at the neighbourhood scale and points to the importance of grocery stores to residents’ perceptions of their neighbourhood centres. It is less clear from the City documentation how the aspects of the Visions pertaining to grocery retail are actually implemented. Vancouver’s Highway Oriented Retail policies suggest that planners have supported neighbourhood grocery by restricting food retail in areas that would detract from the viability of local retail. They have refined the big box policy to acknowledge the special role food retail plays in neighbourhood centres. The policies guiding major new developments such as Southeast False Creek and East Fraserlands, illustrate that planners can help shape the character of food access in new neighbourhoods, not just by influencing grocery store size, but also by making provisions for alternative food sources such as urban agriculture or farmers markets. The development of food planning within the City of Vancouver offers additional policy support for food retail to be integrated as a planning concern. The Food System Assessment points to the potential for social enterprise to contribute to a more sustainable food system. Finally, several studies, conferences and reports have contributed to an understanding of grocery retail in Vancouver and possible strategies to support grocery access.

The City of Edmonton has not been as active in addressing grocery retail; there are few policies or documents that address grocery store access either directly or indirectly. A recent report to council on restrictive covenants is the only policy or document available that discusses grocery stores directly. Although grocery retail is not mentioned explicitly, the findings in the next chapter illustrate the recent SmartChoices program provides a policy framework within which grocery retail access could be situated. The City of Edmonton documentation suggests little formal involvement in grocery store access. At this point the reader may begin to wonder, if Edmonton planners have done little to support grocery store access, why choose to study it? The subsequent chapter will reveal that in spite of a lack of involvement in this area, planners may still regard grocery access as a topic worthy of planning attention. The Vancouver and Edmonton experiences together shed light on the factors that influence planning involvement in grocery store access.
CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The previous chapter provided a review of policies and documents from the City of Edmonton and the City of Vancouver that relate to grocery retail; this will serve as context for the present chapter which looks at findings from the interviews with planners from both of these municipalities.

7.1 Perceptions of Grocery Access in Vancouver and Edmonton

In order to understand how grocery retail access figures into their practice, it was important to have some indication of planners' perceptions of grocery access and the extent to which it has been a problem in their community. Several questions aimed to gain insights into this area. The key findings regarding planners' perceptions of grocery access are summarized in Table 7.1.

Is Grocery Access A Problem?

Amongst planners in Edmonton and Vancouver, there was a high level of recognition of the importance of grocery stores. Virtually all of the planners interviewed identified that grocery access is a problem, or has been a problem in the past in their city. However this evaluation was tempered by comments indicating it is not a dire issue. Planners characterized the problem as a subtle one, in need of qualification, rather than an obvious and easily understood issue. Two Vancouver planners commented that overall, the city is well provided for. Grocery access in Vancouver has even improved in the last seven years—there are more grocery stores close to where people live. Five Vancouver planners and two Edmonton planners indicated that it is not a widespread problem, but may be an issue in some specific neighbourhoods. Additionally, planners in both Edmonton and Vancouver acknowledged the greater importance of grocery store access for seniors, children, the disabled and those of low-income who may not have the same mobility to access more distant stores.

Although there is widespread recognition that grocery access may be diminished in some areas of Vancouver and Edmonton, no planner indicated that residents were
going without food as a result. The chief concern of both Edmonton and Vancouver planners was with the neighbourhood impacts. One Edmonton planner stated:

People may still be able to access food; in this sense it is not necessarily a 'problem'. However there is an opportunity to make the neighbourhood a better place. The absence of a grocery store on the site is a problem as well as an opportunity to create a more walkable and healthier community.

Similarly, a Vancouver Planner stated:

Nobody's going without finding a grocery store. But we have found that some of the attributes in grocery stores that we value as planners which in many ways means having them as a kind of heart of neighbourhood commercial centres have been missing from some neighbourhoods. And we all want neighbourhood commercial for local planning.

All Vancouver planners and two Edmonton planners construed grocery stores as an important element of the retail mix in healthy neighbourhood centres. There was recognition that grocery stores provide more than healthy food—theyir role as anchor tenants in commercial areas was widely acknowledged. Several planners noted that grocery retail can contribute to a vibrant public realm. This notion is reflected in the following comment by a Vancouver planner:

Part of what a grocery store does, like a coffee shop does, like a pub does is create a neighbourhood focus and comfortable place for people to go. . . so that the ability to have affordable food services within easy walking distance is as important for the livability and neighbourhood sense as it is for anything to do with health.

In some instances, planners identified that it was not lack of food retail that was problematic, it was the lack of full range of shopping choices—for example, a retail study conducted for the City of Vancouver of the Knight and Kingsway area revealed that the food retail there, which was predominantly Vietnamese, was not serving all nearby residents. Thus, grocery access problems stem not simply from the absence of grocery retail in the neighbourhood; problems can also emerge when the food retail mix does not adequately meet the needs of local residents.

The interviews also revealed that planners' views on grocery access problems are shaped by the community's expectations and perceptions, not necessarily an objective standard of grocery store access. One Edmonton planner commented that although grocery stores in many neighbourhoods in Edmonton are out of walking distance, most residents expect to drive to the store and therefore, the current level of
access was not necessarily problematic. Two Edmonton and three Vancouver planners commented that community members may perceive an access problem, although there is no hard data on to support these perceptions. Particularly, two planners noted that perceptions of poor access can arise when a grocery store closes down, irrespective of the other food sources in the neighbourhood. Thus, the access problem stems more from the perception that a community resource has disappeared than any scientific understanding of grocery access in the area. These perceptions of poor access can be heightened if uses that replace former grocery store sites are perceived by the community to be desirable, such as the flea-market which came to occupy the old Safeway sites at Knight and Kingsway in Vancouver and in the Highlands neighbourhood in Edmonton.

What Does Grocery Store Access Mean?

The interviews also offered perspectives on planners' notions of the meaning of grocery store access. The comment most frequently heard from planners reflected the idea that a full service grocery store where you can buy food and goods for daily consumption should be within walking distance of residents. Three Vancouver planners also added that the affordability of grocery stores should also be considered. Three Vancouver planners stipulated that grocery access involved having access to culturally appropriate food. The interviews also revealed that the meaning of grocery store access will vary from one community to the next, depending on the neighbourhood's needs. As one Vancouver planner described: "There is no one-sized fits all solution."

Role of Grocery Store Alternatives in Access

The interviews revealed that particularly in Vancouver there is a strong recognition amongst the planners that alternatives to grocery stores can play a part in provisioning food retail. A number of Vancouver planners recognized diversification within the grocery industry, not just in terms of sizes and formats, but also specialized types. This was seen to stem in part from growing ethnic diversity in Vancouver. As a result there is a strong place for smaller green grocers and specialty shops that collectively provide for a wide range of shopping choice. One planner highlighted that
areas of Vancouver missing a grocery store still have a wide array of food choice and high level of grocery provision overall:

If you look at neighbourhoods like Victoria Drive, there isn't one single grocery store there, there are a number of small ones. However in the end Victoria Drive comes out as having a lot of food retail relative to other neighbourhoods. We wouldn't want to impose a white way of shopping on ethnically diverse neighbourhoods.

