

Case Studies of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture

2005

Edited by David J. Hess and Langdon Winner

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Boston Community Gardens

By Rachel Dowty

Edited by David Hess and Betsy Johnson

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Boston's community gardens have a long history, and some of the current gardens date back to prior waves of community gardening. For example, Boston residents can still rent a plot for \$10-\$20 per year on a first come, first serve basis at Fenway Community Gardens, where residents grew food during WWII. During the 1970s, a new wave of community gardens emerged on vacant and abandoned lots. From the mid 1970s to early 1980s, the city's Revival Program started about fifty community gardens using Community Development Block Grants from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. The grants paid for water systems, chain link fencing, railroad ties, and soil to create raised beds in new community gardens.

In 1976 the non-profit Boston Urban Gardeners (BUG) was founded. In the following year the Boston Natural Areas Fund (BNAF) was founded to protect 143 undeveloped sites in the city that were listed in the "Boston Urban Wilds" report put out by the Boston Redevelopment Authority. BUG and BNAF networked neighborhood groups with funding from both public and private sources to produce a new basis for community gardening in the city. During the 1980s the organizations also supported community gardens as they faced challenges from zoning, development pressures, and budget cuts in the city government.¹

I interviewed Betsy Johnson, the former director of Garden Futures and interim executive director of the American Community Gardening Association. In the mid 1980s she worked with the Massachusetts Audubon Society on urban open space issues. Her work led to involvement with the South End Neighborhood Housing Initiative, which was formed to figure out what to do with forty vacant parcels of land in the one square mile South End neighborhood. She explained, "As the gentrification and housing price escalation was heating up in the South End, buildings were being broken up and becoming condominiums, and developers were finding they could buy a building and sell each of four or five separate floors for more than they bought the whole building. All of a sudden, houses that had been \$100,000 were selling for \$350,000 to \$400,000, because

of the condominium conversions. In 1986 one of the community gardens on the edge of Chinatown was bulldozed for affordable, low-income housing. That was a wake up call for us to be more proactive, so that we would not lose all the gardens.”

Mrs. Johnson worked with the neighborhood groups to form the Ad Hoc Housing Coalition, which asked the city to preserve some of the unused land for community gardens and affordable housing. Because the Parks Department was under severe budgetary constraints, it was not able to take the community gardens under its purview, but the city worked with the Trust for Public Land and BUG to develop the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust. The land trust eventually preserved eight parcels of open space, of which six were community gardens, the other two being “pocket parks.” Other community-based land trusts and non-profits followed in the 1990s, such as the Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve and Development Corporation (DGP).²

In 1994, BNAF, BUG, Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve, and the South End Lower Roxbury Open Land Trust formed Garden Futures to develop a long-term vision and plan for community gardening in the city. Johnson became the director of Garden Futures and expanded the organization into a collaborative of eleven non-profit organizations. As of 2005, approximately thirty nonprofit organizations and six government agencies own or manage approximately 200 community gardens in Boston. One of the programs established by Garden Futures was the City Gardener Certificate Program (renamed the Master Urban Gardener Program in 2003). The program not only educates neighborhood residents in horticultural aspects of gardening, but it also trains them in the politics and administration of community gardens. The education and training equips residents with the knowledge and resource networks to sustain their community gardens.³

In early 2002 Garden Futures and BNAF merged to form Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN), and Johnson became the vice-president of the new organization. As Johnson explained, “Garden Futures created a floor for all the community gardens regardless of who the owner was. It was a place where gardeners could get basic education and look for some political support. However, the problem was that the funders had a difficult time seeing how one organization is different from another. That’s why Garden Futures merged in with BNAN. I just knew that in the long term we were giving up some things by not having an independent Garden Futures. On the other hand, at least most of those basic services would be able to continue long term.”

As of 2005 BNAN owned or managed nearly a third of Boston’s community gardens, but it provided education and resource support to all Boston area community gardens. The organization’s goals include networking together citizens, protecting urban wilds, working to improve food availability and quality for low- and middle-income residents, and educating residents about environmental stewardship, community issues, and sustainable agriculture. Other ongoing BNAN projects include developing new uses for the fifty plus acres of land atop the new underground I-93 tunnels and in east Boston, and helping to create the Neponset River Greenway (connecting urban wild sites as

well as areas remediated from hazardous waste sites to public trails) and the East Boston Greenway. BNAN's community gardening efforts include working with both the city and local for-profit businesses for discounted gardening materials and garbage removal. BNAN also completed a strategic plan for Boston's community gardens and helped develop the Boston Community Garden Council, which consists of community gardeners sent to represent their neighborhood's garden, and aims to play the unified voice of Boston's community gardeners. As of May 2005, an estimated 10,000 Boston residents participate in community gardening, and 48 gardens and organizations (including the Food Project) had joined the Council.⁴

The city supports community gardening efforts mostly through the Grassroots Program of the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND), which administers Community Development Block Grant funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. State support comes in the form of farmers' markets established by the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture. The University of Massachusetts Extension Service in Amherst helps with soil testing. The Boston Parks Department and the Environment Department work together to administer the Community Garden Small Grant Program, which gives annual grants of up to \$400 for minor capital improvements such as "fence repairs, tree-trimming, new toolboxes or bulletin boards, and the like." The two departments also published a resource guide in several languages, for community gardeners to find everything from "gardening instruction to potential funding sources." As Johnson explained, "The Parks Department does not help us, aside from their small grant program for community gardens. They've given out up to a total of \$25,000, I think. Last year it was less than \$10,000, and this year it must be less than \$5000." Instead, funding primarily comes from fundraisers held by the gardeners. "We [SELROSLT] have an annual garden tour of both public and private spaces. That raises about \$15,000 for us, and the gardeners pay a certain fee based on square footage of the garden, either collected directly from the gardeners or they do fundraising within the garden. We've also been able to get a small amount of grant money. We have no staff, so we keep expenses down."⁵

Equity and Sustainability

According to Johnson, "There's a whole host of cities and community gardens, primarily in the Northeast, and some in the Midwest, where the community gardens sprung out of neighborhood disinvestment and people needing to do something about vacant lots. Gardeners were gaining access to grow food for themselves and their families and friends." The programs were developed largely without support from the city government, except for some free composting. However, the Boston Housing Authority supports several community garden spaces in residential developments, and the city's Department of Neighborhood Development administers the federal Community Development Block grants program. Project sites that are funded through the program must be either city-owned or owned by a non-profit, and be in neighborhoods where 51% of the population is of low or moderate income. Between 1995 and 2000, more

than 45 community gardens received federal funding for a total of \$2.5 million. Annual Community Development Block Grant funds allocated to a single project cannot exceed \$150,000. The problem with DND funds, according to Johnson, is that they can be “quite difficult for a small organization to access.”⁶

Of the projects in Boston that connect low-income neighborhood residents and food from urban agricultural efforts (but not community gardening programs per se), two stand out: The Re-Vision House and the Food Project. Founded in 1990, Re-Vision House shelters pregnant and homeless women. The Re-Vision House Urban Farm was founded shortly thereafter from concern about “the nutritional well being of the families living at the shelter and for the residents of Franklin Field, the neighborhood in which the shelter is located.” Re-Vision House’s one-acre Urban Farm is “an organic micro-farm whose guiding vision is environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable urban agriculture. The farm enhances the delivery of nutrition services throughout our community and increases local awareness of the social, environmental, and economic benefits of sustainable urban agriculture.”⁷

The Food Project, founded in 1991, uses urban agriculture as a youth leadership development tool on two urban farms in Boston, where produce is raised according to sustainable agriculture guidelines for city markets. Hundreds of teens per year are trained and utilized in all phases of growing food on urban Boston lots and on thirty-one acres owned by the organization in rural Lincoln, Massachusetts. The Food Project donates about half of its produce to local shelters and sells the rest through community-supported agriculture crop shares and farmers’ markets. The organization also helps neighborhoods remediate lead-contaminated soils.⁸

Policy Issues and Recommendations

BNAN’s Strategic Plan for 2003-2008 highlights the following goals: 1) further recognition of the range of benefits offered by community gardens, 2) more garden integration with the larger environment and city planning departments, 3) strengthened organizational structure, public stewardship and education, 4) more realization of the political force gardeners have in Boston, and 5) stimulating diversification of gardeners for more cohesive community neighborhoods across demographic categories. Boston appears to provide an effective community gardening model for municipalities, non-profits, and local neighborhoods, and BNAN envisions Boston as a future community gardening model for other cities.⁹

In the Parks Department’s Open Space Management Mission, recommendations for community gardens over the next two years include: 1) supporting and expanding programs such as the City Gardener Certificate Program (see above), 2) supporting organizations such as BNAN that institutionalize a support network of city and state agencies, landowners, non-profit organizations, and garden leaders by identifying relevant organizations, defining their contributions, and developing their commitments to gardens, and 3) providing weather-resistant bulletin boards within each community garden to facilitate the dissemination of information pertinent to garden management and

for general informational purposes. The Parks Department also suggests minimizing “the unnecessary use of pesticides and herbicides” and emphasizing “safe, low-cost intensive gardening techniques.”¹⁰

The city’s high property values spur the threat of community garden loss to property development, but the ownership by land trusts and other nonprofits formed to protect community gardens helps the Boston city government. However, Johnson makes the point that the non-profits were created in Boston to deal with community garden protection and establishment, and there continues to be little more than token support from the Parks Department. As she explained, “The South End Land Trust manages more open space parcels than the Parks Department does in the Lower Roxbury and South End neighborhood, and we get no tax dollars.”

Johnson believes that BNAN uniquely provides a model to other cities in terms of the “existence of a single entity that has some involvement with all the gardens in a given area and the degree of non-profit organization ownership of gardens.” She contrasts Boston’s model with those in Chicago and Portland: “In Chicago, the city decided that these small community gardens and small pocket parks were not cost effective for their parks department to maintain. So they set up a non-profit land trust like the South End land trust, to become the owner of these gardens. But they’ve also committed \$100,000 each (\$300,000) a year for this non-profit organization. That is, the parks departments of the city, county, and state are providing \$300,000 for twenty years to make the capital improvements and to own these community gardens. They forced the non-profit to take on what the parks department should be doing, but at least they’re paying somebody else to do it. In our case, we took on what should have been Parks Department responsibilities for no money, although we did get the land. The other model, which is under attack right now, is Portland, Oregon. There the gardens are owned and basically run as part of the city’s parks department, but they also have active friends groups. So the gardens are in line with the public-private partnership that is the main park management model that’s really driving park management everywhere in the country right now.”

“What we suffer from is that we need to get across that we’re a cause that needs to be supported.” explains Johnson. “If people want to do something about hunger, they give to a food bank. But they should teach them to fish rather than give them a fish. If they want to support community building, they give to a community development corporation or a community organization. They don’t think about giving to community gardening, which is really all these things. The average person still doesn’t even know what a community garden is.”

Based on an interview with Rachel Dowty, May 31, 2005.

Web site of BNAN: <http://www.bostonnatural.org/index.php>

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Cleveland Community Gardens

By Colin Beech

Edited by David Hess

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Cleveland's community gardens receive a relatively high level of support from grassroots organizations, non-profit research and planning groups, and the city government. Some gardens date back over sixty years and were formed as part of the Cleveland City Schools Gardening Program. However, the majority of community gardens today can be traced back to the mid 1970s, when the Summer Sprout Urban Gardening program was founded. The program is part of the city's Division of Neighborhood Services in the Department of Community Development and has been a leading force in providing resources for the development of the city's community gardens. Currently its management has been transferred to the nonprofit organization Afro-American Market Research and Development Association. Today the city of about 500,000 people has approximately 185 community gardens, which are located on city land, municipal school district land, privately owned land, and nonprofit organizations such as universities.

Before the current wave of community gardening began in the 1970s, Cleveland had other waves of gardening, including victory gardens during World War II and a school gardening program that had started back in the early twentieth century. The school gardening program ended in the mid 1970s due to problems with funding, lack of support from a new superintendent, and busing, which made it more difficult for them to conduct a gardening program. However, in some cases neighborhood groups received permission to use the property for community gardens, and today some of the largest community gardens in the city are former school gardens.

At about the same time that the school horticultural programs were ending, the Summer Sprout and Ohio State University Extension Program were starting. After initially receiving funding in 1978 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Extension's From Seed to Shelf Community Gardening Program was developed. The program advocated the use of community gardens as a means to improve the nutrition of low-income families. The extension program, now known as Cultivating Our Community, provides the training and technical experience for the county's gardens, including workshops for the garden leaders associated with the Summer Sprout program, which is limited to the city of

Cleveland. Cultivating Our Community also makes available Master Gardeners, who have earned certification from the Extension and serve as consultants for the gardens. Their technical expertise is available for soil testing, pest control, and other specific growing expertise. They also play an advocacy role by educating and informing local community groups about the possibilities and benefits of a community garden, and they provide a newsletter, demonstration gardens, and their website of general information.¹

Not all cities in the U.S. have opted to use Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to support community gardening, and Cleveland's decision to do so is probably another key to the relative success of community gardening in the city. CDBG funding helps defray the cost of gardening tools, materials, and infrastructure, such as soil maintenance and tilling. The program's self-described mission statement "is to turn vacant city lots into neighborhood assets. These abandoned lots are transformed into neatly tilled vegetable gardens providing much needed food to residents and eliminating neighborhood eyesores and health hazards."² Although the initiative rests with the garden leader of each garden, Summer Sprout provides considerable assistance. For example, it provides a back hoe to rake the soil, at least twenty yards of leaf humus, and (once the gardeners have spread it) a rototiller for the land.

The Summer Sprout program also benefits from Cleveland's Land Bank program, a city initiative that helps to place empty lots in the hands of qualified local homeowners and commercial developers at a minimum cost. About one third or one fourth of the city's community gardens is located on Land Bank lots. Those gardens are at a higher risk of development, and there have been a few cases where gardens have been lost to new development, but the issue is not as pressing in Cleveland as it is in other cities.

