



# HAMILTON COUNTY SITE SELECTION STUDY PHASE II

CONTAINER FOOD HALL

AUGUST 2021



# PHASE I

In May 2021, Hamilton County contracted Urban Fast Forward to conduct a site selection study for a container-based food hall concept. Phase I of the project was to identify jurisdictions within the county that would be best suited for this business concept. Phase I resulted in the Hamilton County Site Selection Study, which was completed in June 2021.

Jurisdictions throughout Hamilton County were reviewed and ranked based on geographic constraints, demographic profiles, accessibility, and market analysis. This review determined that the top suitable locations for a container-based food hall are the City of Norwood, Village of Silverton, and City of Cheviot.

# PHASE II

Phase II of the site search process concentrated on these three jurisdictions, identifying potential sites and determining the municipality's willingness to move this type of project forward.

When looking for sites in each jurisdiction, the team used the following criteria to determine suitability.

- Along main business district
- Proximity to complimentary uses
- Adequate size
- Adequate access
- Parking

Being in or proximate to a business district creates a node that both helps drive foot traffic to the site and to the business district as a destination, there-

fore sites must be along or near the community's neighborhood business district. In Norwood and Silverton, that is on or near Montgomery Road. In Cheviot, the business district is along Harrison Avenue. In addition to being within the neighborhood business district, an ideal site should be near complimentary uses, such as other bars and restaurants. Proximity to other food establishments is critical to the success of a new food hall, as it brings consumers seeking out these services.

The container food hall concept is designed to be scalable which allows it to change in size to meet a range of site areas. However, like in traditional building construction, there are still site requirements that need to be addressed. Suitable sites must be a minimum of 6,000 – 10,000 square feet to fit the containers and courtyard space. Permanent utility improvements such as water, sewer and electric are required. Food service pods require outfitting of commercial hoods, ANSUL systems, three compartment sinks, and more.

The site must provide adequate access for customers, both pedestrians and drivers. This means safe pathways, sidewalks, and lighting for pedestrians and sufficient road access for vehicles. Streets also must be wide enough for trucks to navigate and unload for the various vendors onsite.

Parking capacity is another important element of a successful food hall. Acceptable sites need to have space for onsite parking, access to a nearby parking lot or on-street parking. Parking needs to be convenient and easy to navigate for consumers. Access to transit alternatives such as bus and bike share are helpful not required.

Three sites were identified in each of the jurisdictions. They are discussed on the following pages.

# NORWOOD SITES

Norwood's prime sites for the food hall concept are all on or very near Montgomery Road.

## 2078 Mills Avenue



The building at 2078 Mills Avenue is the city's former Safety Lane inspection building. The lot next to the building, the site of a now filled in swimming pool, is part of Victory Park, which hosts many events throughout the year. The building and park sit one large parcel owned by the Norwood's Board of Education. At 8,964 square feet, the Safety Lane building would be large enough to house the containers and limited seating, with space on the adjacent lot for additional seating and gathering areas.

Site Size: 0.86 acres (37,461 SF)  
Ownership: Norwood City Board of Education

## 3855 Montgomery Road



Xaiver University owns the parking lot at the shopping plaza off Montgomery Road at Ivanhoe Avenue. Its proximity to Xaiver's campus and easy access to the Montgomery Road corridor make it an attractive location for this business concept. It is unclear if Xaiver has an interest in selling all or part of the parking lot for development.

Site Size: 3.64 acres (158,558 SF)  
Ownership: XUPROP CO-PLAZA

## 3732 Montgomery Road



The land along the Wasson Way at Montgomery Road is owned by Pond Realty Co., a company affiliated with Joseph Auto Group. The Wasson Way sees thousands of users per day. This location on a new urban trail would be prime for attracting customers to a container food hall. As the trail runs along former railroad tracks, container usage would tie into the history of the site. At present, there is no indication that the ownership is willing to sell the land. However, it remains clear that long-term this site is an ideal location for a food hall concept.

Site Size: 3.75 acres (163,350 SF)  
Ownership: Pond Realty Co.

## DISCUSSION WITH NORWOOD LEADERSHIP

Urban Fast Forward discussed the container concept and potential sites with Norwood Mayor, Victor Schneider, and Norwood Together president, Mary C. Miller. The site of most interest was the Safety Lane building on Mills Avenue. City officials determined that they intended to bank the building for another use and were not interested in moving forward with the container food hall concept in Norwood.