Planners identified that alternative distribution channels can also play a role in food access and can thereby alleviate some of the need for a local grocery store. For example, there is an opportunity for urban agriculture and farmers markets. The benefits of these alternatives identified by the interviewees included greater access to organic foods, increased interaction between producers and consumers, and a more secure food supply.

Although the importance of grocery retail alternatives was widely recognized, planners generally identified grocery stores as the mainstream means to access food. “The majority of the population will continue to go to the grocery store.” Several planners viewed a full-service grocery store to be particularly important for low-income populations. They have an interest in ensuring that they have access to reasonably priced household goods, which may not be available at smaller stores. The product offering and experience at the smaller collection of stores may not meet their needs. The Chinatown market was offered as an example of the limits of ethnic markets in serving the low-income population.

The Chinatown market is huge and yet in a lot of ways it doesn't serve the low income population. There may be issues of racism on both sides that limit its use. And also cultural difference-- what products the Chinese merchants serve, language issues as well as some suspicion that make the low-income population feel uncomfortable in those stores.

Thus, even when a neighbourhood provides cheap access to a range of healthy food, this may not adequately replace some of the services and comfort offered by a full service grocery store.

The Vancouver planners' perspectives on grocery retail alternatives may be best summarized by the comments of one community planner:

Access is about providing a range of options. There are so many different niche markets especially because of the diversity of population and ethnic groups in Vancouver. For some people it wouldn't be a substitute [for a full service grocery store] but for others it is and they don't do much of their shopping at
supermarkets. So it's almost more interesting to keep that diversity of opportunity going.

Table 7.1 Interviewee Perspectives on Grocery Store Access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Stores are important elements of neighbourhoods</td>
<td>Vancouver &amp; Edmonton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A full-service grocery store should ideally be within walking distance of all residents</td>
<td>Vancouver &amp; Edmonton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are issues with grocery store access in some areas of the city.</td>
<td>Vancouver &amp; Edmonton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery store access problems impact seniors, the disabled and low-income more.</td>
<td>Vancouver &amp; Edmonton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery store access is not a dire problem</td>
<td>Vancouver &amp; Edmonton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternatives to large grocery stores play an important role in providing diversity in food choice, but a full service grocery store is still important (Vancouver)</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.2 Planners' Role in Supporting Grocery Access

Planners were asked to discuss the ways in which they have addressed grocery retail through their planning practice. Their responses can be grouped under three main categories which loosely correspond to the questions in the interview script: 1. What policies and mandate support planner involvement in grocery store access? 2. How do planners gain an understanding of grocery access issues? 3. How have they intervened to support grocery store access?

Mandate and Policy Related to Grocery Stores Access

In order to understand the mandate of planners to support grocery store access, interviewees were asked to indicate whether they felt that grocery retail was afforded any special status during planning processes. That is, are grocery stores treated differently than other commercial uses? In neither Edmonton nor Vancouver were grocery stores afforded any official status different than other uses. However, most interviewees from Vancouver (five of seven interviewees) perceived that practically speaking, grocery stores were treated differently in planning processes—they are explicitly recognized as a use in policy. Food stores must go through a particular process that is subject to greater scrutiny. The future of grocery stores is discussed, as one planner put it, in a way that "you wouldn't talk about the future of a London Drugs." Although planners generally felt that grocery retail was treated differently than other
commercial uses, there was no official recognition of special status in policy. Amongst Edmonton planners, all felt that grocery stores were not treated differently than other commercial uses.

Table 7.2 summarizes the range of policies that Edmonton and Vancouver planners identified as being related to grocery access. The Edmonton planners did not identify any policies that directly address grocery access. The SmartChoices program will indirectly address grocery access by looking at neighbourhood quality of life and walkability. One interviewee pointed that Section 3.5.8 of the Municipal Development Plan makes reference to working with multiple layers of government in order to provision food. However she clarified that this is mainly from a social rather than a land use perspective.

Amongst Vancouver planners, several interviewees noted that CityPlan provides the broad policy support for the importance of having grocery stores near where people live. The Community Visions indicate "what people want" and give further direction to planners priorities. It was clear that the mandate was coming from the community itself rather than a staff generated policy:

It comes up in the Visions—staff is not there to advocate, but to facilitate—a menu of options is offered and it depends on whether the community responds to what is on the list. In the Community Visions there is a desire to keep current stores and in some areas communities wish to add new stores.

Four of seven Vancouver planners commented that grocery store access has been influenced through big box policies.

Big box grocery stores are something that are understood to be detrimental. When the first large grocery stores began to be proposed there was a lot of discussion regarding whether they should be allowed in former industrial areas. They decided to not allow big box food. This was very controversial at the time because there was a concern they were depriving residents of low priced foods.

Planners noted that they've generally been discouraging of big box stores at the periphery of the city. Conscious attention has been paid to how big box development relates to public policy objectives and the impact of big box development on neighbourhood centres.

To a lesser extent, several planners mentioned that the City of Vancouver food policy also addresses grocery store access. However planners, both those involved in food planning, and those not, commented that food planning is still relatively new and the place of grocery store access is not clear. It nonetheless is perceived to offer legitimacy to raising food access in the context of other planning activities.
Table 7.2 Mandate and Policy Related to Grocery Store Access Identified in Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CityPlan</td>
<td>Provides City-wide support for developing basic services close to home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Visioning</td>
<td>Allows community members to express specific priorities with regard to grocery retail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big box policy (i.e Highway Oriented Retail) Food Planning</td>
<td>Focuses grocery retail in neighbourhood centres, ensures large format food stores undergo special planning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SmartChoices Policy</td>
<td>Provides policy framework for walkability, which may include grocery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Development Plan</td>
<td>Identifies municipal stake in provisioning food.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Edmonton**

In Edmonton, planners indicated that there have been no particular initiatives that have been taken to study grocery store access. One planner noted that a charrette led by Dan Burden, a walkability guru, had raised the visibility of a grocery access gap in the Highlands neighbourhood. Although the event was not intended to address grocery store access, the public process allowed citizens to voice their concerns over the absence of a grocery store on the former Safeway site.

One planner indicated that a second way that Edmonton planners learn about grocery store access issues is through the community leagues. The Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues is a federation of 148 Community Leagues throughout Edmonton that play a role in advocating on issues that affect communities. In the case of the restrictive covenant in the Highlands neighbourhood in Edmonton the community league was a vocal protestor. It is an important community institution which...
has the power to raise the visibility of community concerns such as inadequate grocery store access.

Planners in Vancouver identified a range of ways in which planners gained insight into grocery access. The supermarket study, conference on grocery retailing and interviews with representatives from the grocery industry, discussed in the previous chapter, were mentioned by four Vancouver planners as one of the ways planners gained an understanding of grocery store access and developments in the grocery business. One planner commented that although the supermarket report was requested by council, once it was completed, council had seemingly lost interest and there was no immediate follow up from it. However, the report was later used to inform some of the Community Visioning work on shopping areas, highlighting the natural place of grocery stores in discussions about neighbourhood centres.