Another contributor to community gardening in Cleveland is EcoCity Cleveland, an environmental planning organization that was founded in 1992. EcoCity's policy mission is to promote equity and sustainability issues throughout metropolitan Cleveland. The nonprofit organization attempts to combat suburban sprawl with a cohesive vision of urban planning and community building, and it provides planning advice to city managers to meet these goals. Projects such as the EcoVillage, a cluster of townhouses in the Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood, demonstrate a commitment to green housing. The organization also plays an advocacy role by networking local stakeholders to create cohesive goals for community gardening in Cleveland.³

Equity and Sustainability

Approximately 80% of Cleveland's community gardens are located in its lowest income neighborhoods, and the gardeners themselves represent the demographic diversity of the city. As part of his reporting obligations for the city, Dennis Rinehart, the former Ohio State University Extension Agent, has compiled demographic data on the gardens, as reported by the garden leaders for 184 sites: 1,877 African-American, 934 white, 176 Hispanic, 75 Asian, 12 Native American/Alaskan Native, and 44 Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders. Some of the gardens are organic, but the decision is up to the garden.

One of the unique features of community gardens in Cleveland is the role of the local police. Twenty-five years ago police officer Dan Kane established a garden that provided a place for local youth to participate in the community, including juvenile offenders performing community service work. Several community gardens in East Cleveland, a predominately African-American section of the city, today are organized by local police officers who view the gardens as a natural extension of community watch programs.⁴

Many gardeners are also encouraged to “adopt a family,” with whom the harvest is shared. A recent study completed by the Northeast Ohio Foodshed Network indicates that the Cleveland Block Grant Fund invests \$100,000 annually into the Summer Sprout Urban Gardening Program, and claims that \$1 million worth of produce is created, a 1,000% return on the investment.⁵

Policy Issues and Recommendations

In 2004 EcoCity Cleveland sponsored community-wide events that were attended by representatives of Cleveland Neighborhood Services, the Cuyahoga Planning Commission, the OSU Extension, and the Cleveland Municipal School District. Those organizations also made four separate policy recommendations, which may be of general interest to community garden programs across the country. First, they recommended that planning for the gardens should be incorporated into the city’s planning department. The recommendation follows the model of community gardening in some cities, such as Seattle, where it is part of the city plan. Second, special status should be accorded to land bank lots with developed gardens on them, and be recommended for preservation in planning decisions. This issue is more unique to the eastern cities, where community gardens are frequently located on vacant land and land tenure is an issue. In cities where land values are high or have risen rapidly, gardens on unoccupied land tend to be forced out, and community gardening can only be preserved on land owned by nonprofit organizations or on city land, such as parkland. A third recommendation was that a community urban food steering committee should be formed to advocate and manage permanent community gardens, presumably out of members of each respective stakeholder group. Some American cities now have food policy councils, which can integrate food security and local agriculture issues. Fourth, a new 501(c)(3) organization should not be formed since so many non-profits already exist. Instead, an existing non-profit should expand its mission statement to include land acquisition, fund-raising, and title management.

Although the four recommendations indicate areas where community gardening in Cleveland can improve its position, in comparison with other cities, community gardening in Cleveland enjoys a confluence of several positive factors that are currently operating in its favor: the high level of vacant lots and willingness of the city to help convert those lots into community gardens, the city’s decision to use some CDBG funds to assist community gardens through the city’s Summer Sprout program, the assistance of the university extension program, and the advocacy work of organizations such as EcoCity Cleveland. The Summer Sprout program provides material assistance, whereas the

extension service provides educational assistance, and the complementary roles been successful.

As with community gardening in most cities, the budget is inadequate. Although block grant funding can go a long way—because it takes only \$1000 to \$1500 to get a small, vacant lot ready for gardening—block grant funding has been reduced in recent years. Likewise, in the 1970s the extension service had a larger staff with people devoted to specific neighborhoods, but in recent years its staff size has been reduced.

Web site: www.summersprout.org

Based on an interview by Colin Beech of Dennis Rinehart on June 20, 2005. Rinehart has been involved with the Summer Sprout Program for about ten years. He formerly served as an Ohio State University Extension agent and conducted the urban gardening program in Cuyahoga County.

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Denver Urban Gardens (DUG)

By Richard Arias

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Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) is a nonprofit organization that provides assistance to community organizations for planning, designing, constructing, and maintaining community gardens and parks that are located in Denver's low-income neighborhoods and surrounding cities. Having begun with just three gardens in northwest Denver in 1985, today DUG operates sixty-two active urban gardens, one organic farm, and nine parks and playgrounds. DUG has also completed sixteen playgrounds and gardens that no longer require its involvement, and it is planning to develop seven new gardens in the forthcoming years. Over the course of its existence, the organization has been involved in the creation of more than eighty green, open spaces that serve over 26,000 people a year in the metro-area.¹

I interviewed Michael Buchenau, the executive director of DUG. Formerly an all-volunteer organization, DUG was restructured in 1994 by Michael Buchenau and David Rieseck, both of whom are landscape architects who graduated from the Harvard's School of Design. According to Buchenau, "David Rieseck and I volunteered for the board of directors, and eventually we saw the potential that existed and the needs that were not being met by an all-volunteer board. As a result, we established an organization with more substantial funding that could support a staff." In 2003, DUG had a staff of six full-time employees and 1,740 volunteers, who provided 4,700 hours of volunteer work. With an average budget of \$700,000 a year, DUG is currently being funded by city, county, state, and federal annual grants; grants awarded by foundations and corporations; and donations from businesses and individuals. These factors have made DUG the main organization in charge of creating and managing community gardens in Denver.²

To fulfill its mission, DUG organizes its work into five main programs: education and training, technical and managerial assistance, land tenure issues, design and construction of gardens, and channeling of volunteer workforce. It also runs community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs at its DeLaney organic farm, located in the city of Aurora, and it partners with food banks and hunger-related organizations to provide them with fresh and organic food.

In Denver, community gardens are usually located on vacant and rundown city lots and on school yards, which are mostly in low-income neighborhoods. Before the lots became gardens, they were often full of junk and frequently sites of illicit drug commerce and consumption. The transformation of the lots into gardens occurs when the neighborhood approaches DUG for a feasibility evaluation and assistance in creating a garden. After that initial step, DUG analyzes whether or not the project is physically sustainable by taking into account issues of land tenure, commitment of neighbors, and economic support. If the necessary conditions are met, DUG partners with the neighbors and volunteers to go ahead with land negotiations, construction of the garden, provision of seeds, and gardeners' training.³

Other organizations in the metropolitan region also provide opportunities for urban farming in Denver. Denver Botanic Gardens, a division of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, rents plots every year on its land. Some public nonprofit housing organizations, such as Mercy Housing and Neighborhood Partners, also promote community gardens in their projects. Co-housing projects include community gardens as part of the design of communal spaces, and some schools and churches offer plots for gardening to the surrounding community. In addition, institutions such as the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension offer technical assistance, information, and training programs for gardeners to complement the programs that DUG and other organizations offer for urban farming.

The City and County of Denver has a long-term partnership with DUG to develop community gardens, and over time DUG has become the representative for community gardeners who wish to negotiate with the city over land tenure and other urban farming-related issues. Regarding case of land tenure, DUG prepares and presents the case for each community garden before the city council, which then decides whether or not to lease the land. In addition, the city has assigned to DUG the operation of community gardens-related programs such as "The Seeds and Transplants Program," which is funded by a grant from the Housing & Neighborhood Development Department. The city has also worked with DUG in other programs such as "Denver Recycles." These activities have made the relationship between DUG and the city a strong and sustainable one. As Buchenau explains, "We have always maintained a very good relationship with the major's office and city council. We have helped to make them feel like a lot of the decisions we were making were decisions that they would make, and that the gardens that we were building were projects that they would like to see happen. Therefore, we have maintained a really strong connection at all the way along, and there has been a trust built over time. When it comes to community gardens, the city defers to us and our expertise."

Equity and Sustainability

In general, DUG has been working with community gardens to satisfy several needs in low-to-moderate income neighborhoods, including urban renewal, production of fresh/low-cost organic food, and strengthening of social capital. Approximately 85% of Denver's community gardens are located in low-

income neighborhoods, and they constitute a sustenance-based activity for 80% of the gardeners.⁴ Access for the low-income gardeners is facilitated by maintaining plot low plot fees—between \$15 and \$40 per year depending on the plot's size—and by offering free vegetable seeds and transplants through DUG's "The Seeds and Transplants Program." When low-income residents show interest in joining the program but do not have the money needed to rent a plot, DUG does not turn them down. As Buchenau explained, "If people show us they do not have the ability to pay, we ask our sponsors and donors to help us to supplement those needs making sure everyone has an opportunity to garden." DUG also offers the opportunity for low-income people to become shareholders of its CSA programs by purchasing produce shares with their own work.⁵

Most of the food that is produced in community gardens and in the DeLaney organic farm is consumed by gardeners and their families, but it is not uncommon to have excess food. When this is the case, DUG donates the food to charitable organizations that provide it to senior centers, soup kitchens, shelters, and schools. In 2003, for instance, just one of DUG's sixty-two active gardens donated two tons of food to Project Angel Heart, a nonprofit organization that delivers more than 370 meals daily to people living with HIV/AIDS, cancer, and other life-threatening diseases.⁶

DUG discourages the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in favor of organic methods by requesting that gardeners sign an agreement to accept several responsibilities, one of which is to farm organically. This orientation is also evident in DUG's DeLaney Community Farm, which is one of the only organic farms in the metropolitan Denver area.⁷ However, sometimes gardeners do not follow the organic principles. As Buchenau explained, "When these issues do come up, we try to deal with them through education. We have an education coordinator who teaches gardeners how to grow more effectively organically by using compost, watering effectively, and using organic methods to control pests. It definitely takes a lot of education to take someone who would otherwise utilize chemicals and fertilizers and help them develop into an organic gardener, but in the end it is a more effective way to approach gardening. It is especially true here in Denver, where we have a very extreme climate. The methods that we teach will strengthen the ability of plants to withstand the climate better than if we were to use chemicals and fertilizers."

Community gardens are popular with immigrants who have come to Denver from countries where they used to be farmers. When they first arrive, some of the immigrants face language barriers that constrain their incorporation into Denver's economy. The gardens offer them the opportunity to engage in productive activities in a space where they feel comfortable and are able to socialize with the rest of the neighborhood.⁸

Policy Issues

One of the relatively unique advantages of community gardening in Denver is that the 2002 Master Plan for Parks and Recreation included community gardens as alternative green, open spaces. Also known as "The Game Plan," the department's master plan was approved in 2003 by the City

Council after a process that involved an extensive survey of citizens' perceptions of the parks and recreation system and a participative process of diagnosis and design for an updated Master Plan. The Game Plan provides a fifty-year vision as well as strategies for "transforming Denver into a City in a Park." One of the most interesting elements of this policy, in terms of urban planning and community gardens, is framing community gardens as "public open spaces." Chapter 3 of the Game Plan states that one of its goals is to increase the number of "breathing spaces" in Denver. The plan characterizes breathing spaces as ranging from "natural open space to neighborhood parks or rooftop gardens, to more urban squares and plazas." The document also states that the diverse public open spaces can "support gathering, recreation, and relaxation for families, friends and neighbors," and that there should be "at least one-half acre of public open space within one-half mile of every resident's home that can be reached without crossing a major barrier." They goal could be fulfilled not only by creating parks, but also by creating or adopting community gardens, plazas, and schoolyards, all of which are cheaper to build and maintain than parks.⁹

As Buchenau explained, "It was the first time a city planning department recognized community gardens, based on the desires of the residents, as one of the components of a healthy city and included them as part of the city plan when considering new park developments. Just the fact that the Parks and Recreation Department recognized gardens as a component of a healthy park was a victory for the cause of community gardens in Denver. Today, when young planners are working on a neighborhood project or a park plan, they have community gardens as part of their palette."

The city has also supported community gardens by maintaining a close relationship with DUG. In addition to programs described above, the city has helped DUG to relocate gardens that are lost to development. Over the last two decades about six community gardens were lost to housing development. As Buchenau explains, "We have limited low-income housing and affordable housing. In our inner city core there is still a need for land to be used for infill housing, and about a half dozen of our gardens have had to move. In those cases, the city has helped us to find another piece of ground and buy it to accommodate the new garden, and it has also helped us to pay for garden improvements so that all the efforts that went into the previous garden were not lost."

DUG also reduces potential land tenure conflicts by attaining ten-year leases from land owners and by seeking out institutionalized properties to place gardens. As Buchenau explained, "We are not very interested in establishing gardens on private property, and we are looking primarily for institutionalized properties. Even when we have a garden on a city-owned property, we are still concerned about the city feeling pressure to put housing on that site, so what we would ideally like to do is to have our gardens be associated with institutionalized uses such as parks or school grounds. We also look for grounds that are not suitable for construction. For example, the size may be too small for any sort of development, or the shape of the site may mean that it is not allowed to be developed."

Although the support from City Hall and City Council is strong, it needs to be renewed every time Denver's political leadership and administrators change. Buchenau added, "If administrators and politicians do not already know about the benefits of community gardens, we end up having to reeducate them and helping them to understand what our program does. Once they see a garden actively being utilized and talk to the gardeners, they are convinced, but often they are not even aware of the benefits. They need to learn that gardens are much more than recreation. Gardens help to stabilize neighborhoods and improve people's lives, and they can even help neighborhoods come back together and reduce crime."

Another challenge that DUG is facing and will continue to face is dealing with a growing Latino community of gardeners. "A lot of them do not speak English as a second language, and we sometimes have communication barriers at our gardens. They may not even be aware that they can even garden in one of our plots." Communication is needed to ensure community gardens are meeting DUG's growing goals and that gardens are fully utilized despite people's transience. Buchenau added, "In a lot of inner city neighborhoods in Denver, garden participants one year may be completely different than the people who come in the next year. People move and change jobs, and they leave the neighborhood. We have to remain in contact with the neighborhood leaders and make sure that our gardens in some of our neighborhoods are feasible. We also have to make the availability of gardens known in every neighborhood. When we have a full garden with a waiting list, it will flourish, but when it is not quite full, it will struggle."

Based on an interview by Richard Arias of Michael Buchenau, May 31, 2005.

Web site: <http://www.dug.org>

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Detroit Community Gardens
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Detroit more, than any other city in USA is a product of industrially driven urbanism: "Detroit is the largest factory town ever built."¹ It thus had and has a larger sensitivity and susceptibility to economic cycles of boom and bust than many other cities of comparable size. Community gardens and urban farms have been tied very closely to that legacy. Detroit's history of community gardens goes back to the late nineteenth century, and the city claims to have had the oldest officially recognized community gardens initiative. As a result of the economic depression in 1893-97, the city of Detroit began a vacant-lot garden program as a relief for the unemployed. Hazen Pingree, then mayor of Detroit, "urged owners of vacant lots to allow the urban unemployed to grow food."² This official initiative was referred to as the "Detroit Experiment" or "Potato Patch Farms." The success of this experiment led to its widespread adoption in other industrial cities. During the Depression the city government launched the Detroit Thrift Gardens Program as an organized urban gardening program to assist the poor and unemployed in meeting their nutrition needs. These relief gardens encouraged participants to grow produce for home consumption.