Safety Lane Building at 2078 Mills Avenue, Norwood

# SILVERTON SITES

The top three sites in Silverton are along Montgomery and Plainfield Roads, two of which are in the heart of the business district.

## 7000 Montgomery Road



The Metro Access building at 7000 Montgomery Road has a large parking lot that is noticeably underutilized. It is owned by Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority and has good access to public transit as it is along a Metro bus line. This location has excellent visibility as there is a grade change from the street allowing drivers and pedestrians on Montgomery to look down on the lot as they pass. The grade change may be an issue for pedestrian access. Railroad tracks run behind the lot, offering the opportunity to tie the industrial nature of the container concept into the location.

Site Size: 0.7 acres (30,492 SF)

Ownership: Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority

## 7309 Montgomery Road



7309 Montgomery Road and its adjacent parcels are owned by Italianette Pizza, a popular neighborhood restaurant on Plainfield Road. Currently several parcels are being used as a seating area to compliment the city-owned park at the corner. The remaining parcels make up an informal parking lot that stretches to Silverton Avenue. This site's location at the intersection of the two commercial corridors, near HighGrain Brewing and other similar uses makes it a prime space for the food hall concept.

Site Size: 0.43 acres (18,730 SF)

Ownership: Pizzeria Properties LLC

## 6955 Plainfield Road



This location at 6955 Plainfield Road is the site of Meiers Wine Cellars. While the western portion of the site is active, the lot along Plainfield Road is often empty and not utilized by the company. Usage of this site would be predicated on the opportunity to partner with Meiers Wine Cellars. Further analysis is necessary to determine if the existing liquor license can be shared. Nearby uses include a coffee shop, sports bar and grille, and a city-owned parking lot to south of the site on Plainfield Road.

Site Size: 0.2 acres (8,712 SF)  
Ownership: Meiers Wine Cellars Inc.

## DISCUSSION WITH SILVERTON LEADERSHIP

The Urban Fast Forward team met with Tom Carroll, Village Manager of Silverton, to discuss the potential of a container food hall concept in the village. Though receptive to the idea, Silverton faces two challenges for this concept. Currently, there are not any liquor licenses available, posing a problem for the bar, which is a key element of the food hall. Silverton also has a limited number of sites owned by the village. Though possible, locating the food hall on a non-village-owned site will lengthen the process and increase the overall cost of the project for the village.



**Metro Access Site at 7000 Montgomery Road, Silverton**

# CHEVIOT SITES

Cheviot's top sites sit along or directly off Harrison Avenue. Two are currently owned by the City of

Cheviot, the only locations identified in any of the jurisdictions with existing site control.

## Glenmore Avenue Parking Lot



The parcel at the corner of Glenmore and Gamble is a metered parking lot owned by the City of Cheviot. This lot is located slightly off Harrison Avenue, the city's main street but it is still in the middle of the business district. There is a large city-owned parking lot with a pedestrian pathway across Glenmore Ave. This area of Glenmore and Harrison contain several bars and restaurants, which will compliment a food hall business. City administration has expressed willingness to sell or lease this land for development beneficial to the business district.

Site Size: 0.22 acres (9,583 SF)  
Ownership: City of Cheviot

## 3709 Harrison Avenue



The large public parking lot off Harrison Avenue is in the heart of Cheviot's business district. Owned by the City, this lot is near established bars and restaurant and has excellent street frontage on Harrison. The existing parking lot is well utilized by patrons of nearby businesses. Therefore, removing some or all of these spaces would likely face resistance from business owners and patrons.

Site Size: 1.04 acres (45,302 SF)  
Ownership: City of Cheviot

## 3240 Harrison Avenue



The building at 3240 Harrison Avenue has had several iterations over the past decade. Once the site of Sunshine Cleaners, it was most recently home to The City On A Hill ministry. The building was sold in 2019 to 3240 Harrison Ave LLC and has since been partially demolished. A narrow parcel to adjacent to the building (3236 Harrison Ave) is owned by Jennifer Harrison. This land is vacant and could potentially be assembled as part of a larger site. Though still on Harrison Avenue, this location is further from the main business district than the other two Cheviot sites and sits close to the edge of the City of Cincinnati boundary.