The Food System Assessment\(^2\) was identified by two planners in social planning as one of the ways in which grocery store access is understood. No planners outside of Social Planning mentioned the Food System Assessment directly as an avenue to understand grocery retail access—this may simply be because the Food System Assessment is so recent. It was only finalized in late 2005. Several planners outside of Social Planning indicated that they were aware a study was being undertaken, but were not familiar with the details or results.

The Community Visions were the most commonly cited mechanism by which community planners gained an understanding of grocery access needs. "It comes up through the planning process as you start talking about walking to where you shop." The Community Visioning process helps to raise "site specific awareness" of grocery access problems. For example, during the conversations about Knight and Kingsway, grocery store was near the top of the list of what to do with that site.

The Neighbourhood Centres Delivery Program was identified by one planner as key to understanding the retail make up of Vancouver's neighbourhood centres; The objective of the Neighbourhood Centres Delivery Program is to implement Community Vision directions pertaining to neighbourhood shopping areas including inserting new zones and creating higher density housing around shopping streets and making improvements to the public realm on local shopping streets including retail vitality, pedestrian safety, accessibility and state of amenities. Grocery stores came into the

\(^2\) Discussed in Chapter six, the Food System Assessment is the research on Vancouver's food system which grew out of Food Task Force.
picture when they looked at neighbourhood vitality. They tried to develop a retail mix standard against which to measure each of the neighbourhood centres. In order to do this, they looked at the retail mix in neighbourhoods that were perceived to be performing well and then compared the other 19 neighbourhood centres with that standard. They found that places like Victoria Drive, which lacked a full service grocery store but still had a large amount of food retail, performed very well. They used this retail standard to rank the neighbourhoods and determine which neighbourhood centres were in greatest need in terms of lack of retail vitality, lack of pedestrian safety, lowest amount of street amenities. Through this analysis, it was identified that Norquay would be next in the neighbourhood centres implementation after Knight and Kingsway.

Table 7.3 How Interviewees Learn about and Understand Grocery Store Access

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vancouver</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Visioning process</td>
<td>Neighbourhood planning process which allows issues pertaining to grocery retail to emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Centres Deliveries Program analysis</td>
<td>Analysis of retail mix in neighbourhood centres which points to gaps in food retail as well as deficiencies in the public realm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supermarket report to Council</td>
<td>Assessment of distribution of grocery stores and restrictive covenants in Vancouver which was presented to council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery retail interviews and conference</td>
<td>Process to engage community and grocery retail industry in discussion of how City can better support neighbourhood grocery retail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Edmonton</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkability charette</td>
<td>Public consultation held in the Highlands neighbourhood allowed concerns around covenants and grocery access to emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Leagues</td>
<td>Community organizations in Edmonton which have been important in raising community concerns surrounding development decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interventions that Support Grocery Access

Planners in both Edmonton and Vancouver were asked to identify any planning actions they or their department have taken that address grocery retail. Once again, Vancouver planners had experience with a much broader range of interventions. Table 7.4 summarizes the range of interventions identified by Vancouver and Edmonton planners.

First and foremost interviewees in both Edmonton and Vancouver identified that planners ensure that there is adequate zoning for grocery stores. A Vancouver planner referred to this as “allowing” grocery store access or “not screwing up”. That is, planners have a role in ensuring that the zoning is not restricting the development of desired grocery uses.

However, one Vancouver planner identified that zoning is not always enough; when the development conditions are so constrained, it becomes very difficult for grocery stores to find new locations. Planners also have a role in facilitating grocery store development. This involves investigating the types of problems grocery retail tenants encounter when they want to open a store and paying particular attention to the type of site they need. As an example, she described that when retail store limits were put in the Broadway and Arbutus area in order to prevent large format stores, supermarkets were given a larger limit in order to allow for a medium-sized grocery.

Although they recognize their role in allowing and facilitating grocery store development, a number of Vancouver planners indicated that they have also had a role in restricting grocery stores from developing in certain areas. This is reflected in the general reluctance to approve big box development. Instead they have encouraged developers to come up with creative and flexible solutions in terms of store location and format. Several planners highlighted that there were battles that were hard fought. Initially, the retailers argued that they needed to be able to develop in industrial lands in order to offer sufficient parking; they could not be near residential areas because of noises and odors; they need certain building layouts so that the pillars are not in the way of the aisles. However, there were key landmark developments which broke myths around the needs of grocery store format. For example, the Safeway at Broadway and MacDonald in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood illustrated that people were willing to shop at a store with parking located underground. As one planner described:
This out of the mold solution was extremely successful and led to an awareness that if you restrict development in industrial areas, developers will find another way to exist within the city. Developers realize they have a difficult land use situation and will need to be creative to thrive in the market.

Interviewees pointed to Urban Fare in Yaletown as another precedent-setting development. Until then major retailers were reluctant to locate downtown; at the time, the residential population was not there to support it. However the City was very insistent that the area needed a grocery store. Once Urban Fare became a success it opened up the door for a number of other downtown grocery stores.

Planners identified the rezoning process as a natural opportunity to address grocery store access because this is when attention is focused on gaps in neighbourhood amenities. When large development projects come up, the development planners can work with the CityPlan planners to identify what the neighbourhoods want. One planner used a development in Norquay Village as an example:

There's a large development happening at Kingsway and Nanaimo in the old Elderado Hotel and there's a huge parcel right beside it. There's opportunity to give the developer a density bonus in return for certain things. In this case the developer was asked to include a day care centre and a medium-sized grocery store.

Planners can take advantage of development opportunities to negotiate a grocery store.

During major new developments, planners identified the opportunity to establish a vision for a new commercial area that includes grocery retail. One planner indicated that in these instances, the City has, at times, mandated a grocery store of a certain size to be included (such as Urban Fare in Yaletown). The East Fraserlands development was raised by several planners as an example of how grocery retail expectations have been articulated in policy for new neighbourhoods. There is a commitment to have local-serving commercial that does not adversely affect existing retail but will be an anchor for other commercial activity.

A social planner pointed to the links between social planning and other departments during such major new developments. A senior social planner will sit on the technical planning committee for new developments and consider the social impacts of the development, which could include considerations like food access and walkability. The approval of the senior social planner is necessary on major developments which serves as an important link between social policy and land use.

During the development process planners can also play a role in raising awareness of the role that food retail can play in a community. One interviewee
described how planners play a creative role, showing how food stores can contribute to a lively character in the neighbourhood, highlighting different options for size and form. Food retail can figure into the public realm: it can be a place to go and be. Planners can play a role in the development process of raising the different possibilities for food retail and helping a vision for an area take shape.

Two Vancouver planners also discussed the role of Business Improvement Associations in addressing retail gaps in neighbourhood centres. Planners have a role in supporting grocery retail insofar as they support the development of BIAs. One of the functions of the Neighbourhood Centres Delivery Program has been to help the neighbourhood develop a retail strategy or form a BIA. If the neighbourhood has a BIA, it can market itself to the public and therefore increase the viability of neighbourhood retail. BIAs also help local businesses work together as well as with the city on overall health and vitality of the neighbourhood centre. When there are vacancies, the BIAs are equipped to market themselves to the right kind of merchant, such as a grocery store, where appropriate.

