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Greater Chicago Food Depository unveils bold plan for new meal preparation facility

Expanded Archer Heights campus will also feature a nutrition education center, workforce development programs and community cafe

Chicago – The Greater Chicago Food Depository plans to build a new 40,000-square-foot meal preparation kitchen to make nutritious, high-quality meals for older adults and people with disabilities.

The meal preparation kitchen will be built in the lot adjacent to the Food Depository’s headquarters and warehouse in the Archer Heights neighborhood on Chicago’s Southwest Side. The two facilities will be connected by another new building that will house a nutrition education center and community café – creating a campus for community partners and volunteers who are committed to ending hunger in Chicago and throughout Cook County.

The project is estimated to cost about \$50 million, including the cost of programmatic expansion. Pending city approval, the Food Depository plans to break ground by Summer 2020 and begin operations by Summer 2021.

Ultimately, the success of this bold project will depend on the philanthropic support of the community.

“This is about more than a building,” said Kate Maehr, the Food Depository’s executive director and CEO. “This is about fulfilling our mission to end hunger. Together, as a community, we can and must do more to help people who struggle to access nutritious meals.”

The expansion into meal preparation also presents the opportunity to grow the Food Depository’s workforce development program. Some of the jobs created at the new facility likely

will be transitional jobs offered through Chicago's Community Kitchens, the Food Depository's job training program that has helped lift people out of poverty for more than 20 years. In these transitional jobs, Chicago's Community Kitchens graduates will receive additional support before pursuing their careers in the food industry.

Workforce development will also be a primary focus in the growing of food outside. The Food Depository plans to partner with an urban gardening nonprofit to grow food for preparation in the nutrition education center. No further details on that partnership are available at this time.

The nutrition education center housed in the connecting building – linking the Food Depository's existing headquarters to the new meal kitchen – will feature a demonstration kitchen for classes on how to prepare healthy food for students, healthcare professionals and other members of the community.

The Food Depository's vision for the meal preparation kitchen is well-grounded in research that shows a growing need for prepared meals, particularly among older adults who may have difficulty leaving their homes or preparing their own meals.

As the Baby Boomer generation continues to age beyond 64, the number of older adults living on fixed incomes and facing mobility and health challenges is expected to significantly increase. Recent U.S. Census Bureau projections indicate that the older adult population (65 and older) in Cook County may increase by 48% by 2030.

The Food Depository plans to partner with other organizations on home-delivery of the meals and distribution to community-style meal programs.

Once fully operational, the meal preparation kitchen will produce more than 4 million meals a year.

Currently, the Food Depository is working through the city of Chicago's zoning and permitting process after gaining permission to vacate the portion of Keeler Avenue that runs between the two properties. The Food Depository acquired the property to build the new facility from BNSF Railway in December 2018 for \$3.6 million.

About the Greater Chicago Food Depository

The Greater Chicago Food Depository, Chicago's food bank, believes a healthy community starts with food. The Food Depository is at the center of a network of more than 700 partner organizations and programs – food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, mobile distributions and other partners – working to bring food, dignity and hope to our neighbors across Chicago and Cook County. The Food Depository addresses the root causes of hunger with job training, advocacy and other innovative solutions. The Food Depository is a proud member of Feeding America – the national network of food banks. Learn more at chicagosfoodbank.org

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