Site Size: 0.32 acres (13,939 SF)

Ownership: 3240 Harrison Ave LLC, Jennifer S. Harrison

## DISCUSSION WITH CHEVIOT LEADERSHIP

Urban Fast Forward's team sat down with Cheviot's Economic Development Director, Carolyn Statkus, and Safety Service Director, Tom Braun. They expressed interest in bringing this concept to Cheviot but do not have any liquor licenses available for use. The bar element is crucial to the food hall's success as it is an income generator for the operator. Without a liquor license, the bar cannot exist. There was no indication that Cheviot is interested in obtaining a license from outside the city.

Of the two city-owned sites, Cheviot prefers the use of the smaller parking lot on Glenmore for the container concept. Though well-located, the size of site will limit the size of the food hall, and not provide space for possible expansion.



**Glenmore Parking Lot Site, Cheviot**

# CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

Urban Fast Forward's work on concept research, the site search process and discussions with municipal leadership have revealed five major considerations that will need to be addressed for success of a container-based food hall concept in any of the jurisdictions.

- Location
- Financing
- Liquor License
- Construction
- Implementation

## LOCATION

A well operated container food hall is often a destination driver, creating and attracting patrons from the community as well as across the region. Part of the primary goal of this report was to identify a location where this concept could locate and benefit not only the operations of the food hall but also the surrounding community. That is why locating the concept in the primary business district is an essential component. The team considered some site options that were within a five-minute walking distance of the district.

## FINANCING

As part of the site search, the Urban Fast Forward team researched other container food halls in the region. Based on comparable projects, development of this concept in the Cincinnati region could range in cost from \$1-1.5 million on the low end. The Hamilton County Community and Economic Development Assistance Program (CEDAP) offers grants for up to \$300,000. Additional

capital will be required through financing, investors, and other forms of funding.

## LIQUOR LICENSE

As discussed previously, a core component of this business concept is a bar which requires a liquor license. Cheviot and Silverton are both lacking available liquor licenses, a hurdle which they and other communities would have to overcome to move forward with this project. There are methods to obtain additional licenses, the most common being an Economic Development Transfer, or "TREX". TREX-ing in a New Liquor Permit is costly and must be initiated by a municipality.

If a municipality, be it Cheviot, Silverton or any other, is going to support this business concept in their jurisdiction, they must have an available liquor license or be willing to obtain one.

## CONSTRUCTION

As mentioned before, the concept is intended to be a permanent structure and will need to be permitted and constructed as such. It will need to follow life safety and Ohio building codes as well as local health department regulations for food preparation and dining areas. The containers will need to be outfitted with appropriate hood ventilation, kitchen and other elements to ensure proper compliance with regulations. Utility services such as water, sewer and electric will need to be provided. Three phase electric service, if not already available, would need to be installed.

Actual site preparation should also be considered. Existing ground conditions such as asphalt or soil should be removed, and the area would require

grading. Concrete pads should be poured and depending on scale and site conditions, deeper foundations may be needed. Like any permanent structure, fire protection should be considered as well as accessibility for handicapped individuals. On the small scale, these can be addressed at lower costs, while scaling to a second floor may trigger the need for additional stairs and elevators for egress.

## IMPLEMENTATION

This covers a wide range of factors but primarily focuses on the question, “Could the concept move forward today?” Site control is the primary determining factor. City or Village control is ideal as it removes the need for negotiation. Alternatively, some property owners may already have partnerships or relationships with the municipality and may also consider the use.

Zoning is a significant factor for non-municipal controlled land. Either way, the team analysis found that while some zoning codes allow for interpretive flexibility for this use, or the ability to follow the Conditional Use process.

Finally, as alluded to above, the preferred operator is one with solid capital, potential investors and operational capacity to execute the development of the concept. This analysis is intended to identify these obstacles for the county, community and for the potential operator.

## CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

Based on the research, analysis and discussions conducted for this phase of the report, Urban Fast Forward advises that Cheviot and Silverton are the best suited to move forward with this concept. Norwood’s leadership has made clear that the City is not interested in pursuing this business concept, they should not be considered as a potential jurisdiction for a container-based food hall. Both Silverton and Cheviot were receptive to the concept and provided potential paths forward.

The next step moves beyond this report and into the hands of these two municipalities in identifying operators and evaluating those operators with potential sites and possible funding opportunities. In order to move forward with the CEDAP application for this year, the jurisdiction will need to have solved the issue of the liquor license. Site control and a funding plan are also critical to advancing this concept. If these considerations are not addressed by the September 7th deadline, it is recommended that partnerships be pursued to prepare for the CEDAP application in 2022. While no “shovel ready” sites were found, there are opportunities in both jurisdictions that can germinate into a project within the next few years.