In most areas of Vancouver, the market is attractive enough that the City has significant influence in development negotiations. However, there were two examples offered of how planners have supported grocery store access in areas where the market is seemingly less desirable: First, the City has played a key role in facilitating the redevelopment of Woodwards in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. Planners are making efforts to attract retailers to the site, including a grocery retailer by drawing attention to the market opportunity. However, one planner highlighted “In the end the retailers still need to be convinced by their own research that it will be viable. . . We’re doing everything we can to illustrate the viability in an objective way.” Second, planning staff has supported social enterprise that addresses a grocery access need. In the Downtown Eastside the planning department backed a proposal for a business plan for a community-based grocery store. The concept was to develop a store that could provide both free food and purchased food in the same facility in such a way that it was indistinguishable who was paying and who was not. However, there were concerns that the system being considered, which involved a sort of credit card, would be an invasion of privacy. Ultimately the project lost community support and was never implemented. The initiative nonetheless shows how planners have engaged in discussions to consider creative solutions for meeting grocery needs. The planner involved indicated he still hoped to be able to develop some kind of social enterprise in partnership with a
supermarket, however he emphasized the need for it to be a community-driven endeavor.

Two planners pointed out that the city is unusually well-structured and as such, grocery access has not become a large problem. Thus, decisions about urban form, although made many decades ago, have also supported grocery store access. One planner indicated:

We’re lucky in Vancouver to be pretty much a pre-war city. We’re sort of old urbanist. We’re fortunate to not have as much freedom of choice where you can imprint.

Vancouver also benefits from a legacy of street-fronting retail which has allowed for a diversity of food retail formats. According to one planner, the Jane Jacobs influence of maintaining mixed-use and pedestrian friendly streets resulted in policy which required retail along a lot of commercial street fronts. There have been limited mall-oriented developments in neighbourhoods. Street-fronting retail is highly flexible in its tenancy, unlike a mall which tends to have an overall tenanting strategy. It leaves more room for evolution and diversity in retail uses which has allowed Vancouver’s neighbourhood centres to respond well to changes in the food retail industry.

Table 7.4 Planning Interventions to Support Grocery Store Access Identified in Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zone for Grocery Retail</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring adequate zoning capacity for grocery</td>
<td>Ensuring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stores in neighbourhood areas.</td>
<td>adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit big box development</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing policy that discourages edge-of-city</td>
<td>policy that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food retail outlets.</td>
<td>discourages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate creative building design</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging developers to pursue formats that</td>
<td>developers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will fit into city fabric.</td>
<td>to pursue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate grocery store during rezoning</td>
<td>Using a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a rezoning of significant commercial</td>
<td>rezoning of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development to ensure a grocery store will be</td>
<td>significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>included.</td>
<td>commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a food retail vision in new</td>
<td>Ensuring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neighbourhoods.</td>
<td>developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise awareness of food retail</td>
<td>Drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing attention to how various formats of food</td>
<td>attention to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retail can contribute to the public realm and</td>
<td>how various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community vitality.</td>
<td>formats of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>food retail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Support Business Improvement Associations
Facilitate Redevelopment in Low-Income Areas
Support the Development of Social Enterprise
Promote a Supportive Urban Structure
Zone for commercial

Encouraging neighbourhood commercial areas to take greater control of their own vitality by developing a BIA.
Actively pointing out market opportunities to grocery retailers in the Downtown Eastside (Woodwards).
Assisting the development of community-based initiatives to address specific grocery needs in low-income areas.
Fostering a fine-grained, dense urban form which supports neighbourhood retail and allows for flexibility in local retail uses as the industry evolves.
Ensuring that there is adequate land zoned to allow grocery retail.

7.3 Potential for Further Involvement in Grocery Access

The previous section described how planners are presently involved in supporting access to grocery stores. Planners were also asked to indicate whether they could envision additional opportunities for planner intervention in this area; these are summarized in Table 7.5.

Opportunities for Further Planning Involvement in Grocery Access in Edmonton

All three planners in Edmonton identified that the introduction of the SmartChoices program was an opportunity for grocery stores to appear on the planning agenda. Planning activity has shifted to look more at quality of life issues for the City; the SmartChoices program will allow for more attention to be paid to whether destinations are within walking distance.

Now that council has approved the SmartChoices mandate [planners] are given more flexibility to bring other considerations into the discussion. . . It is not necessarily framed as a question of whether poor people are getting access to food. Instead it is framed in terms of walkability and liveability. . . they are moving in the direction of introducing the issue of access to basic goods.
One interviewee critiqued that most walkability initiatives focus on the physical infrastructure and traffic calming. The other aspect of walkability is ensuring that there are destinations within walking distance. He identified that Edmonton has had real problems in suburban locations where there are high vacancy rates in neighbourhood commercial areas. There is an opportunity to expand the walkability agenda to look more closely at the destinations within walking distance in neighbourhood areas.

One planner suggested a more considered approach to grocery access may be in order. There is an opportunity for the policy planning group, which addresses city-wide policy, to look at the question of grocery access, starting by at least asking the question of whether it warrants a more systematic treatment. Further, there is a need for planners to better understand grocery retail in order to make more informed planning decisions when assessing retail impacts of developments. Planners could map grocery retail in order to gain a more empirical and spatial sense of grocery access. He pointed out that planners have maps that identify fire stations and other basic infrastructure. A map of grocery stores could help to inform the planning process.

Edmonton planners also identified opportunities for information sharing that would allow grocery stores to appear on the planning agenda and contribute to a greater understanding of grocery access in Edmonton. For example, there was interest in having a conference on fostering a walkable community, which may allow for a discussion of whether destinations like grocery stores are within walking distance. Another planner expressed interest in organizing a conference on the gap between planning vision and market realities. The conference would be an opportunity to look at how to reconcile the conflict between on the one hand, the agenda to create self-contained, complete communities and on the other hand trends in the commercial development industry towards large formats and dispersed urban forms. This type of conference would provide a venue to discuss topics like how planners can foster the development of grocery stores in neighbourhood centres.

**Opportunities for Further Planning Involvement in Grocery Access in Vancouver**

Virtually all planners in Vancouver saw some opportunity for greater planning involvement in grocery store access. Although all planners could envision ways to become more active in supporting grocery store access, no planner identified it as an urgent issue or top-of-mind priority. This is consistent with how they viewed grocery
retail access—it's a subtle and not dire problem. General statements along these lines indicated that their understanding of grocery access is very impressionistic. There is a feeling that access is more or less sufficient, but it has not been necessarily supported with studies. Therefore, there are opportunities for planning to be more systematic, or conscious than it has been in the past. This is reflected in the following statement by a City of Vancouver community planner:

The awareness of the importance of grocery retail at the City of Vancouver is fairly high. We've been working more on an opportunistic basis, whether it's through City Visioning, OCP... In theory, there's opportunity to approach the question in a more orderly and organized way.

Several planners specified ways in which grocery retail could be addressed more methodically. For example, they saw opportunities to look more rigorously at commercial zoning schedules to identify possible grocery sites as well as ensure other supports are in place, such as density and parking, to attract and hold grocery stores. One planner expressed interest in cross-referencing the food retail mapping with transit routes to assess the accessibility of food retail by transit. Recognizing the potential for food retail to be part of the public realm and add to neighbourhood interest, one planner suggested reviewing the regulations to ensure setback requirements allow for food displays that create a type of open air market as is found on Commercial drive.

