

With \$3.2M grant, Woonsocket plans for downtown food hub

By [Jacquelyn Voghel](#) - 02/17/2023



*THE FORMER Aaron's Furniture location, located at 330 Social St. in Woonsocket, is the site of a planned food hub.
/ COURTESY GOOGLE MAPS*

WOONSOCKET – For years, Woonsocket officials have been looking to attract a grocery store into the city, which is considered a food desert.

That remains an ongoing effort, said Mayor Lisa Baldelli-Hunt. But with \$3.2 million in federal grant funding, and a \$793,266 local match, officials are planning to establish a centrally-located hub to support food accessibility and business growth.

Over the summer, U.S. Secretary of Commerce and former Rhode Island Gov. Gina M. Raimondo announced a \$3.2 million grant for business expansion, entrepreneurship and workforce development awarded to Woonsocket

The city has now found a potential site for the food hub at the former Aaron's furniture store building at 330 Social St.

“The City of Woonsocket is considered to be a food desert, so any time we have the opportunity to bring in additional food choices within the city, that’s always something that is top of mind,” Baldelli-Hunt said.

Plans for the food hub are currently very fluid, Baldelli-Hunt said, but she estimates five to six businesses could fill the building, though this number will depend on how much space the individual tenants need.

The hub is open to a wide range of tenants, Baldelli-Hunt said, suggesting a coffee shop, fruit and produce market, flower shop, a satellite store of an existing business and other food vendors as potential vendors the building could host.

Grantee estimates show that the hub is anticipated to create 64 jobs and generate \$200,000 in local investment, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The building acquisition has an assessed value of \$790,000, said Michael Debrousse, director of Planning and Development for Woonsocket.

The one-story facility will require new construction if the sale goes through, as city officials have planned for a two-story food hub. But the downtown location makes it “perfect for our food hub,” Debrousse said, adding that he hopes to see shovels in the ground this year.

The food hub “of course doesn’t fit the needs of a grocery store, but it helps with the needs of healthy food, quick in and out, and it helps with the needs of businesses that could start out and be housed there,” Debrousse said.

The city will continue to search for a supermarket as it works to establish the food hub, Baldelli-Hunt said.

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