

H⁹ CASE STUDY:

Sun Fresh Market, Kansas City, MO

OVERVIEW

Kansas City, MO sought to address a food desert by bringing a full-service grocery store to an underserved area. In 2017, the city allocated funds and facilitated the opening of the Sun Fresh market at Linwood Blvd and Prospect Ave to serve the residents. After seven years of operation and multiple funding reinvestments from the city, the store has closed.

HOW CAN FUTURE PROJECTS BETTER ANTICIPATE AND MITIGATE RISKS LIKE THESE?

DETAILS

Kansas City's East Side is a historically underserved area that was recognized as having food deserts. Residents had limited access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats because there were not full-service grocery stores nearby.

Across the U.S., cities are tackling the issue of food deserts which tend to occur in low-income neighborhoods, where private grocery stores are wary of potential low margins. To address this, cities are experimenting with public-private partnerships to open grocery stores providing for low-income neighborhoods.¹ One such grocery store, Sun Fresh market, was opened in Kansas City in 2018, with a development investment of \$15 million by the city.² The grocery store was initially a success, with about 14,000 weekly shoppers and positive reception from the community.³ For a side-by-side comparison, see Table 1.



Source 1: Photo: Zeff, S. (2025, August 26). A troubled Kansas City grocery store has closed, despite nearly \$18 million in City investments. KCUR.

¹ Parker, M. (2024, August 9). *The government spends millions to open grocery stores in food deserts. The real test is their survival.* Investigate Midwest. <https://investigatemidwest.org/2024/08/09/the-government-spends-millions-to-open-grocery-stores-in-food-deserts-the-real-test-is-their-survival/>

²Jackson, A. (2025, July 23). *In depth: Millions invested in Linwood Shopping Center; why is Sun Fresh Market failing?* KSHB 41 Kansas City News. <https://www.kshb.com/news/local-news/in-depth-millions-invested-in-linwood-shopping-center-why-is-sun-fresh-market-failing>

³ Zeff, S. (2025, August 26). *A troubled Kansas City grocery store has closed, despite nearly \$18 million in City Investments.* KCUR. <https://www.kcur.org/news/2025-08-12/kansas-city-grocery-store-sun-fresh-closed-despite-18-million-city-investments-food-desert>

Table 1: Sun Fresh market's rise and fall

Opening	Closing
2018	2025
Initial investment: \$15M	Total invested: almost \$18M
Weekly shoppers: 14,000	Weekly shoppers: 3,000

Over time, problems began to arise. Incidents of drug dealing, theft, and public indecency both inside the store and in the surrounding parking lot and street made customers fearful to shop at the location. After the grocery store was open for about 5 years and had made multiple requests for additional security, Kansas City police officers provided service until it was too costly for KCPD. Then private security officers were hired to provide security for the store, but the cost of this security was not sustainable for the store, and their presence was not reported to significantly reduce crime.⁴

Weekly customers fell to about 4,000 shoppers a week, which meant the store did not have the revenue to keep shelves stocked, which further reduced weekly customers who did not want to shop in a store with empty shelves.

Despite an infusion of \$750,000 from the city in late 2024 for additional security, lighting, and infrastructure to support Sun Fresh market,⁵ the store closed in August 2025, to the disappointment, but not surprise, of the community.

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H⁹ ANALYSIS

The H⁹ Framework guides analysis of how a project interacts with the needs of the people in the community. H⁹ facilitates analysis of a project to identify the goals, risks, and opportunities to fulfill fundamental human needs. These needs are often not understood or explicitly considered. Ignoring some or all of these needs puts project success at risk because humans will always respond based on their fundamental needs. The nine Fundamental Human Needs (FHN), defined by Max Neef⁶, are Subsistence, Protection, Education, Creation, Identity, Affection, Leisure, Participation, and Freedom. These needs should be balanced to prevent unintended consequences or missed opportunities. This approach provides confidence that a project has considered the full impact on the people who will use it.

We don't undertake projects without good reason. Projects, like Sun Fresh market, are done for a purpose and in this case the market directly satisfied a fundamental human need (subsistence). However, focusing only on this need can neglect others, such as security (protection).

⁴ Zeff.

⁵ Barry, K. (2024, November 7). KC City Council approves \$750,000 for 31st and Prospect Improvements. Fox4 KC. <https://fox4kc.com/news/kc-city-council-approves-750000-for-31st-and-prospect-improvements/>

⁶ Max-Neef, M. A., Elizalde, A., Hopenhayn, M., & Hamrell, S. (1991). *Human scale development: Conception, application and further reflections*. The Apex Press.

This Sun Fresh market case study provides an illustration of an H⁹ analysis:

ⓘ Circle colors show distribution of analysis types (stacked from bottom to top): **Green** = Opportunities, **Red** = Risks, **Gray** = Neutral, **Gold** = Needs More Info



Figure 1: H⁹ Subjective Reflection of the Fundamental Human Needs in the Sun Fresh market project

H⁹'s subjective reflection, Figure 1, illustrates unbalanced risks for protection and freedom. The goal of H⁹ is to balance the FHN by mitigating risks and capitalizing on opportunities. H⁹ analysis in preliminary stages of a project leads to an action plan to proactively mitigate risks and capitalize on opportunities. As an example of the connection between the FHN, analysis and action planning, see **Figure 2**.

FHN	Analysis Results	Status	Action Plan
Protection	Current environment is risky for personal safety.	Risk	Provide public, visible security presence to protect people in and around store.
Protection	Theft is common in this area and not always reported or punished.	Risk	Install cameras, motion lights, and other security measures to deter theft.
Protection	Theft is common in this area and not always reported or punished.	Risk	Prepare police responders to respond to issues at the store quickly, to prevent a pattern of theft at the store.

Figure 2: Excerpt from H⁹ Action Plan Log for Sun Fresh market to address protection risks.

SUMMARY

Creating successful projects requires planning and balance of community effects. The H⁹ Framework offers a systematic approach to understand community impact, identify improvement opportunities, mitigate potential negative outcomes, and design with the whole-person experience in mind.

For information on H⁹, visit us at www.NSleng.com or contact us at Info@NSleng.com