Other opportunities identified by planners involved addressing grocery retail through existing planning initiatives. Food planning emerged as one of the key areas of opportunity for expanding planners' involvement in grocery store access. Vancouver is unique in that it has food policy, which legitimizes raising food access during planning processes. The general impression amongst the planners who mentioned food planning and the Food Policy Council was that it is something new with potential that is still taking shape. The food policy work to date is still chiefly at a city-wide scale, according to one social planner, there is potential to bring the Food Assessment to a more local level, focusing more on the neighbourhood scale. She suggested that molding together planning initiatives from, for example, community planning and food planning can raise the profile of grocery stores.

Along these lines, several Vancouver planners pointed to the need to foster better interdepartmental connections in order to take a more integrated approach to issues like grocery retail. According to one community planner, social planning and the City Plan staff have not talked much. Social planning has been more issue-oriented and
has not had a geographic focus. There is potential for better communication between planning groups in order to find the areas of overlap between topics that may emerge in more than one planning area.

The Social Development Plan was identified by a community planner and a social planner as another opportunity for grocery stores to appear on the planning agenda. Still in its early phases, the Social Development Plan will take a long term and coordinated approach to planning for social sustainability and quality of life in Vancouver. It will provide an opportunity to discuss a range of social development issues to which grocery access is pertinent, such as the social dimensions of transportation or the needs of seniors. According to the social planner, neighbourhood development will likely be one focus of the plan, which will be a natural opportunity for the social dimensions of grocery retail to be addressed.

Planners highlighted the opportunity to work more closely with community groups and the private sector in order to address identified grocery needs. During the implementation phase of city visioning there is real opportunity to work with the Business Improvement Associations, community groups and the private sector to facilitate development of the desired grocery stores. Further, two planners pointed to the potential for and expanded role for social enterprise and local economic development to contribute to grocery access in the form of coops.

Table 7.5 Opportunities for Greater Planning Involvement Identified in Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approach grocery retail more systematically</td>
<td>Vancouver: Look at grocery retail more methodically - may include analyzing commercial zoning schedules, transit accessibility, setback requirements on commercial streets and assess impacts on grocery retail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise grocery retail through food planning</td>
<td>Using food planning as an opportunity to put grocery retail on the planning agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish relevance of grocery retail in the social planning agenda</td>
<td>Using the social development plan as an opportunity to discuss the social dimensions of grocery retail in the context of neighbourhood centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster better connections between different departments addressing grocery retail.</td>
<td>Developing stronger links between various city departments which may address grocery stores in some manor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Develop closer partnerships with the business community, and community sector.

Establish links between SmartChoices agenda and grocery retail.

Pursue grocery policy

Map grocery retail locations

Convene a conference on walkability

Convene a conference on planning vision vs. market realities

Fostering closer connections with the private sector as well as with community organizations in order to facilitate implementation of Community Visions directions on grocery retail.

**Edmonton**

Using the SmartChoices policy as an opportunity to raise grocery retail as a question during planning processes.

Assessing whether or not a city-wide policy related to grocery retail is necessary.

Developing better understanding of grocery access by mapping grocery sites.

Developing a better understanding of how to foster a walkable community, looking at availability of key “destinations” as part of walkability agenda.

Looking at strategies to reconcile the conflict between on the one hand, the agenda to create self-contained, complete communities and on the other hand trends towards large formats and dispersed urban forms.

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### 7.4 Barriers to Planner Involvement in Grocery Access

Planners in both Edmonton and Vancouver were able to identify a number of barriers that prevent them from becoming more involved in supporting grocery store access. Several barriers were mentioned by both Edmonton and Vancouver planners. These will be discussed first before addressing the unique barriers identified in each city.

#### Barriers Mentioned in Both Edmonton and Vancouver

*Planning resources*--The most commonly cited barrier to greater involvement in grocery store access issues was simply time and sense of urgency. Planners have many responsibilities and other priorities that are more urgent than this issue. As one Vancouver planner described “usually there needs to be a real or perceived significant issue to get the resources allocated... I’d love to spend some time on it because I think
it's really interesting, but it's not very high on the list of things that need to be done."
Another planner commented: "I haven't developed a framework for how to think about
grocery access—I recognize the importance of grocery in a retail area, but it's not a
comprehensive framework. It's a complex issue that is not seen as a very pressing
problem. Those are the issues it's better to stay clear of."

Political will-- The planning agenda is largely shaped by the political priorities of the
moment. Both Edmonton and Vancouver planners emphasized that the extent to which
planners can support grocery retail is limited unless there is also council interest in the
topic.

Lack of knowledge or expertise-- A small number of planners in both Edmonton and
Vancouver indicated that they were reluctant to intervene in the retail market because
planners may not be the most qualified to say whether or not a business is viable in a
particular location.

City of Edmonton Barriers

Civic culture and planning mandate-- Edmonton planners indicated that the civic culture
takes a laissez-faire approach to the marketplace which has allowed large format stores
to become the predominant development pattern. The focus for rezoning applications
has been on land use compatibility and transportation impacts; planners do not have the
mandate to intervene in development applications on the basis of social or
environmental impacts. This limits the extent to which planners can engage in a
discussion on grocery retail access.

General policy without planning processes to guide interpretation-- The Municipal
Development Plan, guiding developments in Edmonton is very general and does not
necessarily direct specific planning action. There are no detailed policies, or
accompanying implementation system. As a result it is very open to interpretation and
leaves many key issues related to urban development to the marketplace.

Planning and development processes-- Edmonton planners indicated that the planning
processes in Edmonton do not necessarily give opportunities for grocery access to hit
the planning agenda. Since 1997 the city has been in a period of economic growth; most planners have been doing development processing and not community planning. According to one planner, the system formerly used to proactively consult existing communities largely fell apart. Planners can flag a concern, but generally there is the reliance on the constituency to raise something as an issue through the wards. The imbalance between planning and development as well as the absence of processes that proactively engage the community, restrict the extent to which grocery store access can be addressed by planning.

The development process does not allow planning input on the nature of commercial uses in an area. Once council approves the use of land through rezoning, development of that land is adjudicated by a development officer whose evaluation of a permit application is restricted to determining whether it follows the regulations in the zoning bylaw. As long as a commercial use is permitted under the zoning and it is built according to the bylaw requirements, the development is approved. There is little room for proactive intervention by planners in determining specific commercial uses.

One planner indicated that the retail impact studies conducted during major commercial developments are inadequate. They look at the socio-economic data and determine whether there is a sufficient market for the commercial service but tend to give short shrift to impacts on existing businesses and the communities of which they are a part.

City of Vancouver Barriers

Lack of tools-- After the Community Visions are created, one planner identified that the path to implementation is not always easy. There are not always the tools available to ensure that aspects of the Vision pertaining to commercial uses can be implemented. "Thinking about it as a twenty year plan, you're always hopeful that in two years or ten years we'll have some tools that will enable us to do something. Right now we don't." As a result, the aspects of the Community Vision pertaining to commercial uses are treated on a case-by-case basis without any proactive plan for implementation.

