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Local from A1

through and to proceed on its action plan."

Based on the efforts the city has already made with local initiatives and its collection of an engaged group of stakeholders, Salazar said Cottage Grove made the cut above its competitors.

"We hope to use the Local Foods, Local Places initiative to connect and enhance the efforts of these two economic development initiatives – one focused primarily on food, the other primarily on place – into a powerful force for change in Cottage Grove," read the city's application to the program last September.

The application emphasized a strong emerging food sector exemplified by the supporting efforts of Bohemia Food Hub, a local food business incubator and co-working kitchen, and partnered urban renewal projects which have worked to reduce commercial vacancies and invest in downtown improvements.

"We saw that Local Foods, Local Places was the perfect mechanism of trying to link those two things: our economic development efforts as well as the local foods movement that is so focused on the amazing resources that we have in the Willamette Valley," said City Planner Amanda Ferguson, who drafted the application.

Local Foods, Local Places has a record of partnering with communities by supporting local efforts to protect air and water quality, preserve open space and farmland, boost opportunities for local farmers and businesses, improve access to healthy local food, promote childhood wellness and engineer stronger local food economies.

Work with other communities has seen projects which open year-round downtown markets, help schoolchildren grow their own food, plan cooperative grocery stores and develop community gardens.

assistance will be made available to the city as well as a formalized structure to work with a broad range of agricultural, environmental, public health, architectural and economic development experts to help develop an action plan, set goals and identify local assets that can support the local food economy and contribute to downtown and neighborhood revitalization.

"There's a pretty broad range of expertise we can bring in," said Salazar. "They are also directly experts in this process."

The first of a three-stage process is anticipated to begin toward the end of summer or beginning of fall. This stage will analyze the community by holding virtual conversations with a stakeholders and experts. The meetings will include a community-self assessment, goal-setting and workshop planning.

"It will allow the technical assistance team to understand the community context to really meet the community where they are to address their needs around local foods," said Salazar.

Next, the community and assistance team will convene for a two-day workshop, one evening of which will provide the public with an opportunity to give input. A date for the workshop is still undetermined due to uncertainty surrounding the state of the coronavirus pandemic.

"We'll probably wait until we can hold the workshop physically," said Ferguson, adding that virtual options will be available for those who would like to keep socially distanced.

This may place the workshop as late as December, "But that date is still fluid," said Ferguson.

Finally, based on the information gathered from the first two phases, implementation will begin during which the range of program experts will still be available to work through the process.

"Overall, the goals are to increase some community investment in the sustainable, local foods economy, to build on the existing assets and infrastructure in Cottage Grove and then

Cottage Grove Plan
For Cottage Grove, a total of \$25,000 in direct



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to address the local food priorities ... in a way that's both good for the economy and good for the environment," said Salazar.

Implementation of the program's 2018 efforts in Anchorage, Alaska provides a good example of what the program can do, said Salazar, who was involved in the project.

The Anchorage project repurposed an abandoned hospital site, improved access to community gardens and increased a broad range of community investment in the community's goals, Salazar said.

Another case study on the EPA's website points to Huntington, W. Va., where a local foods market expanded to nearly three times its original size after using its Local Foods, Local Places workshop to help with planning. The expansion created space for a small commercial kitchen, cooking classes, agricultural workshops, sustainability programs and other community events as well as generating \$2 million in sales over five years.

As a member of the Local Foods, Local Places steering committee in Cottage Grove, Ferguson is eager to build the city's own catalogue of successes through the networking of a range of local stakeholders.

"One of my personal goals for the city is to really define what the city can do to help this process and help entrepreneurship around food," she said.

education options for youth and inviting developers interested in green spaces as some of the partnership opportunities that may be presented.

Already, Bohemia Food Hub is leading a coalition of local organizations designed to plan and implement support for local entrepreneurs in the food and beverage sector – particularly in the immigrant community. With funding from the Rural Economic Development Innovation initiative, area nonprofit Rural Development Initiatives is providing technical assistance to the program.

It's hoped that workshopping such projects already in place will allow new networks of diverse stakeholders to connect.

In addition to the networking, Hamlin said he saw opportunities for organizations to increase efficiency and commit to waste reduction.

"This effort lines up well with the EPA Administrator [Andrew] Wheeler's priority on reduced waste," he said. "Projects like this have at least an indirect effect of reducing waste."

One of the possible challenges of tapping into Local Foods, Local Places potential will be dealing with the anticipated continuing threat of the coronavirus pandemic, however Ferguson sees a silver lining.

"We're still listed as 'economically distressed' in Cottage Grove and COVID-19 is only going to make that worse," she said. "I think [the program] is going to provide us a pretty unique opportunity to recover from the coronavirus with some new tools and new ideas."

Cottage Grove food carts, for example, have been "overwhelmed" by increased attention since Oregon businesses began restricting service, explained Ferguson. A grant from Business Oregon has enabled the South Lane School District and Bohemia Food Hub to work together to bring a pop-up food truck to high school students, offering a unique environment to teach entrepreneurship.

"In the short term, I can see that at least as a good example," she said.

Partnership opportunities with local health service providers have also

Potential Benefits

Through setting up this architecture, the city is hopeful many of its initiatives currently in progress will find fertile ground to grow.

Projects focused on downtown revitalization, refurbishing the Cottage Grove Armory complete with a commercial kitchen and Bohemia Food Hub support for the local immigrant community are on the list of potential growth areas.

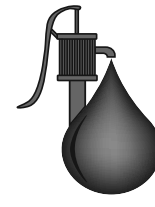
The assistance program is also likely to provide a space for groups and sectors representing a diversity of interests to work together.

Salazar and Ferguson offered possibilities such as linking restauranteurs to local farmers, involving the area's Guatemalan immigrants, providing new ed-

See EPA 9A

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