Urban gardens in Detroit received their next impetus with the announcement in 1976 of the federally funded Urban Garden Program, which was administered by the Department of Agriculture's cooperation extension service. The initial sum of \$1.5 million was provided to set up garden projects in Detroit and five other cities. The money was used in teaching and on demonstration gardening projects. However, the program was quietly buried during the early 1990s.³ Urban gardens, especially in industrial Detroit, have been seen as supplemental sources of production in times of economic stress. During such periods, interest in urban gardens peaks both in policy as well as community levels.

The renaissance of community gardening in Detroit began during the mid 1990s. It is associated with the decline (and demise) of the industrial paradigm, the third highest unemployment rate among the nation's largest cities,⁴ and the establishment of activist organizations. The latter include the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center (also known as the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership (BCNCL)) and the Detroit Agriculture Network (DAN), which have ties to both the civil rights movement and the environmental movement. The BCNCL is a non-profit center founded in 1995 that helps people at the grassroots have

the capacity to be agents of preferred social change. It aims to “help grassroots activists develop themselves into visionary leaders and critical thinkers who can devise pro-active strategies for rebuilding and respriting our cities.”⁵ The center has been active in a host of urban transformation efforts such as environmental justice, urban agriculture and youth leadership development. The center draws inspiration from Grace Boggs, a cultural worker and philosopher who was active in the major U.S. social movements of the twentieth century, and James Boggs, an African American labor activist and writer. The recent surge in interest in urban community gardens parallels the previous episodes of interest in gardens as sources of sustenance. However, there is an important difference: Detroit community gardens in the 1990s and the early 2000s were not exclusively understood as sustenance providers; instead, they were also associated with enhancing neighborhood environmental quality as well as with building social capital. Community gardens are seen as an important component of the rebuilding and revitalizing of Detroit with a sustainable urban ethic. Other efforts include alternative approaches to housing such as cohousing, recycling and reconsumption, local livelihood opportunities, public mural art and intergenerational interaction. In other words, community gardens today are elements of a new vision for a post-industrial Detroit.⁶

On this issue Detroit is notable among other cities for its vision-guided effort that is rejuvenating urban agriculture through not just isolated community gardens but also through an integrated and interconnected comprehensive plan called Adamah (a Hebrew word meaning “of the earth”) where urban farming ventures are but one strand within the Adamah web. Adamah was conceived of in 1999 jointly by the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center, the Detroit Collaborative Design Center, and the School of Architecture, University of Detroit Mercy. The Detroit Collaborative Design Center was founded as a non-profit, multidisciplinary design center within the School of Architecture, University of Detroit Mercy. The mission of this center is to work exclusively with non-profit community development organizations in order to renew the city.⁷ At the heart of the Adamah plan is a message to foster grassroots community development that builds communities and enhances local environmental quality. This is a break from the top-down hierarchical town planning approach. The Adamah plan envisions a number of efforts for a sustainable Detroit that range from energy generation to agriculture and sustainable consumption. The Adamah vision for urban farms is one of gardens and greenhouses for flowers and vegetables and farmers’ markets, grazing land for livestock and a dairy, a tree farm, and a lumber mill. In addition, Adamah envisions windmills to generate electricity and ivy-covered freeway buffers for cleaning the air. The plan seeks to rehabilitate a city sewage canal and employ it for both irrigation of urban farms and for recreation. Through the efforts of a group of activists, the Adamah vision is guiding the disparate gardening, farming, and marketing efforts within Detroit.⁸⁻¹⁰ Thus, such diverse economic activities that contribute to sustainable local livelihoods such as the Cass Corridor Food Cooperative, Avalon International Breads (an organic bakery), as well as alternative mobility enhancers like the Back Alley Bikes, find a place within the encompassing Adamah vision.¹¹ The

Adamah vision animated many people, but the practicalities of implementing the vision left many doing community work a little frustrated. It must be noted that outside a circle of activists, the Adamah plan has so far failed to evoke interest among the city bureaucrats or the elected officials. The plan has been categorized as impractical by city officials.¹² The Adamah vision has now been transformed into a network called Sustainable Detroit.

The Detroit Agriculture Network (DAN) arose in the mid-1990s from the “growing interest in using the vacant lots of Detroit for agricultural production.” It was the brain-child of David Hacker, then director of the Hunger Action Coalition, a nonprofit, anti-hunger advocacy organization. It remained within the umbrella of the Hunger Action Coalition until 2003, when DAN constituted its board of directors and initiated the process of becoming a 501(c)(3) organization. DAN is a loose coalition of activists, gardeners, and volunteers who are involved in providing support resources and educational opportunities that advance the related causes of urban food security and healthy communities. Since DAN was very active in the community gardening arena of Detroit, I decided to learn more about the activities of DAN. I therefore interviewed Ms. Ashley Atkinson, a member of the board of directors as well as former Project Coordinator of DAN. According to Ms. Atkinson, DAN sees as its mission “to promote and foster urban agriculture, sustainable use, and appreciation of urban natural resources. We encourage the establishment of resource support networks, experiential educational opportunities for youth and their families and collaborations that advance urban food security, good nutrition, healthy land, and communities.” This is reflected in the motto of DAN: “Growing People and Communities.” Sustainable urban development for DAN is about combining the “cultural roots of the community while creating self-sustaining neighborhoods.”¹³ The network tries to support neighborhoods that take over vacant lots for community gardens. The attempt is to see the “numerous vacant lots in Detroit transformed into community gardens, neighborhood farms, and outdoor farm markets.”¹⁴ DAN has an active array of programs and services that it offers.

In 2003, DAN received a USDA community grant that allowed the network to begin the Garden Resource Program for gardeners in the city of Detroit. As Atkinson explained, the program “provides not only all that they need to garden—seeds, plants, soils, composts and raised beds—but also support to become connected with residents and to build communities gardening in their same neighborhood.” The program attempts to strengthen not just local resources for gardeners but also to create city-wide resources. About 115 family and community gardens in the city received support through DAN from the US Dept. of Agriculture.¹⁵ The DAN website mentions that in 2004, 33 community gardens are part of the network and receive support from it.¹⁶ In 2005 the Garden Resource Program has continued growing, with the number of community gardens more than doubling to 77. Atkinson added, “In 2004 we were gardening well over 30 acres in Detroit, and I believe that the number will probably double this year [2005].” For the purpose of organizing and outreach to community gardens spread all over the city, DAN has grouped gardens within ten planning clusters.¹⁷ Each of the clusters possesses a neighborhood leader as well as a

neighborhood center, which will host a tool-bank and hold workshops. To be a part of the Garden Resource Program, each registered community garden has to fill an application form and pay a nominal membership fee of \$20 per annum. The fee serves the primary purpose of ensuring that the members take the responsibility of coming to plant-distribution dates and planting the plants. Program members receive three distributions for gardens. In March, forty-two packets of seeds such as peas, beans, mustard, radishes, carrots and spinach are provided. Two distributions totaling 216 plants are made in April and then in May. These include plants such as collards, kale, cauliflower as well as tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, onions, squash and peppers. This compares very favorably with the city government sponsored program Farm-a-Lot whose distribution is often not very reliable.

DAN also conducts a nine-week training program called Urban Roots. As Atkinson explained, "The program covers not only the basics of plant science and soil science but also capacity building skills such as how to find resources in your neighborhood that you need: grant writing, community organizing, etc." DAN also conducts an educational workshop series, with classes held twice a month. Topics range from "vermicomposting, making rain barrels, to basic gardening and bio-intensive agriculture." In addition, public outreach happens through potlucks, tours, and other social events that facilitate interactions with gardeners.

Equity and Sustainability

The focus of community gardens is on meeting the sustenance needs of marginalized and abandoned neighborhoods. The flight of industry from Detroit, along with troubled social circumstances (racial tensions and substance abuse), has resulted in an abundance of vacant and abandoned lots. The total number is estimated to be around 40,000; that is, roughly a third of the 139 square miles of the city is composed of abandoned and vacant lots. Many of the gardens and other community efforts at revitalization are located in abandoned neighborhoods in an effort to improve the physical environment, inject some energy into the community, and to improve the quality of life for the needy through better quality of diet.

DAN sees equity and sustainability as inseparably intertwined within the mission of creating community gardens within Detroit. The organization sees itself reshaping the fabric of the city. As Atkinson explained, "Urban agriculture will play a big role in making the city more self-sufficient, more environmentally friendly, and more green." The equity focus in the programs emerges in two spheres. First, there is a close relation between the community gardens and food banks and other anti-hunger organizations. In addition, some gardens sell their produce in farmer's markets, while others provide fresh produce to food banks. A second focus on equity emerges from the additional livelihood and nutritional value that community gardens provide to poor and other socially marginalized communities.

Two other organizations of note have both contributed especially to the equity dimension of urban agriculture. Another example of an equity-related project in the city is the community garden run by the Capuchin Monastery. The

garden has partnered with Project Fresh, an organization that supplies needy women and children with fresh fruits and vegetables.¹⁸ A second organization, the Foundation for Agricultural Resources (FARM), involves the city's underprivileged youth in urban agriculture as an opportunity for them to realize their potential. Managed by John Gruchala and Tris Richardson, the youth farm about an acre of vacant land and produce one ton of produce, including cabbages, tomatoes, kale, and peppers. Some of the produce is canned in a converted auto body shop. FARM sees the venture as a means of involving young people in all phases of the vegetable production process.¹⁹ Paul Weetz, a science teacher at Catherine Ferguson Academy, has provided a hands-on curriculum that teaches agriculture and gardening skills to pregnant teens and young mothers. In addition to acquiring math and science skills, students are being taught to raise farm animals, tend a community garden, and build a barn. As a result student drop-out rates have declined substantially, and students with little self-esteem have completed their education and in some cases gone into college.

In summary, community elders see gardening as a means to contribute to equity and sustainability considerations. Fresh produce from community gardens not only enhance projects for the poor like Forgotten Harvest but gardens also become safe spaces for intergenerational support groups and dialogs.²⁰ In all these cases, community gardens are making explicit choices about how to grow produce—organic or non-organic—and how much to support a marginalized group or one's own household.

Policy Issues and Recommendations

Detroit possesses a history of government intervention in community gardens and urban agriculture. The Farm-a-Lot program, which was supported by Mayor Coleman Young and is still administered by the Detroit Recreation Department, is a legacy of governmental activism. The city government has since had to scale back its commitment to the program, which appears less and less capable of handling the requests of residents even as the demand for agriculture services seems to be increasing. As Atkinson explained, "Because there are so many people wanting to garden, one has to either be lucky to know of the [Farm-a-Lot] distribution or be on some special list" to receive the plantings. The Farm-a-Lot program suffers from a further drawback, which arises from its inability to restrict the benefits of the program to legitimate community gardeners. As it is conceived, distribution of plantings is freely available from the local city center for anyone who walks in. The lack of screening criteria dilutes the responsibility of beneficiaries towards meeting the goals of the program.

Community gardens are of interest to the city government's planning department. Most community gardens are situated on publicly held vacant lots, which often have alternative uses that are planned by the city. As Atkinson explained, "The city planning department has publicly said a number of times that while community gardens do have some positive benefits, when there is a choice between development and community gardens, the department would choose development all the time." Alternate visions of the city like Adamah see

community gardens as central to a more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable Detroit. The Adamah vision was seen by the planning department as unrealistic and out of touch with economic and social realities.

Under such conditions, an organization like DAN has to tread a fine line by appearing supportive of the city government's developmental agenda and yet also attempting to educate the government about the value of community gardening. DAN thus interacts with the city government at a more personal level of individual contacts and friends. Turnover in staff often results in loss of biggest allies within the planning department, and as a result a constant effort is needed to reestablish friends and contacts. However, interaction at the personal rather than at an institutional level also exposes an organization like DAN to the need to appear studiously non-partisan on political issues and during elections.

According to Atkinson, DAN would like to see three major policy changes on community gardens. In the short term, the organization would like to see the city government come on as a major partner of the Garden Resource Program, Urban Roots, and education series services that DAN provides. These programs have been found to be effective, and the presence of the city government as a partner organization would further legitimate the program. In addition, a partnership would allow the government to maximize resources while minimizing the cost to the government for providing similar services. Another short-term policy prescription concerns the city-run Farm-a-Lot program. The program requires the community gardener to fill out a Farm-a-Lot permit that recognizes the applicant as a legitimate user of the land for the duration of one year. The security provided by a one year permit is insufficient to allow users to make the investment in time and money that is required. Transforming the permit into a long-term lease would provide a greater guarantee. In the long term Atkinson suggests that DAN would like to see the planning department "not only recognize green space but also urban farming or community gardening as an icon of the master plan" and in addition incorporate into the master plan a recommendation for a certain amount of acreage as community gardening or urban farming/ green space in each of the ten planning clusters in the city.

Based on interview of Ms. Ashley Atkinson with Govind Gopakumar conducted on June 14, 2005.

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New York City Community Gardens

By Govind Gopakumar, Rachel Dowty, and Colin Beech

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Note: There is an extensive published literature on community gardens. The materials that follow represent an introduction to some of the organizations issues. See the bibliography and web sites of the organizations for additional information.

1. New York Restoration Project

By Govind Gopakumar

NYRP was founded in 1995 by singer/actress Bette Midler after her move to New York City. The organization owes its origin to Ms Midler's personal motivation to improve the quality of life of New Yorkers by helping create livable neighborhoods. The mission of the organization is to "reclaim, restore, and develop under-resourced parks, community gardens, and open space in New York City" as well as to involve the neighborhood's residents, through programs that NYRP conducts, in the maintenance of a beautiful neighborhood.¹ While New York City's flagship parks – Central Park, Bryant Park – receive substantial care and attention, parks and gardens in less privileged neighborhoods have received substantially less attention, it is these parks that are the focus of NYRP's efforts. While parks and gardens are key in the renewal efforts of the organization, it believes that through these efforts, as well as through environmental education and community programs, the reweaving of the social fabric of the neighborhood is achieved. In other words, values such as civic pride, neighborhood ownership and neighborliness are reinvented with parks and gardens as the locus.