Private market-- A number of planners in Vancouver acknowledged that grocery retail is still a private interest and so there are limits to what can be done. Although planners
can exert some influence over the private market, they cannot force developers to do anything.

Lack of a forum— Although there are a number of planning processes through which grocery stores have emerged as a topic for discussion, there is no forum for it to be addressed more systematically or opportunities for it to be raised high enough in the food chain for it to be addressed.

Data collection and maintenance— Two planners commented that it is time-intensive to track information pertaining to grocery retail such as retail mix, grocery store location or the status of restrictive covenants. As a result, it is difficult to maintain a current understanding of grocery access.

7.5 Planners' Role in Addressing Restrictive Covenants

Restrictive covenants have emerged as a central theme in discussions of grocery store access in both Edmonton and Vancouver. The responses related to covenants have been reported separately here in order to offer a more continuous description of planners' perspectives on this topic.

There was widespread recognition amongst all interviewees that covenants have had some negative impact on grocery store access in areas of both Edmonton and Vancouver. In both cities covenants have received attention from the municipality as a result of public outcry. However, in neither city had the planners become directly involved with restrictive covenants, aside from producing a report requested by council.

Although most planners indicated that they wished there was something planners could do about restrictive covenants, there was a widely held belief was that there is little room for planners to intervene. Unless there is a rezoning happening, there is no forum for it to hit the planning agenda. Ultimately, it's a legal matter between two landowners rather than a planning issue. The enabling legislation would need to be changed to permit greater municipal involvement. One planner indicated that the advice from the law department is frequently conservative, which limits the perceived realm of action.

There were few tools identified by planners to address covenants. One planner suggested they could downzone a site in order to have more control over its
redevelopment. Another indicated that they could encourage the developer to configure a space for a future grocery store so that it can be easily adapted for a grocery store when the covenant lifts. Ultimately in Vancouver and Edmonton municipal intervention on restrictive covenants has occurred at the political level, where councilors and mayors have become involved, rather than the staff level. In neither city has a supermarket chain been forced to remove the covenant. The city can have some political, but not legal influence on a developer. Planners again emphasized the importance of political will. When there is political will, planners also have wider range of tools at their disposal:

When we see something as a corporate priority we can be fairly aggressive about it. And when it’s a medium priority it can take a long time and be very complicated legally. But suddenly if it moves up as a priority politically it’s interesting how we find legal solutions. Solutions can be a combination of both sticks and carrots. We can do court challenges but we can also offer incentives to companies willing to work with us. We can offer density bonuses above stores. That's worth real cash to business.

There is a role for the community in building political will—one planner described that as a result of the attention received by restrictive covenants, people are now more educated about it and interested in land use. They, in turn, can put pressure on politicians.

7.6 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to review the findings from the interviews with planners from both the City of Edmonton and the City of Vancouver. Planners in Vancouver revealed a wide range of ways they have been involved in grocery store access: zoning for commercial, creating policies in both existing and new neighbourhoods, conducting studies, facilitating alternative formats. In sum, Vancouver planners are already quite involved in addressing grocery retail access; planners saw opportunities to approach the topic in a more coordinated way as well as to foster stronger linkages between groups within the City, the private and community sector who have an interest in grocery retail. In Edmonton, planners' primary involvement with grocery retail has been zoning for commercial uses. The main opportunities identified by planners involved finding ways to understand grocery retail needs better and develop strategies to address these needs.
Although the results suggest dramatically different scenarios in Edmonton and Vancouver, there are several noteworthy commonalities between the perspectives of Edmonton and Vancouver planners on their involvement in grocery retail.

1. **Grocery stores are important.** Edmonton and Vancouver planners share a recognition of the importance of grocery stores in their communities. Both Edmonton and Vancouver planners saw that there had been gaps in grocery store access at least in some areas of their municipality. Typically, their concern did not address food access, but rather the neighbourhood impacts of diminished grocery access—a grocery store was seen as an important element of community vitality.

2. **The community plays a key role in putting grocery on the planning agenda.** There was a broad recognition that grocery store access issues are primarily identified by the community. Planners’ perceptions of grocery access needs were largely shaped by input from the community. In Vancouver, it emerged through the Community Visioning process. In Edmonton, the charrette on walkability allowed a grocery store access issue to be identified. When there has been political attention to grocery access, it has been as a result of community concern about the existing levels of grocery access rather than through any sort of systematic research by planners that has revealed a problem. That is, the community plays a key role in placing grocery retail on the planning agenda.

3. **Restrictive covenants have a negative impact on grocery access.** Planners from both cities acknowledged that restrictive covenants had interfered with grocery access in both cities. However, there was a general perception that planners had no leverage to address the issue. Any municipal intervention needed to be taken at the political level rather than by planning staff. So far, restrictive covenants have not garnered enough attention to lead to an aggressive political response.

4. **Political will and planning resources are key barriers.** Planners consistently cited constraints in planning resources as a reason they did not become more involved with grocery store access. They recognize grocery retail as important but generally do not perceive it to be enough of an issue to trump other more pressing planning priorities. Planners also perceived political will to be a barrier to greater intervention. Unless grocery access is perceived to be a priority by the community or politicians, the extent to which they can intervene in grocery issues is limited.
Apart from these similarities, the differences between how grocery stores are treated by planners in both Edmonton and Vancouver are striking.

1. Status of Grocery Stores-- Although there is no explicit city-wide policy on grocery stores in Vancouver, there is a tacit policy that affords them special treatment in planning processes. They are raised as a specific commercial use in planning processes for new and existing neighbourhoods. Planners have not dictated the agenda, but they have given the community an opportunity to comment on their grocery access needs. In Edmonton, grocery stores are afforded no particular status in planning processes. By all accounts, they are treated as any other commercial service.

2. Neighbourhood-scale planning-- In Vancouver, CityPlan offers a strong city-wide framework within which to situate grocery store access. There is a well-developed system of consultation that allows this broad policy to be interpreted at a neighbourhood scale. This has allowed the community to voice concerns and develop policy objectives regarding grocery stores which reflect their community's interests. In Edmonton there is also high-level policy within which to situate grocery retail, however there is no process of consultation to inform how this policy should be interpreted on a local scale.

3. Large format development-- Planners indicated that the City of Edmonton is largely permissive of large format retailing. In contrast, in the City of Vancouver specific efforts had been made to contain big box development and to focus local serving uses, such as food retail, within neighbourhood centres.

4. Social impacts of development-- Planners in Edmonton indicated that historically, they have not had the mandate to address the social impacts of development during planning processes. There was a heavy reliance on community-members to raise issues through the political system, rather than planners to proactively flag social impacts associated with development decisions. The interviews with City of Vancouver planners suggest that they have the mandate to consider the social dimensions of development decisions—the public is proactively consulted through neighbourhood planning processes, social planners are included on major development decisions and a Social Development Policy is under development for the City.
In conclusion, planners in both Edmonton and Vancouver recognize the importance of grocery retail, but their activities in this realm have been dramatically different. The findings from the interviews reinforce that political context is key in determining planning action.
CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters described the key findings from the empirical research. The aim of this final chapter is to discuss these findings in the context of the overarching objectives guiding this research.

