

MEDIA ADVISORY



For Immediate Release

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The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts Purchases Land for New Home

(Hatfield, Mass.) – The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts has purchased 16.5 acres of vacant land at the Chicopee River Business Park in Chicopee for its future headquarters and warehouse. After many years of planning and searching, The Food Bank selected this property to uphold its commitment to serve as the region’s clearinghouse of emergency food to meet the need for food assistance for decades to come.

Andrew Morehouse, Food Bank Executive Director, said “this property is located strategically at the intersection of three major highways. It will not only accommodate a larger warehouse to meet our growth needs for the long term, but it is also close to the largest population center of our region with the highest concentration of households at risk of hunger and/or food insecurity both historically and at this critical moment.”

The Chicopee River Business Park “CRBP” is owned by Westmass Area Development Corporation. Jeff Daley President & CEO of Westmass said, “I am excited to see the development of the new Food Bank headquarters move forward. They are such an important part of our community and to have them centrally located to the population they serve, is a testament to their board of directors and management team. This will be such a great addition to our business park, and we look forward to their opening.”

Daley added, “The Westmass Board of Directors and management team hope this exciting project will reinvigorate the importance of the Chicopee River Business Park and other land that is under Westmass control.” Westmass Chairman of the Board Antonio Dos Santos added, “we are excited to watch The Food Bank begin their project for such an important mission. We are confident they will grow and prosper with this new location.”

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, The Food Bank has provided nutritious shelf-stable and perishable emergency food, including fresh and local vegetables, dairy, and frozen meats, to an all-time high of approximately 119,000 individuals monthly across all four counties of western Massachusetts – Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire Counties. In the last twelve months, The Food Bank distributed the equivalent of approximately 12.4 million meals through a vast network of 165 independent local food

pantries, meal sites, shelters and through its own 78 direct-to-patron Brown Bag: Food for Elders and Mobile Food Bank sites.

While The Food Bank has had to operate with insufficient warehouse space for several years, the current COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated its overcapacity. Before the pandemic, The Food Bank's annual food distribution grew annually at an average of six percent. During the last ten months of the pandemic, its distribution has grown by 29 percent.

At its current 30,000 square foot facility, The Food Bank has been forced to store food in the aisles and on refrigerated trailers parked permanently at loading docks, creating warehouse inefficiencies and delays for inbound and outbound food distribution. "Our warehouse staff has overcome tremendous obstacles to keep up with demand during the pandemic, working long hours and finding creative way to get the food out to those who need it," said Shirley DelRio, Director of Food Operations. Given its limited freezer space, The Food Bank has stored frozen offsite thanks to in-kind support from Pioneer Cold in Chicopee and Lineage Logistics in Westfield. At times, The Food Bank even has had to turn away some large retail store donations.

Food Bank Board President Erica Flores stated, "The Food Bank will announce in the coming months the formal launch of a multi-million capital campaign in support of this project to better serve our member food pantries and those in need of food assistance across Western Massachusetts." The Food Bank is currently working with several individuals and local companies with expertise in commercial real estate development that have provided pro-bono support, including The Dennis Group and O'Connell Development. "We want to design and construct a building that will provide maximum storage capacity potential, that is energy efficient and utilizes green technology, and is adaptable and welcoming to the surrounding community," said Morehouse. Ultimately, The Food Bank will sell its current property in Hatfield. Morehouse is quick to add, "We will maintain our presence in the upper valley with our two Food Bank Farms in Hadley and, of course, uphold our commitment to those in need of food assistance in all four counties of our region."

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The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts believes that everyone has a right to healthy food regardless of their circumstances. Serving Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire counties, The Food Bank leads the region's emergency food network, distributing nutritious food to households with lower incomes. Since 1982, they have been providing individuals facing hunger with the food they need to survive and leading communities towards long-term solutions to food insecurity by addressing its underlying causes. They are committed to creating a western Massachusetts where no one goes hungry and everyone has access to nutritious food. For more information, visit foodbankwma.org.



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