Since 1995, NYRP has been involved with a number of local community revitalization efforts in New York City. The organization has raised \$18 million dollars to finance its objective of rehabilitating neighborhood parks and open space especially in economically disadvantaged communities. The organization has acquired titles to 60 neighborhood gardens spread over all five boroughs of New York City. This was a direct fallout of the move by the City of New York to auction 114 community gardens around the city for alternate development.

NYRP sees a three tier approach to the management of community gardens under its control. The New York Garden Trust (NYGT), a subsidiary of NYRP, has partnered with community gardeners in order to ensure their continued blooming. NYGT acts as an intermediary group that interacts with community and neighborhood groups and provides support and resources in the care of these gardens. At the lowest tier, “Community Garden Managers are the local gardeners responsible for day-to-day garden operations and maintenance” and they interact with NYGT with regards to improvements of the garden.² An operational resource – the “Borough Center” – is envisaged that will “house all programs and resources provided to community gardens through NYGT.”³ It will also have teams of volunteers attached to the center who can render assistance to the gardens as they need it. The organization has also concentrated its efforts on revitalizing three existing city parks – Fort Tryon, Fort Washington and Highbridge Park which were cleaned and “119 abandoned and overgrown acres” of park land were reclaimed. The New Leaf Café is “a unique entrepreneurial endeavor” that was launched by NYRP.⁴ Located within the sylvan environs of Fort Tryon Park, the café specializes in providing a fine dining experience. The café has been conceived as a public/private partnership with all proceeds being ploughed back into the restoration and maintenance of Fort Tryon Park. The benefits from the enterprise are thus spread out to the City of New York as well the community where the jobs are created in.

NYRP has adopted a triple pronged strategy of environmental education, recreation and community programs in order to ensure that community gardens and parks remain a focal center of neighborhoods. Programs not only educate school children about plant species, pollination and seed dispersal in the context of the garden but also attempt to incorporate art and literary efforts into the program making it an interdisciplinary offering. Advanced learning opportunities on environmental education concentrate on such fields as “Park Science,” “Garden Science,” and “Aquatic Science.” Recreational programs attempt to reach out to a diverse audience including adolescents, adults and seniors. These include efforts such as cycling, boat building, rowing, gardening. NYRP’s community programs aim to organize fun activities and festivals that get the community together and build bridges in an effort to create cohesive and secure communities.⁵

2. GreenThumb NYC

By Rachel Dowty

The GreenThumb community garden program in New York City began in 1978 as an understaffed municipal organization to give some shape to the amorphous and increasing neighborhood practice of residents adopting abandoned lots as gardening spots. It is now the largest organized urban gardening network in any American city with more than six hundred gardens and approximately 20,000 garden members. As its mission statement explains, “Our aim is to foster civic

participation and encourage neighborhood revitalization while preserving open space. Community gardens provide green space and easily accessible recreational opportunities in the areas that need them most. GreenThumb was initiated in response to the city's financial crisis of the 1970's, which resulted in the abandonment of a tremendous amount of public and private land. Residents of these devastated communities transformed these unattractive and unsafe spaces into green havens."⁶

From its inception, GreenThumb focused on locating community gardens in "economically disadvantaged community planning districts."⁷ The city approached these gardens as temporary loans of open space, reserving the right to "evict" gardeners with a 30-day notice. However, the enthusiasm with which many residents applied for small grants offered through GreenThumb made the \$1 yearly lease expand into five or ten year leases by the mid 1980s.⁸ Local community assembly and common ground established by these gardens provided not only green space, but also neighborhood solidarity among diverse families and individuals in all five boroughs of the City. Federal Community Development Block Grants helped catapult GreenThumb into the national community garden limelight, making it "the largest municipally run community gardening program in the United States" by the 1990s.⁹

When Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's administration threatened destruction of many GreenThumb gardens in 1998, he "cancelled all Green Thumb leases and removed all the Green Thumb community gardens from the Department of Parks and Recreation, and relocated them in Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD)."¹⁰ HPD was no longer required to consult GreenThumb or the Parks Department during evictions. HPD was still required to inform community boards of evictions, but because "community gardens are not included on city maps, notification to the gardens is slow or does not happen at all."¹¹ While Giuliani called it "plans to build on only 131 - or 18% - of the original 711 'Greenthumb' community garden sites,"¹² GreenThumb gardeners from across the city mobilized in protest. The city's position remained that the green space needed to make way for desperately needed housing. GreenThumb advocates argued that there were plenty of vacant lots to build housing on other than GreenThumb garden lots, and that the proposed housing was aimed to middle-class white demographics. The facts seem to support their claims in that when "the Giuliani administration first sold a block of 113 gardens ... there were no restrictions on the uses for the lots, and the property rights of the City and the new owners appeared to trump housing rights."¹³

After much media and political frenzy, including Attorney General Eliot Spitzer butting heads with Mayor Giuliani through a lawsuit, and support from Bette Midler's New York Restoration Project, a legal agreement was reached. Now some gardens fall into the jurisdiction of land trusts, some are under the Department of Parks and Recreation, some under the Department of Transportation, and some under the Department of Environmental Protection.

GreenThumb started a grant program in 2000, called the “Plants and People Grants Program,” but was scaled back in 2003.¹⁴ GreenThumb still actively provides distribution of raw materials, technical support (including networking through their website), community gatherings, and educational workshops throughout New York City for its more than 20,000 involved residents and 600 gardens.¹⁵ The organization is also involved in the Community Gardens Mapping Project, available online through the Open Accessible Space Information System for New York City (OASIS NYC).¹⁶

3. Green Guerillas

By Colin Beech

The Manhattan-based non-profit organization Green Guerillas has been operating for over 30 years. Liz Christy, a founder, helped to create the original Green Guerillas garden in 1973 on the corner of Bowery and Houston streets in a vacant lot.¹⁷ Since then, the organization has grown to over 600 members who help fund the organization, as well as several foundations. Their staff provides assistance to 200 grassroots groups every year, as well as helping 40 community garden groups enhance their sites. They also play an advocacy role for community garden’s who face losing their site to development, and thus participate in several coalitions in an attempt to bolster their local political power.

In the course of 30 years, Green Guerillas have developed over 700 vacant or abandoned lots into community gardens throughout New York City’s boroughs.¹⁸ Many, such as the First Presbyterian Church of Newtown,¹⁹ will use their gardens to supply local foodbanks or provide space for growing herbs or vegetables indigenous to their member’s countries. Their focus has changed over the years, from creating new gardens to protecting those that already exist from development. A major victory for the organization came in September, 2002, when Mayor Michael Bloomberg, “gave permanent status to almost 500 community gardens”, reversing the trend set in motion by the Giuliani administration to develop community gardens.²⁰ Part of the agreement was that some community gardens would be lost to build housing, which Green Guerillas director Steve Frillman insists must be made available as low-income housing.²¹

Given how much the Green Guerillas assist and advocate for other groups, perhaps one of their most pressing tasks has been the protection of their own home garden, taken over as part of the parks department in early 2003. The AvalonBay company proposed new construction on the border of the garden property. In order to pour the foundation, however, the developer would have to perform shoring to support the building. The quickest, cheapest way to perform the shoring would have been to excavate several trees from the Bowery Houston Community Garden, including the signature tree for which the garden is known. Facing this dilemma, the Green Guerillas hired an architect to propose alternative

solutions; he proposed four viable alternatives, each of which “don’t have to come within an inch of our property line”, said Penny Jones, a 12 year member. Each alternative, however, is more costly and time-consuming. Bob Paley, senior developer for AvalonBay, assured the gardeners the company had every intention of preserving the garden.²²

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⁵ New York Restoration Project (<http://www.nyrp.org>)
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(<http://www.aetv.com/class/makeadifference/index.jsp>)
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¹¹ Hansen, Laura and Steve Zeitlin. 1998. With greenspace for all. *New York Folklore Society Newsletter*. Fall/Winter 1998. Retrieved May 12, 2005. (<http://www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/news/nlfw98/greensp.html>)

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¹³ Staeheli, Lynn A., Don Mitchell; Kristina Gibson. 2002. Conflicting rights to the city in New York’s community gardens. *GeoJournal* 58(2-3): 199.

¹⁴ GreenThumb. 2001. “The GreenThumb Plant & People Grant.” See link to application. Retrieved May 12, 2005. (<http://www.greenthumbnyc.org/ppg.html>)

¹⁵ GreenThumb. 2001. “Green Thumb” home page. Retrieved May 12, 2005. (<http://www.greenthumbnyc.org/>)

¹⁶ Open Accessible Space Information System for New York City (OASIS NYC). Available online at:

http://www.oasisnyc.net/resources/comm_gardens/default.asp (accessed May 12, 2005)

¹⁷ Green Guerillas. 2001. "What we do." Retrieved May 11, 2005

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¹⁸ Collazzi, Bret Nolan. 2003. "At 30, Green Guerillas refocuses its mission and trudges ahead." *Bronx Times Reporter*, July 31. Retrieved May 11, 2005

(http://www.bxtimes.com/news/2003/0731/Boroughwide_News/030.html)

¹⁹ Melwani, Levina. 2004. "A garden of spirit, and of food." *Newsday*, June 8, A32. Retrieved May 11, 2005 (<http://www.greenguerillas.org/>)

²⁰ Collazzi, Bret Nolan. 2003. "At 30, Green Guerillas refocuses its mission and trudges ahead." *Bronx Times Reporter*, July 31. Retrieved May 11, 2005

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²¹ Frillman, Steve. 2002. "Community Gardens" (Letter to the editor). *New York Times*, September 21, A14. Retrieved May 11, 2005

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²² So, Hemmy. 2004. "Border war pits garden vs. developer." *The Villager* 74:34. Retrieved May 11, 2005

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Philadelphia Community Gardens

By David J. Hess

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Community gardening in Philadelphia has a long history that has been traced back to the Vacant Lots Cultivation Association (1897-1927). During the middle decades of the twentieth century there were various school gardens, war gardens, and victory gardens. After the 1950s, the city of Philadelphia underwent a long process of deindustrialization, depopulation, and de-urbanization, which left tens of thousands of vacant lots and abandoned buildings amid deteriorating neighborhoods. Those conditions set the stage for a revitalization of community gardening in the 1970s.¹

The main organizational force behind the late twentieth-century wave of community gardening in Philadelphia has been the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS). To understand better the work of that organization, I interviewed its executive vice-president, J. Blaine Bonham, Jr., who has worked at the nonprofit organization for thirty-one years. He was hired to launch the Philadelphia Green program in 1974 and was a founding member of the Neighborhood Gardens Association/A Philadelphia Land Trust, an organization that has helped secure the land tenure for some of the community gardens. He is also the coauthor of *Old Cities/Green Cities: Communities Transform Unmanaged Land*.²

Founded in 1827, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society has historically been dedicated to the art and science of horticulture and its exhibition. The organization is known especially for the Philadelphia Flower Show, which began in 1829 and today is the largest indoor flower shows worldwide. During the 1970s the organization responded to the declining fortunes of Philadelphia's neighborhoods and its residents by expanding its activities to help create community gardens. This early work developed into the program now known as Philadelphia Green, which focuses broadly on urban greening and revitalization. Initially funded by proceeds from the Philadelphia Flower Show, in addition the program currently secures additional funding from grants from foundations, contracts from the city government's federal block grant and its Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, landscape architecture services for the management of public landscapes, and the society's general fundraising efforts.

Although Philadelphia Green originally focused on community gardening, its work soon diversified into other forms of urban greening and horticultural

development. As Mr. Bonham explained, “It was originally a community vegetable program for low-income neighborhoods to grow food on vacant land. Over the decade or so after that, PHS was able to get foundation funding, and Philadelphia was also the first city to use federal block grant funds for this kind of work. With that funding, we expanded our work, to respond to requests from residents to plant trees and create small sitting gardens. People like to grow food, but they also garden for the sense of community and for the positive impact on the environment. It’s very empowering to take a vacant, trashed lot and making it into a beautiful place. The land can be a place to grow food or to have barbecues and sit under your favorite trees. That aspect of community improvement quickly rose to the top as one of the chief motivators. Improving communities in general became the modus operandi for our community work.”

In 1985 Philadelphia Green underwent another expansion of its programming when it decided to develop greening projects to improve public spaces. Another example is the Parks Revitalization Project, which began in the early 1990s and involves collaboration among Philadelphia Green, volunteer “Friends” organizations in neighborhoods, the city’s Department of Recreation, and the Fairmount Park Commission (the city’s equivalent to a parks department). The city had been unable to maintain all of its park and recreation sites, but after Philadelphia Green helped organize the neighborhood-based associations, many of the sites were restored. The city remained responsible for the overall maintenance of parks, and the neighborhood groups helped by raising money to plant trees, setting up gardens within the parks, and organizing people for occasional clean-ups. As Bonham noted, “It worked beautifully, and now we have about over 60 parks in the program.” Since the 1990s, Philadelphia Green has continually expanded its greening programs to include improving streetscapes, developing pocket gardens, landscaping prominent public sites, greening high-profile street corridors, linking storm-water management with open space utilization, and managing vacant lands. In 2001 Philadelphia Green articulated its many urban greening projects into a comprehensive “Green City Strategy,” a plan for urban revitalization that was based on urban greening and included community gardening as one of the means to that end. In 2003 the city of Philadelphia adopted the strategy as part of its Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, which will be discussed in more detail below.³

Two other key organizations have played an important role in the success of community gardens in the city. From 1977 through 2004, the Urban Gardening Program of the Pennsylvania State Cooperative Extension in Philadelphia County has assisted community gardeners by training youth, providing classes to enable residents to become master gardeners, and helping groups start and improve community gardens. In 1986 a new organization was formed—Neighborhood Gardens Association, a Philadelphia Land Trust—in order to acquire properties with land tenure risk. Although it is estimated that Philadelphia is home to over 40,000 vacant buildings and abandoned lots, some of the community gardens faced closure due to development pressure. As of 2005 the organization held title to about two dozen gardens in the city, including community vegetable gardens, sitting parks and flower gardens.⁴

A survey by the American Community Garden Association in 1996 found that Philadelphia was home to about 1135 community gardens, giving the city the distinction of having one of the highest levels of community gardening in the U.S., both in terms of the absolute number of gardens and gardens per capita.⁵ However, Bonham notes that Philadelphia Green completed a survey a few years ago, and they estimated that the total number of vibrant gardens was a much more modest figure of about 500. He noted that some of the gardens had been built on; for others, neighborhoods declined significantly, or coordinators moved or became too old to manage the site. Based on their experience with the collapse of some community gardens, both Philadelphia Green and the Neighborhood Gardens Association have been strategic in their selection of gardens to support. As Bonham explained, “The Neighborhood Gardens Association has focused on the very large gardens, which I think is a good approach from the perspective of resources. If you have to choose which to acquire, it makes sense to choose the large ones, because they have an inherent stability that makes their longevity more assured. I think that one of the reasons Philadelphia has had so many small gardens is because of the row-house configuration. If you take one or two row houses down, you’ll have the possibility of a garden, but it’s a relatively small site. It might be thirty-feet wide by fifty or seventy-feet deep. The longevity of that kind of garden is questionable, unless it’s a really strong block that is well organized and committed to the garden.”