This thesis explored the opportunities and constraints facing planners in supporting local access to grocery stores. It looked at how planners are presently involved in supporting grocery store access, investigated the potential for further involvement as well as the barriers which may limit planners’ activity in this area. The following discussion will be organized into three sections.

1. Key conclusions regarding the role planners can play in supporting grocery retail and some of the main barriers faced.
2. Supportive conditions will be identified which facilitate planner involvement in grocery retail.
3. Implications for action for planners and researchers stemming from this research will be identified.

8.2 The Role of Planners in Supporting Grocery Retail

Why Should Planners be Involved in Supporting Grocery Store Access

This thesis asserts that grocery store access warrants the attention of the planning profession. At the outset it was argued that planners have a role in ensuring that certain basic services—such as housing, water and sewage— are adequately provided. As a basic service of urban communities that contributes to individual and community health, grocery stores warrant the attention of planners, particularly when faced with evidence that in some instances grocery stores are not accessible to all people. Literature from food systems planning lends additional justification for planners’ involvement in this area. They have the capacity to be able to consider holistically how a grocery store is positioned within a particular community and within the food system. The empirical research confirmed that planners are uniquely positioned to learn about
grocery access issues and needs through community-based planning processes which ask residents what kind of neighbourhood they want to live in and work to identify strategies for implementation. These processes allow for a more qualitative understanding of access issues which may be lost in empirical research that simply measures the distance to the nearest grocery store.

The case studies also highlight another fundamental reason grocery retail warrants the attention of planners: planners are involved in decisions that have a major impact on the viability of local grocery access—zoning, density, big box policy, set-back requirements. Grocery store access is inextricably linked to urban form; as a result, a discussion of how to facilitate local access to grocery necessarily involves looking at the processes that shape how we build our communities. Pothukuchi (2004) argues that planners who are not aware of the food system can have a negative, not simply neutral impact. Similarly, without planning attention to the grocery retail landscape and recognition of the particular role food retail plays in neighbourhood centres, there is risk that access will be compromised.

How Can Planners Be Involved in Grocery Store Access

Chapter four outlined a range of ways in which, operationally, planners can support grocery retail access. These actions can be divided into three, not necessarily mutually exclusive, categories: 1. developing policy and/or mandate to address grocery retail 2. understanding grocery access and 3. intervening to support grocery access. Within these categories, a number of strategies were identified, from mapping grocery outlets, to zoning more commercial land, to negotiating a grocery store during a rezoning. These strategies amount to tactical roles that planners can play to support grocery retail access. From the case studies of Vancouver and Edmonton, several conceptual roles for planners can also be generalized:

1. Establishing connections within existing policy and planning processes—In both the City of Edmonton and the City of Vancouver, planners were most active in addressing grocery retail within a broader, city-wide policy, such as CityPlan or SmartChoices. Planners can play a key role in establishing the relevancy of grocery retail to broad policy. Planners generally identified that grocery retail is an important, yet not pressing issue; a key barrier was the lack of political will to address grocery
retail more directly. As such, it becomes important to find ways to integrate grocery retail within existing planning processes. These processes are opportunities to build capacity for grocery retail issues as well as gain insights into community needs and preferences regarding grocery store access.

2. *Raising awareness of the role of food retail*—Through their work, planners can reveal the potential for food retail to contribute to community vitality, highlighting how alternative formats can support the local food system as well as enliven the public realm. A large chain supermarket does not always need to be the answer. Planners can raise awareness of the possibilities for food retail during planning processes.

3. *Protecting grocery retail resources*—In Vancouver, planners were involved in shaping the grocery retail landscape by focusing food retail in neighbourhood centres and limiting its development in auto-oriented industrial areas. Planners have an important role in looking at the impact of regulations on grocery retail and drawing attention to regulations which may have unintentional negative impacts on the viability of neighbourhood grocery stores.

4. *Facilitating and negotiating solutions*—The interviews did not reveal any singular tool or strategy for addressing inadequacies in grocery store access. Addressing gaps in grocery store access involves problem-solving on a case-by-case basis and facilitating or negotiating solutions with the private and community sector. The case study of Vancouver illustrates that planners can play a role in questioning assumptions regarding where grocery stores must locate, where the parking must be and how the store must be configured. Planners can help developers to come up with creative solutions to better integrate into the urban fabric.

**Barriers Faced by Planners in Supporting Grocery Store Access**

Unequivocally, the most frequently cited barriers by Edmonton and Vancouver planners alike were lack of *political will* and lack of *planning resources*. Grocery retail is not perceived to be enough of an issue to warrant the planning resources for greater attention. Furthermore, until grocery access is perceived as a greater issue, it is unlikely to garner the political attention to raise it on the list of priorities. This is consistent with
the food system planning literature which has found that planners are not more involved in food planning because it is not perceived to be a significant problem. Planners did identify other barriers, such as lack of tools available to address specific gaps and the difficulty collecting and maintaining information on grocery retail. However the influence of the political context on planners’ involvement in this area should not be understated. As one planner emphasized, when something is a political priority, somehow tools are discovered and solutions are found.

8.3 Conditions that Support Involvement in Grocery Access

The empirical results from Vancouver and Edmonton indicate that Edmonton planners have been far less active in addressing grocery retail. However, during the interviews, all three Edmonton participants expressed a high level of appreciation for the importance of grocery retail as well as interest in supporting it further. The findings suggest several key conditions which facilitate the involvement of planners in addressing local access to grocery stores:

1. Political outlook and support— As mentioned in the previous section, the findings in both Vancouver and Edmonton highlight the strong influence of political context on the planning agenda. In general, Vancouver planners have been able to become involved in certain areas, like food planning, because there is political support. As one planner described, there's a lot of interest in being progressive and continually doing things better.

2. Planning processes— The City of Vancouver has developed planning processes that actively solicit citizen involvement. They are geared at understanding neighbourhood needs and tailoring city-wide policy to reflect the local community's vision. These processes provide an opportunity to understand local access to grocery stores. In contrast, the City of Edmonton has put less of an emphasis on citizen involvement in community planning. As a result, there are fewer opportunities to hear about community needs, such as grocery store access.
3. **Development market conditions**— Influencing grocery retail in Vancouver is facilitated by the conditions of the development market—the market is booming and there are constraints on available land. The City of Vancouver has used this as leverage to encourage developers to be flexible and creative with their store formats. The City of Edmonton does not face the same land constraints. According to planners, the municipality has adopted a pro-development approach and is reluctant to challenge new development proposals on the basis of social or environmental impacts. As a result, planners have less leverage to encourage unconventional store formats.

4. **Urban form and city structure**— The City of Vancouver has a fine-grained urban fabric which was more or less laid down pre-World War II. As such, the existing commercial areas are inherently more accessible. There are more neighbourhoods with smaller street-fronting retail uses. The question for planners then is how they can help those areas flourish. In contrast, planners in Edmonton indicated the predominance of auto-oriented large format development which is less flexible in its use and less accessible to those not traveling by car.

