

Jackson City Council

SPECIAL MEETING

“Grocery Stores”

January 22, 2026



News by Day.

The Jackson City Council held a special meeting on January 22nd. The council members that participated were A Foote of Ward 1, T Clay of Ward 2, B Grizzell of Ward 4, V Hartley of Ward 5, L Brown of Ward 6, and the entire evening was introduced and spearheaded by K Parkinson of Ward 7, with multiple shouts out to Ward 7 Deputy Clerk Esther Urbina.

The purpose of the special meeting was to seek input about what can be done to get more grocery stores opened in the food deserts throughout the city, particularly after a few vital grocery store and drug store chains had recently closed down. This was the city council's attempt to collect community leaders, grocery store owners, prospective owners, and economic development experts in one room to speak with each other and to answer many of the council's questions. It was introduced in 4 acts:

Act I: We hear from community leaders and local advocates about the importance of having a grocery store nearby and the effects of not having one.

Act II: We talk to the Save-A-Lot manager and a real estate development consultant to figure out what grocery stores need and don't have from the city.

Act III: We talk to a unified force of economic development leaders about what the city can do to help incentivize new businesses.

Act IV: Public Comment

Act I

Featuring Dr. Scott Crawford and Monica Butler. I will do my very best to relay their sentiment. Their full unedited comments are in the video linked in the QR code at the top.

Dr Crawford is a resident of Fondren and a leader in the disability rights community. He says MS remains one of the least healthy states in the union, with diet as a principal factor. His main focus is making sure people with disabilities, the elderly, and those without reliable transportation have access to high quality, cheap produce within walking distance or a very short drive. He's fortunate enough to live right next to a grocery store, but if he didn't he would have no way to live independently. Even if you can drive there are many people that have trouble navigating busy highways and long distances, or they simply cannot afford a ride. He rides JTRAN for all his commuting and realizes it's impossible to expect someone to travel with a family's worth of groceries on a bus in the summer. Delivery is available but it often results in sub-par choices for produce, or it eliminates the ability to go into a store and look for what you want based on how fresh it is. He says there are many people in Jackson that need a grocery store built within a mile of their home, and every neighborhood in Jackson should have one. Another thing he's noticed is that often, produce in the suburbs is cheaper and higher quality, so it's important we maintain prices and quality as we open new stores.

Now welcome Monica Butler. She serves as director of community outreach with MidTown Partners, she is an officer with the midtown neighborhood association, and a board member of the business association of Midtown. She's here to share concerns about the recent closure of Grocery Depot on Fortification St., as well as the recent closure of Walgreen and CVS in that same area, creating an immediate hardship for local residents. "That store was not just convenient, it was essential." It provided access to food and household necessities within walking distance or a short ride. Now that same trip requires multiple bus routes, using a rideshare service, or relying on others to help when they can. This puts a strain on an already limited income and demands choices between food, medication, and other necessities. "This is what a food desert looks like." It contributes to poor health outcomes, increased stress on families, and fewer employment opportunities in those areas. It also places added strain on caregivers and community based organizations. People would also speak with their local pharmacist for information on how to manage their health conditions, which is not possible when prescriptions are delivered. She states that lack of access to groceries, medication, and essential services should not be a barrier to quality of life.

ACT II:

There unfortunately were no active grocery store owners at the meeting but the manager from Save-A-Lot Victor Edwards and Jason Brookens, a local real estate development consultant, were able to give their insight. The conversation was pretty back and forth but I'll do my best to summarize what they talked about.

The council members had a lot of questions figuring out what it was that prospective grocery store owners were looking for in a potential site location. And if we didn't have any of those, what would need to be done to get some potential sites ready. Mr Brookens says he has two prospective clients who are thinking about investing in opening a store in one of Jackson's food deserts. One of the major problems is that grocery store models in cities trend smaller and the only sites that are ready to be re-opened are too large. For example the Roses that recently closed was 57,000 square feet, and the Farmacy Marketplace that specializes in smaller, locally sourced grocery stores operates in about 7,000 square feet. Anything too large would have to be retrofitted which is not enticing to potential buyers.

Mr. Brookens also said large companies will look at the DOT website and see the car counts which are a lot lower than they'd like to see. Councilmember Clay makes a good point that that number does not show the amount of foot/bus traffic a store would get here which would be high.

Mr Edwards was able to provide valuable insight about monthly operational costs, maintenance costs, logistics issues, and employment availability. He says finding help is not an issue, but theft brings up prices, and the quality of the roads makes the location less desirable. His suggestion is to fix the roads and increase the police presence to improve the shopping experience and lower prices. Mr. Hartley took this time to remind him that he can tie his security camera directly into the police headquarter command center.

Over the course of this conversation it became pretty evident that it's very unlikely the city is going to be able to attract something like a Kroger, Whole Foods, or Aldi, with low profit margins being the key factor.

The entire evening included different creative suggestions to start thinking about new and alternative ways to make sure more people in Jackson had fresh food nearby. A couple of these suggestions include a non-profit store model, a co-op model, a city model in which the city might own the building, and be able to subsidize the rent. Later in the meeting we'll hear suggestions of repurposed gas stations and a larger number of farmer's markets. Councilmember Grizzel made a point to remind everybody that shopping at big box stores outside of the city was the main contributor to the issues we're facing now, and that everybody should be prioritizing shopping small and local.