Bonham added that Philadelphia Green also has a special focus on these larger gardens: “We’ve identified about ten larger gardens that have been around for a number of years. Most of them have fairly established governance; and some have infrastructure, such as sheds, watering systems, and greenhouses, or they involve schools. We helped to organize the leaders of those gardens. We call them ‘keystone gardens’ because they are the keystones to the neighborhoods, just as Pennsylvania is the Keystone State. We take people to visit them, and they attract gardeners from more than the surrounding neighborhood. We’ve focused on them for preservation and for infrastructure development, because we think they’ll be permanent assets to those neighborhoods. We have developed a Garden Tenders program, a multi-session training course, for would-be community gardeners. We then work further with those ‘graduates’ showing the most potential to make gardens.”

Equity and Sustainability

As more and more houses were demolished in the 1990s, the amount of vacant land appearing in neighborhoods began to overwhelm the valiant efforts of volunteer community gardeners. In 1995, PHS partnered with the New Kensington Community Development Corporation on a seven-year project to address the vacant lot issue in the Kensington-Fishtown neighborhood, which had over 1,100 vacant lots. The project resulted in fifteen new community gardens, several hundred “cleaned and greened” vacant lots, and over 500 new trees. A study funded by the William Penn Foundation and completed by

University of Pennsylvania Wharton School's Susan Wachter indicated that the vacant lot stabilization project improved housing values in New Kensington by as much as 30%. As Bonham noted, "That was an important analysis. Once we translated the improvements into economic terms, it gave greening a new credibility."⁶

A second major effort to assist low-income neighborhoods has occurred through the city's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative. In 2003 and 2004 the city developed contracts with PHS, which was charged with helping to develop programs to clean up and maintain vacant lots, to develop general greening programs in targeted neighborhoods, and to assist in citywide greening for streets, parks, new community gardens, and commercial corridors. In one of the programs, the Community-Based Vacant Lot Program, Philadelphia Green works with neighborhood organizations and community development corporations (including the New Kensington CDC) to improve and maintain land in the neighborhoods. The organizations provide jobs for low-income residents in the neighborhoods, and some organizations also provide job training.⁷

As Bonham explained, "We've persuaded the city that volunteers from the city's neighborhoods are not going to accept maintenance responsibility for 40,000 vacant lots. That is the work of a municipality. After the lot is stabilized and, volunteers can then develop it further as a green space if they want to make community gardens, small parks, a playing field, or simply put a bed of flowers on the corner of a greened lot. However, all this green land has to be maintained. Initially, the city thought that the Streets Department could maintain it. It quickly became obvious that the city's Streets Department didn't have the capacity to maintain them in addition to its normal workload. So the city provides us funds to contract with currently nine community groups, some of them CDCs, who in turn have hired community residents and formed teams. We help them with capital such as lawn mowers and weed whackers, and we train them in basic landscape maintenance skills. A few of the organizations, such as Ready, Willing and Able, also teach the workers basic job skills, such as showing up on time and having a work schedule. Many of the people hired have histories of homelessness and drug related addiction problems or and they are mostly men. When you talk to these men, it's heartening to understand what it means to them to have a job and to do something that is valuable to the community."

Given the large number of vacant lots, it is impossible to green all of them, and as of mid-2005 Philadelphia Green and the partner organizations were maintaining about 500 improved and 2,000 unimproved vacant lots. As Bonham explained, "We've tried to be strategic about this. We work with the community to identify the lots. Often they are entryways to the community or on main thoroughfares. We choose lots that will change the perception of the community not only by the people driving through but also the people who live in the neighborhoods."⁸

In addition to the work of Philadelphia Green, two other developments that link equity and sustainability are worth mentioning. The food security organization Philabundance has helped run a community garden that provides food to the hungry, and the organization's "Share the Harvest" program collects

produce from gardeners for distribution through the food bank and pantry network. Philadelphia is also home to entrepreneurial urban agriculture, some of which has provided training to low-income residents and high school students. Examples of the projects are Greensgrow Farm and the Roots Gardening Project (a high school rooftop greenhouse).⁹

Policy Issues and Recommendations

Even if one adopts a conservative figure of 500 community gardens in the city, Philadelphia has about one community garden for every 3,000 residents or 750 households, a figure that is among the highest in the country. The high level of community gardens is due in part to the huge number of vacant lots in the city and high level of urban poverty. Philadelphia also has a strong tradition of gardening and horticulture, enhanced by the first modern community gardening leaders from the 1970s and 1980s, many who had grown up in the South on farms. Community gardeners in Philadelphia have been fortunate to receive the support from PHS's Philadelphia Green, the Penn State Urban Gardening Program, the Neighborhood Gardens Association, as well as block grants through the city government.

Philadelphia Green provides a well-developed model of how a nonprofit organization's support for community gardening can be embedded in a much broader vision of urban greening and revitalization. There is a strong, ongoing, and developing partnership with the city government that embeds community gardening in a broader program of nonprofit-government partnerships. Bonham noted that in addition to the mayor's office, the city's Recreation Department, Streets Department, and Water Department have all been partners and supportive of various Philadelphia Green projects. (Philadelphia does not have a Neighborhood Department equivalent to those in Seattle and Cleveland, and instead the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative has been run directly out of the Mayor's office.) Of course, the city government's support could change with a different mayoral administration, but city leadership is trying to institutionalize the community greening initiatives currently in effect.

As discussed above, one of the key programs of the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative has been vacant lot reclamation to "clean and green" lots in targeted neighborhoods, and the city's investment has been significant. As Bonham explained, "To date, with this year's contract in place, the city has spent over \$9 million on vacant land reclamation and maintenance. However, maintenance is a continually growing cost, because the more we clean up, the more there is to maintain." Although the city has stepped up to the challenge of vacant land management, after the first year it has not been able to dedicate Neighborhood Transformation Initiative funds specifically for community gardens. As Bonham explained, "Personally, I can understand that logic. The problem of the vacant land is so enormous that the city has said that if we want to help create community gardens, we need to raise money from other non-government sources." However, Bonham added that in his experience funders today are not especially interested in community gardens; instead, they want to see proposals for "the next big step in community development through greening."

Once vacant lots are cleaned and greened, they become possible sites for community gardens, provided that there is significant interest from the neighborhood. However, the use of the land for gardening, recreation, or other community activities is not guaranteed over the long term. Although Philadelphia has not seen the high levels of real estate appreciation characteristic of the Bay Area, Seattle, and Boston, redevelopment and gentrification are occurring in several neighborhoods. The city's many vacant lots, including the ones that have been cleaned and greened, eventually could be resold to developers. As a result, they are in a holding status similar to the land banks of other cities. This issue raises the question of balancing development with green space maintenance, that is, a question of urban planning.

As Bonham explained, "In 1999 we did a cost-benefit analysis on the issue of vacant land maintenance, and part of the recommendation was to set up a land bank like the one in Cleveland. Instead of creating a separate agency, the City has condemned and acquired probably over 6,000 lots and to put them into its Redevelopment Authority for future disposition. The city realized that if the land was ever going to be repackaged for redevelopment, it had to take control of the land. No one is pretending that every piece of land should be a green space; that would fragment the city. However, as we re-plan the city, we need permanent green spaces in those communities. That's the challenge we're facing."¹⁰

Unlike Seattle, where there is a city plan that explicitly has a per capita ratio of community gardens as part of its green space targets, Philadelphia does not have a city plan, let alone a city-wide goal for community gardens. As Bonham explained, "The city's growth had stagnated for so long that planning for the future became anathema in the city leadership's thinking. Today a boom real estate market around Center City and its fringe communities is spurring development, without overarching redevelopment plan in place, and many community gardens that were on unvalued property have become hot properties. The city just got funding to develop an open space plan, and included as part of the team. I would like to see a plan that articulates has a certain percentage of land dedicated to open space, greenways, and community gardens. It doesn't mean that every community garden should continue to exist, because sometimes gardens are on large lots that are most appropriate for development. It's a challenging situation, but I think that for Philadelphia there is recognition on a civic level of how important this is."

If the situation were to develop so that vacant lots were to disappear, community gardening would need to transition to public land and land held in trust, as has occurred in cities with high levels of gentrification. Fortunately, the city's Fairmount Park Commission has been open to the idea of community gardens in city parks, so as land values increase, there is potential to expand onto public green spaces. However, as Bonham explained, "At this point there's so much vacant land that it's just not needed. That's just part of the dynamics of Philadelphia in the early twenty-first century."

Based on an interview by David Hess with J. Blaine Bonham, Jr., on August 17, 2005.

Web site: <http://www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org>

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Portland Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture

By David J. Hess

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Since 1975 the city of Portland has supported community gardening through its Bureau of Parks and Recreation. As of 2005 the city had about thirty community gardens, of which fifteen were on the Parks and Recreation Bureau lands. The city supported community gardening with one, full-time staff person and a budget of about \$200,000. I interviewed Leslie Pohl-Kosbau, the director of the Community Gardens Program, and visited two community gardens. She founded the program in 1974 and organized Friends of Portland Community Gardens in 1985, and she has also served on the board of the American Community Gardening Association. There are a number of other urban agriculture groups and programs in the city and region; this study will focus on community gardens. However, I was also able to visit the Zenger Urban Agriculture Park and gardens assisted by the nonprofit organization Growing Gardens, so a brief description of their work will be included under the broader umbrella of urban agriculture in Portland.

Portland's thirty community gardens host about 1,000 plots, and collectively they generate a half million dollars in produce. Seven of the gardens are on private lands (churches, Reed College, etc.), fifteen are on the lands of the Bureau of Parks and Recreation, and eight are on other public lands, including schools. Notwithstanding the decades of support from the city government, demand for community gardens in this city of about 530,000 people has outstripped supply, and in 2001 the city's vision statement noted the shortage and the need for more gardens. As of 2005 about 300 families were on waiting lists to get a garden plot, and there was a three-year waiting list. The city was adding gardens, and had added three in 2004 and one in 2005.¹

When the citizens of the Sellwood neighborhood asked to create a community garden on land for a pump station, their request led city commissioner Dan Saltzman to propose a resolution to conduct an inventory of city land that could become community gardens. The city council passed the resolution and contracted with Portland State University to conduct the study. The study, called the "Diggable City," identified 289 potential locations, including areas east of Interstate 205, which the city's Food Policy Council had identified as food insecure.²

Pohl-Kosbau agreed that the area east of Interstate 205, where there is a large low-income population, would be a good area to develop. In addition, she

noted several possible areas for possible expansion: “I would like to see some rooftop gardens, especially in highly desirable areas. For example, in the inner southeast, there is a huge gardening ethic, and that’s where most of our waiting lists are. It looks like there are a lot of gardens there, but there’s very little land. We’re in schoolyards, too, and the next garden that we want to develop is in a schoolyard. The problem is funding. We have all the community development in place and the school on board, but we just don’t have the funds. The Friends of Portland Community Gardens has been able to raise about \$7,000, but we need at least \$50,000 to start a garden. A water meter costs \$10-12,000.”

Once schoolyard gardens are developed, there are resources available for curriculum development. For example, the Portland International Institute for Ecology, Culture, and Learning, which is a research group at Portland State University, has received a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to develop environmental education in schoolyard gardens. The project, which is known as “Food-Based Ecological Education and Design” or FEED, will also integrate food produced in the gardens into the students’ cafeteria meals.³

Although there has been widespread support for community gardening in the city, in 2004-2005 budgetary pressures put the gardens at risk. By 2005 the city was facing a budget deficit of \$16 million, and the city underwent a zero-based budgeting process that required the departments to prioritize their spending. The Bureau of Parks and Recreation placed community gardens in its lowest priority group of programs, and it also raised garden fees by 28%. Other areas targeted were community centers and swimming pools. A campaign led by Friends of Portland Community Gardens mobilized widespread public support for the gardens. As Pohl-Kosbau explained, “The city council went through every bureau very carefully and said that they were not going to close community centers, pools, and gardens, and we had to find cuts elsewhere. The public spoke and we’re back in budget. I’m trying to do business a little differently by finding more partnerships and more outside sources, but I also want to keep the base in a municipal program.”⁴

Zenger Urban Agricultural Park

Ulrich Zenger, Jr., inherited a dairy farm in southeastern Portland, Oregon, from his father, Ulrich Zenger, Sr. The son ran the farm until 1954, when he stopped commercial dairy farming. He maintained the farm through the 1980s, and he was exploring ways of preserving the farm before his death in 1989. In 1994 the city’s Bureau of Environmental Services purchased the farm from the son’s cousins, who had inherited the land, as part of its plan for wetlands conservation. In the following year the city leased part of the land to Marc Boucher-Colbert, who developed the land as an educational site for local schools and Portland State University. Five years later Friends of Zenger Farm was created to develop a long-term master plan and hold a fifty-year lease on the land from the city. Its executive director is Wisteria Loeffler.⁵

The Zenger Urban Agricultural Park, as it is now known, sits on six acres of the former Zenger Farm, and it provides a model of the variety of functions that a nonprofit urban agricultural site can serve. The heart of the farm is its youth

education program. The Grow Wise program serves K-12 students, who learn about farming during field trips to the farm. The nonprofit organization provides a working farm by contracting with a local farmer who runs the 47th Avenue Farm, a somewhat larger farm. The farmer cultivates a few acres of the Zenger land without charge and adds the produce to her CSA (community-supported agriculture) subscriptions.⁶

The vision for the Zenger Urban Agricultural Park includes rehabilitating the former farmhouse by utilizing various sustainable building technologies. Construction work was in progress during 2005, and it included certified sustainable lumber, photovoltaic panels, and rainwater harvesting. Although Portland is known as a city that has a lot of rain, there is a dry season during the summer months, and rainwater harvesting can help supply the fields with water. The farm will also be connected to the ten acres of wetlands through a system of trails. New programs will include a demonstration garden and orchard, seasonal farm stand, and adult education. As a result, the urban agricultural park hopes to become a destination point for people in the city, and it hopes also to become a national model of what a nonprofit, urban farm can achieve.⁷

Equity and Sustainability

As Pohl-Kosbau explained, one of the benefits of keeping community gardens as a municipal program is that the gardens are accessible to all people. "If people move from one part of the city to another, they can transfer. It's the kind of ideal that you would want if you were a citizen. We don't have one group in one place that has its set of rules, and another group somewhere else that has its rules. It's an open process and it's accountable. I'm not saying that nonprofits are not accountable, but there can be programs that are run for certain people and may not be open to all people. Our commitment is to be accessible to everyone. That's what a municipal program is all about." Although there are no distinctions among income levels for gardens and gardeners, Pohl-Kosbau does make efforts to assist low-income gardeners. As she added, "I try to raise money outside the program for scholarships, and that's been successful so far." She is also looking at a sliding scale of fees for plots that is based on income.