### 8.4 Implications for Action

The conclusions from this thesis point to several areas of action in the realm of planning and academic research:

1. **Including grocery retail into existing planning processes**— It has been shown that grocery retail intersects with multiple planning agendas. The most immediate opportunity for planners is to begin addressing grocery access explicitly during established planning processes. Given that planners do not view grocery retail as their most pressing issue and there is not necessarily sufficient political interest to allow for a more coordinated approach, in the near-term this is likely the most effective way to give visibility to grocery retail needs.

2. **Fostering linkages between planning initiatives**— Grocery retail is relevant to a number of different planning areas; the Vancouver example illustrates how food planning, social planning, as well as several different areas of community planning
have all addressed grocery store access in some capacity. Municipal planners should ensure that there is information sharing and coordination between different planning areas to which grocery retail is relevant.

3. **Strengthening the food link in grocery retail planning**-- Although planners have addressed grocery stores in their practice, this study reveals that few have done so from the perspective of food access. In most cases planners approached grocery retail from the vantage of neighbourhood vitality. There is an opportunity to bring a greater presence of food into the discussions of grocery stores during planning processes. The food planning work in Vancouver to date has not focused on grocery retail per se. There is an opportunity for food planning to take a more active role in planning for grocery store access and make grocery retail objectives more explicit.

4. **Strengthening the connection between social agendas and land use decisions**-- Physical land use decisions, like where grocery stores are located, have social impacts. Conversely, social issues, such as food insecurity, have physical dimensions. The connections between social objectives and decisions about the built environment need to be continually strengthened. In Vancouver, making these links will be facilitated by the growth of food planning and the development of the Social Development Policy. In Edmonton, the SmartChoices program may also enable these connections. Stronger links between social objectives and land use decisions will offer greater opportunities for grocery access issues to hit the planning agenda.

5. **Developing a role for social enterprise**-- This thesis does not point to any singular intervention available to planners to spur grocery store development in neighbourhoods where retailers cannot be convinced that there is a viable market opportunity. There is an opportunity for community-based solutions in the form of social enterprise to address this gap as well as a role for municipal planners to catalyze initiatives along this vein.

6. **Understanding neighbourhood centre retail mix**-- The literature on walkable communities stresses the importance of dense, mixed-use development where a wide range of services is within walking distance. However there is little research on
the particular mix of retail uses that comprise a "complete" neighbourhood. More research in this field would offer further support for the importance of grocery retail in neighbourhood centres and may serve to draw more attention to it during planning processes.

7. **Expanding the dialogue on grocery store access**—The findings from this study suggest several avenues for future research. This thesis focused only on the perspectives of planners. The natural next step is to broaden the research to also include community members, retailers and politicians. There is also an opportunity for future research to look at food retail more holistically to include, for example, farmers markets and small specialty food stores, rather than simply grocery stores. Looking more explicitly at the possibilities of various formats of food retail and the different roles they can play in a community, this research could also serve to heighten participant awareness of the social dimensions of land use. Action research, that engages planners, community members and politicians alike in a dialogue on the future of food retail in an area, may be a fitting design for such future research.

8.5 **Conclusion**

The focus of this research was on planners’ involvement in grocery store access in Canadian cities. Neither Edmonton nor Vancouver could be described as extreme scenarios (City of Vancouver, 1998c, Tomic, 2006)—the existing research suggests these cities do not have "food desert" neighbourhoods, characterized by high concentrations of poverty, poor access to food retail, low vehicular ownership and poor transit service. Nonetheless, inadequacies in grocery store access have been identified in each of these cities. Sometimes these issues have been framed as food access issues (Barbolet et al., 2005, Tomic, 2006). More often, the grocery access problems are characterized as issues of neighbourhood vitality or quality of life.

How then, does this research relate to the literature on grocery store access? This thesis has shown that in many cases grocery retail is already a consideration for planners; they generally recognize the importance of grocery stores to neighbourhoods and in some cases have undertaken efforts to assess community needs and develop
policy and strategies to support grocery access. It highlights that grocery store access is not just a *market* problem. Municipalities play a key role in determining the accessibility of grocery through shaping an "accessible" urban structure and public realm that contributes to vibrant neighbourhood centres and allows for a natural evolution of local retail uses. Thus, although planners cannot control the market, they can build communities in which grocery access issues are less apt to occur. Planners are uniquely positioned to understand community needs with respect to grocery access simply by raising food retail as a topic during planning processes. This research did not uncover a 'silver bullet' for addressing circumstances where the market fails to provide adequate food retail. However it does suggest that through a combination of facilitation and negotiation with the private and community sectors, planners can help to find creative solutions to provisioning grocery retail in underserved areas.

Finally, this thesis illustrates that political context is one of the key influences on the role that planners play in supporting grocery store access. It highlights that there is a strong potential to address food access issues by finding key points of intersection with other planning agendas such as the agenda to create walkable neighbourhood centres. There is growing attention to the ways in which planners can support health through the built environment. As the planning purview expands to include areas traditionally outside of the jurisdiction of municipal planners, such as food and health, it will be important to identify intersections with existing planning activities in order to functionally integrate these areas into land use decisions.
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APPENDIX A
SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. From your perspective, has your municipality encountered problems with the adequacy of grocery store access? If yes, please describe the nature of the problems.

2. How did you learn about the grocery access problems?

3. What does "grocery store access" mean to you?

4. How would you describe the different ways in which staff in your area are currently involved with or influence the accessibility of grocery retail?

5. Does your department have any implicit or explicit policies or standards that address grocery access?

6. Do you feel that grocery stores are attributed any special status during planning processes (relative to other commercial services)?

7. Has your municipality encountered problems resulting from the use of restrictive covenants?
   a. Do you think that restrictive covenants have had a negative impact on neighbourhood grocery retail in your city?
   b. What are the mechanisms available to the city to deal with restrictive covenants that are perceived to negatively affect the community?

8. Do you feel that there is need/opportunity for greater intervention of planners/municipal staff in supporting access to grocery stores? If yes, in what ways?

9. What are the barriers facing planners/municipal staff wishing to support grocery store access?
APPENDIX B
MAPS OF VANCOUVER COMMUNITY VISIONING
NEIGHBOURHOODS

Figure A.1 Vancouver Neighbourhoods

(City of Vancouver, 2006)
Figure A.2 Dunbar Community Vision Area

Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

(City of Vancouver, 1998)
Figure A.3 Kensington-Cedar Cottage Community Vision Area

(City of Vancouver, 1998)
Figure A.4 Victoria Fraserview Killarney Community Vision Area

Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

(City of Vancouver, 2002c)
Figure A.5 Sunset Community Vision Area

Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

(City of Vancouver, 2002b)
Figure A.6 Hastings Sunrise Community Vision Area

Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

(City of Vancouver, 2004b)
Figure A.7 Renfrew Collingwood Community Area
Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

(City of Vancouver, 2004c)
Figure A.8 Arbutus Ridge/Kerrisdale/Shawghnessy Community Vision Area

Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

(City of Vancouver, 2005)
Figure A.9 Riley Park/South Cambie Community Vision
Used with permission of the City of Vancouver Planning Department

(City of Vancouver, 2005d)