Councilmember Grizzel was pointed and asked someone associated with Farmacy Marketplace to come up and talk. Farmacy Marketplace is a non-profit that opened a grocery store in Webb, MS that works with local beginner and intermediate farmers to help them get integrated into the market. Jada Lee has been working with the organization the last couple months since she has an interest in opening a grocery store in South Jackson specifically and spreading out from there, and says old Walgreens' and the like are really good candidates. She says there is already a vested interest from her and the Farmacy Marketplace non-profit to get a store set up. The only issue now is being confident that there will be funding available with the already tight margins.

Ms Clay asks her to clarify "Funding like startup capital?"

Ms. Lee says startup capital would be nice but also a rent subsidy or even a co-op model where members pay a small fee to help offset costs. There are many different co-op models and no specifics were really discussed. Ms Clay reminded her that the city of Jackson does not have any direct funds to give but federal funds/grants may help.

Act III:

Act III consisted of 3 people who know less about grocery stores, and more about the city's needs and abilities. Jeff Rent, president and CEO of Greater Jackson Chamber Partnership, Christopher Pike, the leader of the Jackson Redevelopment Authority sat and answered questions from the council members, and Angel Brown, The city's new Planning and Development Director as of a month ago. Her department deals with zoning, licensing, permitting, housing, and transportation.

Mr. Pike said he is currently recruiting a grocery store owner to the Farish St. district which is an Urban Renewal Zone under the Jackson Redevelopment Authority. He says at the moment, his client is asking for \$10 per square foot in rent while the market rate is 15-20. He also states that a lot of property is not locally owned and therefore more difficult to discuss deals and make an affordable sale. He says real estate brokers are going to be the council's best resource for finding out how to entice potential store openings.

Ms. Brown says her department would like to focus on keeping current businesses that they have by developing a business retention office. She also said that they were looking into CBDG dollars (the Community Development Block Grant from the Federal Dept. of Housing and Urban Development) to try and raise funds as well as looking into new housing to try and attract more people to the area.

This again is where the discussion runs a little dry for traditional models and the conversation turns to alternative solutions.

Ms Clay mentions that there are multiple colleges in the area that could be used as a resource for studying what would be successful in the area. Mr. Hartley launched a pretty daring question along the lines of "Jackson has pockets where conditions are declining, there's a loss of residents, and an increase in blight. Are there any models that could thrive in those conditions?" This certainly demanded creativity and it was met with tales of vending machine grocery that's being tested in Atlanta, GA. As well as a memory of George St Tavern and Grocery back in the day where there was an attendant, and you would give them your grocery list, and they would bring you back a box with everything you needed. These are both models that would significantly reduce the amount of labor cost and give a store some leeway for expenses. Mr Parkinson reminds us that community leaders are going to be our best resource for learning what is going to work well in different areas.

Mr. Grizzel took this opportunity to remind everyone that consumerism and convenience are the reason we're having such a hard time attracting businesses today. And that shopping local small businesses is the best path forward. And that buying something online and picking it up in the suburbs gives Jackson the bulk of that use tax.

Ms. Brown took this opportunity to remind everyone that there is a website named Engage JXN, where you can find local businesses so you know your dollars are going to support the city. They also have an interest-free \$15,000 loan for new businesses. They also have programs titles Equip JXN and Educate JXN which are entrepreneurship education and financial support programs.

Mr. Pike shares his perspective of never seeming a community come together and fail. And he commends the council for facilitating this discussion and is hopeful in Jackson's ability to fix this issue.

Act IV:

The final section was the public comment section which included two people. Rashad Grey, JPS Educator, building leader for Jackson Federation of Teachers 4402, and a member of the Malcom X grassroots movement. As well as Gwenevier Pevey, a local organizer and member of the Universalist Unitarian Church, the Central MS Democratic-Socialists of America, and head security liaison for the Trans Program of MS. I will do my best to relay their sentiment.

Rashad Grey is pushing back on the assumption that his generation is asking for convenience, and welcomes making sacrifices to see his community thrive. He points out delivery services only started after COVID and it's up to us to break this post-COVID consumerist capitalist system we've been given. He considers this a working class issue, including anyone punching a clock, or getting paid a wage/salary. He appreciates Ms. Clays efforts to push past the business mumbo jumbo and find the concrete answers that will bring more grocery stores to Jackson. After hearing about the necessity of community buy-in for different alternative models, he's confident we can achieve that here, and wants to move on to focus on how they go about that. He pointed to the Riverside Collective, which began receiving grants for youth programming and joined the Tired People's Campaign, a cohort of minority owned businesses promoting health and wellness across Mississippi. They now boast a multi-purpose community center "to develop local gathering, employment, and education opportunities through community engagement and

democratic decision-making." He says one actionable thing we can do as a city is form a street team and canvas local neighborhoods to start learning what people need and what they would want to patronize, similar to how that collective started. We should also form neighborhood committees that can communicate together and enact policy change or present budget proposals.

Gweneviere Pevey was notably the only person to mention farmers markets, and brings attention to the many vacant lots that don't require much startup costs at all to host a farmer's market once a week where community members can come and sell their excess crops alongside larger scale productions. She also shared a story of a young man who was lured away from crime and gang violence through a local farming program. "This is a really big stone that could hit a lot of birds. And from everything I'm hearing it sounds like startup costs, continuation, buy-in, crime, foot-traffic, all of this could potentially be resolved with a network or a large farmers market.

That was the end of the public comment section and the members were dismissed shortly after a lot of thanks given all around.

It's my personal opinion that Jackson residents are in an unbelievably good position to get the city to invest in a local network of low-cost, non-profit grocery solutions that will be owned by people in this city, instead of owned by someone who lives elsewhere with profit as their main motive. I would bet this is a very rare opportunity. Peace out.

-Day