Portland's community gardens also help low-income residents through the nonprofit organization Produce for People. The program helps gardens to food assistance organizations, and the gardens generate an estimated six tons per year of food donations. The city's community gardens program and Friends of Portland Community gardens also cosponsor Children's Gardening Program, an after-school and summer program for low-income children aged six through twelve. The educational program also donates its proceeds to low-income families. Another way that low-income residents benefit from community gardening occurs when gardens open in their neighborhoods. For example, a new community garden that is being added in 2005 will be part of the new McCoy Park, which is affiliated with a Hope VI project.⁸

On the issue of organic gardening techniques and immigrant or low-income gardeners, Pohl-Kosbau answered that she sometimes experienced the issues found in other cities with immigrant gardeners. "I've found slug-bait boxes

in some of the gardens and wonder how I can help this. There are language and culture barriers, and I noticed that there's not a lot of interaction between the immigrant gardeners and the organic trends, which are dominant here. When most people come to a community garden, they know that they want organic. One garden manager has been able to bridge that gap, but she really had to be there a lot of the time."

Pohl-Kosbau gave one example of how a garden had been transformative for a neighborhood. "At Pier Garden the manager is a fantastic guy. He found some kids who were throwing rocks and breaking windows, and he asked them if they would be interested in the garden. He asked the garden, and they gave a plot to the boys. The manager started working with them and established a relationship with them. So these gang members started working in the garden. It was all because of him: his leadership, his personality, and his ability to know how to engage other people. That's exactly what I want to see happen, and I try to support it at every turn."

A related development in Portland has been work to support the development of home gardens for low-income residents. The nonprofit organization Growing Gardens, was founded in 1996 as the Portland Home Garden Project with the goal of assisting low-income gardeners to develop their own gardens. Since its founding, the organization has supported about 350 home gardeners by providing technical assistance, mentors, and workshops. It has also worked with schools and low-income apartment building residents to build about 35 larger gardens, and the organization also runs after-school "garden clubs" at elementary schools that serve low-income children. In 2003 Growing Gardens built thirty-eight new home gardens and worked with other organizations to help develop five community gardens. The organization has also assisted schools to develop on-site gardens.⁹

The Zenger Farm has several programs oriented toward low-income residents. The farm makes an effort to ensure that its program for school field trips reaches out to low-income youth in the southeastern section of Portland. Likewise, the CSA subscriptions associated with the farm include some scholarship shares. The farm also sponsors plots for recent immigrants, who are encouraged to grow food from their native countries that is not readily available. It is hoped that some of them may eventually start their own farms, and a training program is underway.

Policy Issues and Recommendations

Pohl-Kosbau noted several advantages of a public community gardens system beyond those already described. One advantage was that the public system can better handle the insurance problem: "Another good reason to have a municipal system is for insurance purpose. For a private organization, it would be millions of dollars to insure all these sites. We are self-insured, and our volunteers are somewhat protected under our program." The city also tests land in new gardens to make sure that it exceeds federal standards of soil safety.

Another advantage of a public community gardens system is that land tenure is relatively secure for community gardening in Portland. However, there

are land tenure issues in the gardens held on private lands. As Pohl-Kosbau explained, "In Portland we have an urban growth boundary, so people want to develop every piece of land. It is difficult to keep our green spaces, and even the school districts are selling off their property." She added that foundation assistance and other partnerships with nonprofit organizations will be critical for community gardens on private sites. In addition to foundation support, federal block grants could be made available. However, unlike some cities, where some block grant funding is used for community gardens, in Portland the city government has allocated all block grants to housing.

The city of Portland has a comprehensive plan, and its vision statement recognized the value of community gardening, but the city's plan does not include targets for community gardens. Pohl-Kosbau explained, "I know that Seattle has goals, and I think Portland should also have gardens in its plan. There have been neighborhood plans in the past, and we've utilized them to site gardens. The citizens wanted community gardens, and we have been able to put that in our grant requests. They haven't been doing neighborhood-by-neighborhood planning for some time, and I'm a little disappointed, because I think it helps a lot. I hope they'll do it again."

In some cities, such as Seattle and Cleveland, the community gardens programs are housed in the city department of neighborhoods rather than the department of parks and recreation, and the location in a department of neighborhoods seems to have been a positive development for the program. I asked Pohl-Kosbau about this issue and Portland's experience, and she noted that the Bureau of Neighborhood Involvement is not a particularly strong department in Portland. The answer was interesting, because it pointed to the strength of the department as well as its mission as a factor in the success of city community gardens programs. As Pohl-Kosbau explained, "I'm not opposed to moving the community gardens program anywhere as long as it is supported. Right now there is some discussion of possible cross-support from the Office of Sustainable Development, and that would be fine. The Food Policy Council is under the Office of Sustainable Development, so it would be a shame to have something going on there and not coordinated with our program. So I think both bureaus would benefit from cross-support."

Portland is among the few American cities that has a Food Policy Council, which is an organization that integrates a wide range of food-related issues, from local agricultural networks to urban agriculture to food security or anti-hunger work. Yet, even as food policy and food security have made it onto the agenda of the city government through its Office of Sustainable Development, the parks bureau has asked Pohl-Kosbau to reframe the mission of the community gardens program from an anti-hunger or food-related message to a broader message of health because a health-related mission would be aligned with the bureau's motto of "Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland." The point is interesting for a general understanding of community gardens and their public and private support. In some cases private organizations associated with community gardens have emphasized the food security dimensions of community gardens, probably because there is more private funding for food security work than a general

mission of community building. Although the mission of food security may work well for private, nonprofit organizations that assist community gardens, it is not part of the mission of a parks and recreation department, and as a result the rubric of food security can be used as a reason for eliminating or marginalizing a community gardens program that is housed in a parks and recreation department. Yet, community gardens do provide multiple health benefits, including outdoor exercise. Furthermore, by aligning the mission of the community gardens program with the broader mission of health, Pohl-Kosbau noted that the new opportunities for private sector partnerships could emerge, such as with local health maintenance organizations.

The flexibility in defining what a community garden means to a city points to its many benefits. Community gardens are not just about growing food; rather, they are green spaces where the social relationships of a neighborhood can be built and the quality of life, including issues of health and opportunities for young people, can be improved for the city as a whole.

Based on an interview with Leslie Pohl-Kosbau, June 8, 2005, and a tour of gardens and the Zenger Urban Agricultural Park on June 9, 2005, led by Marc Boucher-Colbert, the founder of the Zenger farm; Wisteria Loeffler, its director; and Rodney Bender, the gardens coordinator of Growing Gardens.

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Sacramento Area Community Garden Coalition

By David J. Hess

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Bill Maynard is a civil engineer by day, but as the founder of the Sacramento Area Community Gardens Coalition he spends about 20 hours per week working on his passion of food, community gardens, and antihunger work in Sacramento. He is also on the boards of the American Community Gardens Association and the City of Sacramento Parks and Recreation Commission, and he works on the Sacramento Hunger Commission. In April 2005 he also joined the city as a part-time community garden coordinator. He had been interested in community gardening for some time, but when the state decided not to renew the lease on the thirty-year-old Ron Mandela Community Garden, a controversy erupted with the gardeners and Maynard became involved. The Mandela Garden became a site of protest in 2003, when the police arrested garden members who had chained themselves together under an apricot tree in the garden. The state went ahead and built a building on the site, and it left a small portion of the land for a garden or green space. Two other community gardens in the city were also lost to housing developments.

"I knew that we couldn't save it," Mr. Maynard said. "It was impossible. The state was going to go ahead and build on it, and the city wanted the tax base. So in 2002 I formed the Sacramento Area Community Garden Coalition. I was on the Park and Recreation board at the time, so I met with the city council, the parks department, and the Capital Area Development Authority (CADA), to try to work a compromise. Their compromise was finding other gardens. The first garden they found was too toxic, then they found this piece (the South Side Community Garden at 5th and W). CADA bought this and removed 24 inches of soil from the whole site, tested again, removed some more soil, and they brought in clean soil, put the fence up, and installed irrigation."

The new garden opened in January 2004. CADA donated the property to the city, so the South Side Community Garden became the first community garden run and own by the city on park land. The city's response has been positive, and it may even develop a position for a community gardens manager.

Maynard continued, "When they were given this garden by CADA, that's when they got into the community gardens. I remember one of them saying, 'Now we're in the community garden business.' They did a big report about three years before the protest with the Mandela garden hit the wall, so they were interested in it before 2003. So now we have two that are going to be opening up this year, one downtown inside a park. It's a little 'postage stamp' garden—that's what I call it—the plots are just ten by ten feet and there are maybe a dozen of

them. Then we found some other land outside of but next to a park, and that's open. And we have another park that they just developed, and it's next to a school, so the school will be sharing the garden space on the park property. There have been a lot of articles in the newspaper, and now people from all around town want a community garden.”¹

He estimates that there are about 12-16 formally organized community gardens in the city of Sacramento, with another four to six in development; about one or two dozen “guerilla gardens,” or gardens located on vacant lots with tenuous land tenure; and several gardens on church lands. One of the tasks of the Sacramento Hunger Commission is to inventory and map all of the community gardens in the city. The Sacramento Hunger Commission also serves as the umbrella organization for the Sacramento Area Community Gardens coalition, which as of March 2005 was a grassroots network of gardeners that hoped to develop 501(c)(3) status. The coalition's goals include promoting community gardens in various locations (not just park land), preserving and expanding urban green spaces, provide a resource for area community gardeners, and promote sustainable gardening and organic farmers' markets. Maynard has been recognized as one of the top three environmental leaders in the Volvo for Life leadership awards, of out 4300 people nominated. The award grants him \$25,000 to donate to the charity of his choice, and he will be putting the money toward the development of school and community gardens in Sacramento.²

Equity and Sustainability

The South Side Community Garden is completely organic, and it offers waivers and reductions on plot fees for low-income gardeners. Maynard also described how he had worked with the city to develop edible landscaping in a housing project. They surveyed the residents, with translators in seven languages, to find out what fruit trees the residents would like to see planted. He sees great potential in integrating hunger issues into the landscaping around low-income housing.

Another mechanism for low-income gardening is through school gardens. “We have a few community gardens on school property, and we received a grant from WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program. The gardens have to have kids zero to five years old to garden there, so it's a family garden. In California we have a tobacco tax of fifty cents per pack, and that goes to the Kids' First program, and so they make available a pool of money for projects. We got some money for a community garden with the Hmong families, and they also get nutrition classes. It's hard, when you work with translators, to translate ‘organic.’ A lot of times we'll find them stirring this big garbage can of blue liquid; it's the Miracle Gro. They're making a big batch of that. For them it's a hunger issue; they want the biggest crop, and that's how they figure they can get it. So we end up putting labels on the cartons with a circle with an X over it, saying no Miracle Gro, no this, no that. But I'm well aware of the hunger issue, because I'm involved with the Sacramento Hunger Commission, and we did a survey called

'Hunger Hits Home.' Of the people in soup kitchens, shelters, and food lines, 48% said they would garden in a community garden if they had access to one. But as for sustainability and organic, it is a toss-up sometimes. Some people garden for recreation, and some people garden for food, to supplement their family's food, and it's hard to make that distinction if they're feeding their families."³

Policy Issues and Recommendations

One of the key policy issues for community gardens in Sacramento is developing a place for them in the city's master plan. As Maynard explained, "It was weakly in the Parks and Recreation Department master plan back in the 1990s. The plan mentioned community gardens maybe once. Recently, we did an update of the master plan, and I injected community gardens everywhere I could. Now we have new items like skateboard parks and bocce ball courts, things that we didn't have back in the early 1990s. So I made sure that everywhere they had plans for skateboard parks and bocce ball courts, community gardens were there, too. In Seattle or Portland, they have a ratio in their planning document of about one community garden for every 2500 people, and right now ours is one for every 100,000 people. Their goal, and I couldn't get them to raise it, was to make eight community gardens in the next ten years, and that's way out of line. We should be making about eight a year. There are people who want them all over town in all income levels, and they don't cost much. Some of the parks cost \$50,000 to \$300,000 per year to maintain, and this community garden doesn't cost anything to maintain, just the water."

Maynard also noted that planning for new community subdivisions could include community gardens. "In my job in a land development civil engineering firm, I'm working with my planners to create community gardens in new subdivisions. We have two community gardens in two new subdivisions that will be coming on line in the next year or two. This is going to be a selling point in the future."

Another area for policy development is to create standardized rules for gardens across the city. "I'm on the national board of the American Community Garden Association, and we modeled our rules after the ones used across the country. The city wants a standard set of rules. We'll recommend that each garden has its own board and a leader who can disseminate information to its members.

Maynard was also involved in developing a food charter for the city, and he hoped that the Sacramento food charter would become a model for other cities. "In 2004 the Sacramento Hunger Commission wrote a food charter for the city of Sacramento, modeled after Toronto's food charter. We might even be the first one in the United States. It talks about everyone's right to have access to fresh foods in farmers' markets, community gardens, grocery stores, schools, and workplaces. We wanted the city to promote healthy eating habits. It's been approved by the city, and now we're going to take it to the county and some

outlying cities. We had a food summit to let everyone know that we have a food charter.”⁴

Schools have been very open to community gardening, and Maynard sees school gardens as a major area in need of development. “The main issue is to tie it to the curriculum. There are many publications and books that can do that. You can teach math in the garden, not to mention art and science. You can calculate how many cubic yards of soil is needed to fill up the raised bed. In one of the programs, the kids make salsa and flowers to sell at the coop. Really, it has to come from the teachers. You have to have the teachers involved.” Once a year he also organizes a National Make a Difference Day, where he gets about 350 Americore workers, plus another 100-150 additional volunteers, all of whom work in the school and community gardens.

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www.saccommunitygardens.org

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Soil Born Farm (Sacramento)

By David J. Hess

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Soil Born Farm was founded in 2000 by Shawn Harrison and Marco Francioso. In college Harrison did an internship with Oscar Carmona of the Gildea Resource Center, which ran low-income community gardens in the Santa Barbara area, and he subsequently completed an apprenticeship in ecological horticulture in the Agroecology Program at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he met his business partner Francioso. For Harrison and Francioso, urban agriculture brings together various values. As Harrison described, “It brought together the environmental activism side of it, working with your hands and having the feeling of creating something healthy and positive. Tied in with that, Marco and I had seen that people were very disconnected from their food: how it was grown, where it came from, what it does for your body, how it affects your health and state of mind, and how it affects your community as well. So we decided that this was something we wanted to do in a very formalized way: to start a farm and do things that would reconnect people to food.” The farm has four main goals: developing a permanently protected urban farm with responsible land stewardship, develop education programs, address food security needs, and bring people together. In 2004 it received non-profit status.

The main farm is a one-and-a-half acre site located next to the Jonas Salk Middle School in the city of Sacramento, where a landowner generously allowed them to utilize the space in return for fresh produce. In addition, the city has allowed Soil Born Farm to use about 25 acres of a larger site, located on the American River Parkway, which includes former farmland and a barn. Harrison and Francioso are confident that they could have achieved success as a for-profit farm, but they wanted to go the non-profit route because of their environmental, educational, and antipoverty goals. Financially, the farm is supported by sales to farmers’ markets, restaurants, the food coop, and about forty CSA (community-supported agriculture) subscribers, but because it is a non-profit organization, the farm also obtains support from grants and donations. Harrison made clear that many of the goals could have been achieved as a for-profit farm, and that their non-profit status interacts positively with for-profit farms: “We feel that our work in the city as a non-profit organic farm and education center complements and enhances the ability of for-profit organic farms to increase their markets and presence in urban environments. Being a non-profit gives us more flexibility to

address many of the social, educational, and environmental issues on a programmatic level. This does not suggest, though, that for-profit farms are not able to do these things well. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are plenty of organic farms that are doing all of these positive things in various forms and at varying levels.”

Given the proximity to the middle school, the farm has generated considerable excitement among the teachers for various educational programs. Although the school collaboration was still in a pilot stage when I visited in 2005, Harrison and Francioso were developing plans for a garden-based curriculum program called “Food, Health, and the Environment.” Planned projects included: a garden on the school grounds, teachers’ training workshops, use of fresh produce from the farm in cooking classes and the cafeteria, and an after-school market stand. They will also develop an “edible schoolyard,” which involved planting trees and shrubs that produce edible fruits and vegetables, following the model of Alice Waters of Chez Panisse in Berkeley. “It’s an integrated approach to food systems,” says Harrison. “Schools are cutting after-school programs, and this school is a low-income school, so about 70% of the kids are on free lunch programs, which are horrible.”

Another educational program is for apprentices, who come to the farm from across the country based on listing posted at the web sites of ATTRA, the USDA’s National Sustainable Information Service, and California Certified Organic Farmers. “We specifically look for people who want to go into organic agriculture, whether it be in education or farming,” said Harrison. “It’s a really good way to learn. Our farm in particular is so small and integrated that they can see every piece of what’s involved in growing food, and they also can also tap into the more social, educational, and environmental pieces as well.” When I visited the farm, there were three apprentices working full-time.

Equity and Sustainability

One of the main projects of the farm is Project FEED (Food, Education, Equity, and Diversity). The project is aimed at recent immigrants and refugees in Sacramento who have agricultural backgrounds in their home countries, but it includes people who grew up in California and have an interest in agriculture. As Harrison noted, “We want to create growing opportunities for them—whether it be in a community garden setting, on small farm, or even a larger farm—by giving them the appropriate training and marketing opportunities to that they can grow their business.” With support from the Health Education Council, which is a collaborator on a grant with the California Nutrition Network, the project will develop a fresh product market for the low-income community of Del Paso Heights, where the supermarket produce is second-grade: not fresh, overpriced, nonlocal, and not organic. The project also trains backyard and community gardeners in organic production and marketing. “We want to create the opportunity for that community and accomplish some other goals at the same time: the economic, capacity-building focus; the food access focus; and then the education piece. So the market will be a place where local growers can sell food

and people can come and get educated to cook food.” Their plan is based on research of other examples that combine local food access and economic capacity building.

Many of the low-income growers, especially the immigrant and refugee groups, have a background in horticultural and agricultural techniques that do not use synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. Although in Sacramento some have adopted the synthetic inputs, Harrison added, “For the most part, they are very receptive to trying not to use those things, so I have not gotten a lot of resistance from them. They do use Triple 15 (15-15-15) fertilizers, and some use Miracle Gro, but most don’t use a lot of pesticides and herbicides. It’s definitely a learning process, but our goal is to get them to farm 100% organic.”

Policy Issues and Recommendations

One policy issue facing small, educational farms is the decision to spend the money to become certified organic. “We went that route,” Harrison says, “but we may or may not go that route on our second farm. At least in our formative years, we could sell to all of the high-end restaurants and stores. They want that guarantee. We’ve had great success in having local businesses support us in terms of cost sharing opportunities to pay for certification. We believe in the certification process because we feel that customers should have the guarantee of knowing how their food is grown. Obviously, the more connected they are to the farm, the need for that becomes less and less. The problem is that most people aren’t connected to the farm, so having the guarantee and knowing that there are other people looking at it is positive. But the original intent of most of the organic farmers, in terms of what they were trying to do with their land and how they were trying to treat their employees, is not necessarily reflected in the USDA standards to the extent that they wanted them to be. So now people are looking at standards beyond organic and different types of branding that are giving the guarantees above and beyond organic. And so we have mixed feelings about it, and we think it is a good thing because right now there are so many people who are not educated about it, and this is a way to bring the consumers into the fold.” He notes that with some of the small, low-income gardeners and farmers whom they are training, organic certification may not be necessary if they are growing for a small customer base and not selling to restaurants or the coop.

Another issue that Soil Born Farm faced was liability insurance. “Typically, if you do a thirty-kid tour with some activities during the day, most funds are charging \$5-6 per head.” The non-profit status gives them more flexibility and the ability to solicit donations to cover insurance coverage.

At a more general level, Harrison would like to see cities and counties reserve ten percent of their land for agricultural use. “Within that would fall community gardens, small farms, and a couple big farms. They would be for producing fruits and vegetables for local consumption. If we could do something like that, this country would be in so much better shape. Even on a more basic level, it would be good to have cities and counties create doctrines that say, ‘We support local agriculture and the activities that are associated with it, such as

environmental education.’ Here in Sacramento they wrote a food charter, and now we’re trying to get the county to do it. If every city and county had a food charter that said we want to feed our hungry population and we want to create opportunities for community gardens and small farms, that would be a good start.”

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San Francisco Community Gardens

By David J. Hess

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In San Francisco many of the community gardens are on public lands, mostly held by the city's Recreation and Parks Department. There are also community gardens in public housing areas, lands held by government divisions other than Recreation and Parks, and even one community garden in the Golden Gate National Recreational Area. There appear to be few "guerrilla gardens," that is, gardens that have been appropriated by a neighborhood to make use of abandoned lots that are owned by absentee landlords or have been taken over by the city for failure to pay taxes. Given the high value of real estate in San Francisco, there are few vacant lots in the city.

For many years the San Francisco League of Community Gardeners (SLUG) managed the city's community gardens. The organization was founded in the 1980s after the demise of CETA, the federal jobs program sponsored by the "Comprehensive Employment and Training Act." By the early 2000s SLUG had a budget of about \$1.6 million, largely from city contracts for management of the gardens on public lands. With the budget the nonprofit organization employed 70 youth as well as about 50 part-time and full-time staff and garden crew workers. In the world of welfare-to-work legislation, SLUG became known nationally as a model of urban job creation and training for low-income residents. However, the city did not renew the contract with SLUG in the summer of 2004. Various reasons have been given for the non-renewal. Some claim that the organization did not have a good record of job placement, that there was a high drop-out rate, and that it was having difficulties meeting its financial and contractual obligations. In addition, in the fall of 2004 the city attorney's office alleged that the organization coerced its workers to vote and campaign for Mayor Gavin Newsom. SLUG's leaders denied the allegations and contested the fairness of the investigation, but the organization disbanded.¹

Subsequent to the implosion of SLUG, the city's Recreation and Parks Department took over the management of the forty community gardens on city park lands and other public lands such as the Department of Public Works and the Public Utilities Commission. Although the funds for low-income jobs have disappeared, under the city's Proposition C, which voters approved in 2000, an annual fund of \$150,000 is set aside for community gardens. Marvin Yee, the Community Garden Program Director of the Department of Recreation and Parks since 1996, affirmed the city's commitment to developing community gardens. He cited demand from the citizens, benefits to the neighborhoods, and increased

safety for parks as some of the reasons why the city supports continued development of community gardens on public lands. He was working with San Francisco Garden Resource Organization (SF GRO)—an organization of representatives of public community gardens that was formed after the demise of SLUG—to inventory gardens, assess needs, and work out policies. In an inventory completed during spring 2005 of the department's gardens, they found approximately forty gardens in the city with approximately 700 gardeners.²

Equity and Sustainability

Until 2004, community gardening provided an employment mechanism for low-income people, but the city appears not to have replaced the jobs program for low-income residents that it had offered through SLUG. Although the jobs program is defunct, there is still an equity dimension to community gardening, because the gardens provide access to fresh food for some low-income residents. About half of the city's community gardens are located in the southeastern and central part of the city, which coincides with some of the moderate to low-income neighborhoods. In the central and southeastern portion of the city the population density is higher, and residents may not have access to private gardens, whereas in the northern, western, and southwestern parts of the city there are more single-family residences with private backyards. The weather is also sunnier in the southeastern and central part of the city.

One result of the discontinuation of the funding for low-income residents is that some of the hallmark programs supported by SLUG have suffered. For example, the Alemany Youth Farm had attracted national attention and a write-up as a "success story" on the U.S. Department of Energy's Smart Community Network web site. The four-acre farm is located on a portion of the St. Mary's Recreation Area, a city-owned park that is between a middle-class neighborhood and the Alemany Housing Project. Given its location, the community garden/farm was ideally situated to bring in youth and adults from the housing project to grow their own food. At its peak in the early 2000s, the Alemany Youth Farm had a budget of about a half million dollars. It employed 30 teen-agers at \$6 to \$8 per hour and offered them training in sustainable agriculture as well as access to classes at the City College of San Francisco. Many of the teen-agers who ordinarily would not have gone to college finished the program and went on to college.

Although successful while it was funded, the Youth Farm was overgrown with weeds when I visited it in March, 2005. Without the funding for youth jobs, it was impossible to attract the low-income teen-agers and keep the farm running. It was also hard to attract middle-class residents who lived up the hill from the site, because they were afraid of crime due to farm's location next to the housing project. Meanwhile, the beehives had been overturned, and the greenhouse showed signs of vandalism and illicit uses that were far from the original vision. Unfortunately, at the time of the visit the Youth Farm was unable to get help from the city to clean up the space, either from city gardeners or from the sanitation people. Notwithstanding the tragedy of the collapse of the Alemany Youth Farm, the manager, Naomi Goodwin, had a bountiful vision of the potential of the city's

largest urban farm, and she was looking for new sources of volunteer help, foundation support, and assistance from the Recreation and Park Department. Although the Youth Farm could be converted into the conventional model of community gardening (rental of small plots), Goodwin was trying to find ways to maintain the original vision of paying low-income youth to work in the garden and receive training that would open doors for them in the future.⁴

Policy Issues and Recommendations

San Francisco has not faced the sell-off of publicly owned lands that has occurred in some other cities, such as New York. This is because the gardens are not located on abandoned lots that have come under city ownership. Conversion to private property of land that is under the jurisdiction of the Recreation and Parks Department would require a decision by voters, so land tenure is stable for the gardens that are on public land. In a few cases city Recreation and Parks Department is also acquiring the title to community gardens on private or nonprofit land that may be in jeopardy of losing the gardening rights. The Department's planning division conducted a needs assessment, which revealed that community gardens were one of the top three needs in the city. Government support is widespread for community gardens on public lands, including from the mayor's office, the board of supervisors, and the Recreation and Parks Department. Instead of the land tenure problem that is common elsewhere, two other types of policy issues have emerged in the San Francisco case.⁵

First, the city government has recognized a need to develop policies for community gardens that set standards of management. For example, Marvin Yee is developing a list of tasks for which gardeners are responsible and the city is responsible. One key is to develop policies that ensure equity. Part of the tasks of the managers of each garden will be to keep a reliable waiting list for people who want plots and to assign plots fairly as they become open. By keeping fees at a reasonable level and imposing a fair, standardized policy on waiting lists, issues of access are being addressed more fairly. In some cases people who arrived first have very large plots that are not completely utilized, and yet there are waiting lists. The city's policies will ensure more equitable use of the land, and the new policies will also set priorities for the Recreation and Parks Department's work. Another key issue related to equity and access, which is being addressed by the city's policy committee, is the general public's access into the community garden, particularly into gardens that are locked due to rampant vandalism, theft, or illicit activities. Gardens may need to set up an equitable access structure to allow other members of the public to share the space in other ways. For example, a community type of space (such as an amphitheater) may be incorporated into the community garden to stage community events, or the community garden may schedule bi-annual garden days to invite the general public into the garden space.⁶

As of 2005 there were no comprehensive policies on sustainability or techniques of gardening, but such policies may develop as well. Many of the

city's community gardens were organic or used low levels of synthetic, industrial inputs, but policies regarding sustainability were determined by each garden.⁶

A second type of policy issue is the problem of configuring jobs programs so that they are not vulnerable to criticisms that training and placement rates are a failure. The Alemany Youth Farm did achieve the vision of bringing in low-income youth and providing them with an avenue out of the housing projects and into college education. However, critics have claimed that at least some of SLUG's other programs did not have a sufficient job training component to allow the workers to make a transition to better-paying jobs. In a context where federal, state, and local budgets are tight for any kind of jobs program, policies are needed to develop non-state sponsorship and to help such programs through periods of conversion from government funding to other sources. Otherwise, they can undergo collapse and abandonment, as occurred in the Alemany Youth Farm, where a vibrant and successful program has been lost.

Update, summer 2005: There still was no support for the Alemany Youth Farm and no sign of activity on the farm, other than the beehives.

Web sites:

http://www.parks.sfgov.org/site/recpark_index.asp?id=27048
<http://www.sffoodsystems.org>

Update, 2007:

An email from Bill Goedecke states that there has been some progress on the Alemany Farm. For more information, see www.alemanyfarm.org and also www.sfgro.org.

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San Francisco's Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market and
Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture

By David J. Hess

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The Ferry Plaza Farmers Market, located outside the historic Ferry Building on the Embarcadero at the foot of San Francisco's Market Street, is the largest farmers' market in San Francisco. It has about 80-100 vendors, depending on the season, and it operates four days per week during peak season. The Ferry building itself is an active terminal for commuter boat service in the Bay area, and it has been renovated so that the bottom floor contains upscale food stores and restaurants, some of which sell organic products and food grown on regional farms. Ferry boat passengers mix with tourists and downtown workers to come to the building for lunch and shopping. On some market days, there is also a craft fair where several dozen local vendors sell jewelry and other products. Although the farmers' market has no formal relationship with the food hall and the vendors' market, it exists in a unique synergetic relationship with them. In fact, the company that was redeveloping the Ferry building asked the farmers' market to relocate to the building as part of the redevelopment effort.

The farmers' market is operated by the nonprofit organization Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture (CUESA), and it leases office space from a development firm that runs the Ferry Building. In addition to running the farmers' market, CUESA sponsors educational programs in schools, cooking programs, book signings, farm tours, workshops, panel discussions, and other activities designed to educate consumers about the value of local, sustainable agriculture. CUESA was founded by Sybella Kraus, a former cook at Chez Panisse.

Dexter Carmichael, the Director of Operations at CUESA, worked with her and now runs the farmers' market. He explained the history of the farmers' market. "I met Sybella in the early 1980s, when she was working on a farm restaurant project with Alice Waters at Chez Panisse. She founded the Farm Restaurant Project, which connected farmers with restaurants in the region. In the early 1990s, she started the San Francisco Public Market Collaborative and the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market. In 1993 they held a farmers' market here at the

foot of Market Street, after the Embarcadero had been torn down. This was the first event that gave San Franciscans the potential of the waterfront, which had been left to wither. This one-day market was such a success that in 1994 she worked with the city and the port to set up a regular market. From 1994 to 1998 it was here at the foot of Market St., then from 1998 to 2003 it was at Green and Embarcadero, and then with the redevelopment of the Ferry Building it has moved down to the Ferry Building here.

“Events that came out of the farmers’ market were Shop with the Chef, Cooking with Kids, and Meet the Producer, and these led to the realization that there was an educational potential for the market. Initially the farmers’ market was the central aspect of the organization, and when Sybella saw that there was further possibility in helping smaller farmers and developing educational programs—the two integral parts of our mission—that’s when CUESA came about. In order to run a farmers’ market in California, under the direct marketing rules, it needs to be run by a group of farmers, a community-based organization, a city government, or a nonprofit organization. The San Francisco Public Market Collaborative was then brought under CUESA. Its board of directors runs from interested farmers to food aficionados in the city, restaurateurs, some academics from Berkeley and Davis, and people in the community who are interested in food.”

One of the values of shopping at a farmers’ market is buying fresh, local produce, but in some farmers’ markets across the country there has been a problem of vendors who operate as retailers for nonlocal producers. The Ferry Plaza Farmers Market is a California certified market, which is not to be confused with organic certification. A California certified market means that the vendors are all certified to be growers from within the state who are not engaging in resale of food purchased elsewhere. The county agricultural departments certify farms based on visits to the farm, and they also certify farmers’ markets as well. As Carmichael explained, “Under the direct marketing laws, I can pull from anywhere in the state. Most of my growers, say 50 to 60%, are within a two hour area of San Francisco. Because of the breadth of agricultural products here in the state, I’ll pull citrus or dates from near the Mexican border, and in the summer I can get stone fruit like cherries from near the Oregon border. Several of the growers also operate CSAs and promote them through the market.”

Low-Income Issues and Sustainability

On the issue of low-income access, Carmichael said that they faced these issues in various ways throughout the organization’s history. “We also started a Tuesday market that was really a market for the workers here. You realized that there was a significant market here for them to come and buy. There was also an interest in expanding markets to other areas of the city, especially low-income areas like the Mission and Bayview/Hunters Point. Those never got off the ground because of the focus on expanding the education into the core group of people who were coming to our markets. At this time I think we’ve appealed to a broad cross-section, and as market manager I’ve tried to maintain a mix that

serves a broad range of the public here in San Francisco. I think the perception—and this is a change that has happened—is that this is a very high-end market. This is where we run into that odd dichotomy of trying to get the farmers into the urban area to get them to connect to the populace that is interested in food, but at the same time provide them with a return for their product, and they get a good percent.

“I have about 50-60% organic, and this involves another issue, which is the broad interpretation of what is ‘sustainable.’ Within our board, staff, customers, farmers, and even within the city government there are all sorts of opinions about what is sustainable. So you run into a whole number of issues that are astounding, although they can’t be overcome. For example, you have a city that has become gentrified over the last twenty-five years to a significant degree. You have a base of customers that is fairly well-to-do relative to all farmers’ markets in the area. Hence, we have some expensive prices for some of the rare products that you won’t see elsewhere. This is probably not the most ethnic-based market, but it is the largest in the city in terms of the volume of traffic and number of farmers, although Alemany may at times be of similar size.

“We do have programs here, such as WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) and electronic benefits transfers. They come in with an electronic transfer and we give them, say \$40 in chips, which all the farmers accept. They turn them back into CUESA, and we subtract it from their billing. We encourage the use of these coupons and electronic transfers, and we ask that all farmers accept them as readily as cash. I really try to dispel the perception that we’re this yuppie market, and I also think that the demand for low-cost food in this country is missing the understanding of what sustainable, local, and organic means.”

Policy Issues and Recommendations

One of the key problems that Carmichael has identified is that he is losing farmers, and it is very difficult to attract new people into farming. “The direct marketing law and producers’ certificate allowed a large number of small farmers to expand and to have alternative markets where they could directly sell to the public. We want to continue with that and to expand those opportunities. We need to open it up more within the state to broaden how farmers can sell to increase opportunities for growers. There is a small number of small family farmers, and they aren’t increasing. I’d love to see an increase, and to see opportunities for kids in inner city areas, or rural areas, to go out and grow and learn how to have opportunities in that market.

“That would probably require significant land reform, which very few countries see. I’m losing farmers via attrition. It’s an eight-day-a-week job. My job is easy compared to theirs. I know they enjoy it, but it’s tough on them. Who are the young people who are going to replace them? Their children, perhaps, but I think a lot of the farmers might tell them to go into something else. So I’m wondering where this new generation of growers will come from. The state law limits non-corporate farming to 900 acres or so for a family. If we’re really concerned about the security of our food system, we need to open up opportunities for people to go out there and farm.”

In addition to expanding the limit on acreage for family farms, Carmichael identified schools as another area where opportunities could be expanded for small farmers. “We may be maxed out on farmers’ markets, especially in relatively well-to-do areas like the Bay Area or Southern California. They are saturated in these communities. There needs to be integration into schools, where local growers could sell non-standardized packs into local community schools. If we’re talking about health and access of food, schools could be a place where we could see an impact.” As a future site for expansion, direct farm-to-school programs would synthesize CUESA’s mission of education, expanding opportunities for farmers, and connecting people with healthy, fresh, sustainable food sources.

Web site:

www.cuesa.org

Sources:

Interview by David Hess of Dexter Carmichael, March 9, 2005.

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Seattle's P-Patches

By David J. Hess

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In Seattle the word “P-Patch” is used instead of “community garden.” The word has its origins in the 1970s, when the Picardo family could no longer operate its farm at a profit. In 1974 the city stepped in to support the farm and ten other community gardens under its “P-Patch Program.” The “P” stands for the Picardo family, but today some also say that the “P” stands “Passionate People Producing Peas in Public.”¹

I interviewed Ray Schutte, the President of P-Patch Trust. Mr. Schutte worked in information technology at Starbucks for years, when he pursued community gardening as an activist and advocate. Now retired, he is able to devote much more time to gardening and to developing the advocacy organization for community gardening in Seattle. The history of P-Patch Trust can be traced back to the 1970s, when the city began to adopt community gardening as part of its mission. In 1979 the gardeners formed the P-Patch Advisory Council, and in 1995 it became Friends of P-Patch. The organization played an important role in maintaining support for the city program during the budgetary crisis of the 1980s. In general city support for community gardening was strong, and even when gardeners were displaced—as occurred when the city's plans to develop a golf course forced the Interbay Garden to move—the city provided new land and assistance for the garden. In 1987 the P-Patch Advisory Council entered a new phase when it received title to its first garden, which was donated to the organization, and in 1992 the organization's scope expanded when it initiated a land acquisition fund. By 2002 Friends of P-Patch had purchased four additional gardens and assisted other gardens in achieving more secure land tenure.²

In 2003 the organization entered a new phase when it became P-Patch Trust. The structure changed from an elected, membership-based organization to a donor organization with a self-perpetuating board of directors. As Schutte explained, the change from Friends of P-Patch to P-Patch Trust made it possible for the organization to develop in new ways: “If you want to grow an organization, you need to put people on the board for a reason. The Trust seeks to acquire, protect, preserve, and advocate for community gardens. As an organization, we need to have people who have skills in developing nonprofit organizations, fundraising, advocating before the city council, planning events, and other areas.

We bring people to the board because of what they have to offer to the organization, not because they are gardeners.”

The city's role in community gardening also developed and changed during the 1990s and early 2000s. During that period Seattle experienced rapid growth, which could have been very detrimental to community gardens. However, in Seattle there was a high level of environmental consciousness as well as strong sentiment in favor of preserving the city's quality of life. Partly in response to anticipated growth, in 1994 the city government adopted a comprehensive city plan called “Towards a Sustainable Seattle.” The city subsequently shifted planning goals to the neighborhood level, and each of the thirty-eight neighborhoods or “urban villages” produced its own plan. Through a matching funds program from the city, the neighborhoods had a source of funding that could be used for many projects, including the development of green spaces such as community gardens. The city also provided and continues to provide staff support for the city's community gardens. A joint strategic plan, developed by the P-Patch Trust and the city, has called for one staff person for every twelve gardens. The city has not met the goal, but it does have 5.5 full time staff, perhaps the highest level of support per garden of any city in the U.S. Even during periods of budgetary shortfalls, the city has preserved the level of staff support, in part due to the ongoing support and educational efforts of the P-Patch Trust. In 2000 the city council further supported community gardening by adopting the P-Patch Strategic Plan, which established the goal of adding four new gardens per year. As of 2005 the P-Patch trust inventory listed seventy community gardens in Seattle, or about one garden for every 10,000 residents in the city (or 2500 households). The breakdown of land tenure was as follows: sixteen on Seattle Housing Authority land, twenty on city park land, sixteen on other city land, ten leased from landowners, six owned by P-Patch Trust, three on Metro King County land, and one on a schoolyard. When new gardens are added, the city also tests the soil for contaminants. As Schutte explained, “If there are any problems, the soil is changed or moved out. The Trust doesn't buy property or even accept a donation without a soil test first.”

Land tenure was fairly secure for all gardens except the ten on land leased from landowners. When land values rose dramatically in Seattle in the early 2000s, pressure for sale has increased. For example, a church that for years leased its land to a community garden for \$100 per year decided in 2005 to sell its land so that it could relocate. The church was willing to sell the land to the community garden at the lower end of the appraised value. The mayor pledged \$190,000 to help keep the community garden alive, but the gardeners were struggling to raise nearly \$160,000 more. Yet, even this case, which was not resolved at the time of writing, revealed good support from city hall. In general only a few gardens have been lost to development since the 1970s.⁴

The P-Patch idea is popular in Seattle, and private developers are now using the idea for rooftop gardens. Schutte explained: “One of the condos in the Cascade neighborhood has green roofs, and it is a complete sell-out. The owner is convinced that the reason it sold out and the speed of the sales had something to do with P-Patch gardens as an amenity. The developer is successfully

capitalizing on using the name P-Patch for private gardens that are not open to the public. Some of the most successful rentals also have a P-Patch garden on the roof. Those buildings rent more quickly than buildings that don't have gardens."

Equity and Sustainability

About thirty seven of the city's sixty-two community gardens are located in low-income, ethnically diverse neighborhoods. The P-Patch Trust maintains a Gardenship fund to help low-income gardeners who are unable to pay the low annual plot fees that range from \$31 to \$61. Special programs for low-income and immigrant communities are also codified by the city. As occurs in many cities, community gardeners donate a portion of their produce, and in Seattle the community gardens as a whole donate about seven to ten tons of food per year to food banks. In the Interbay Garden, plots are dedicated for food banks, and they are maintained by a weekly class on organic gardening, which attracts students/volunteers who help out while they learn to garden. To get the food from the gardens to the hungry, there is a program called "Lettuce Link." Run by the nonprofit organization Fremont Public Association, the program collects produce from the city's community gardens for distribution through food banks to low-income residents. The program also helps educate people to grow their own food and provides them with seed packets and seedlings.⁵

In addition to the plot fee waivers and donation to hunger networks, P-Patch Trust has incubated two programs aimed at low-income residents. Cultivating Communities was developed with support from the Kellogg Foundation to incubate community gardens on public housing land. Once the program was up and running, P-Patch Trust passed it on to the city, which took over the management of the program through its Department of Neighborhoods and the Seattle Housing Authority. The city dedicated a full-time staff person to the program. Two of the gardens on the public housing land also operate as community-supported agriculture. In the gardens on public housing land, unlike those of the P-Patch Trust, gardeners may sell their produce or flowers. The second program, "Cultivating Youth," teaches nutrition through gardening to low-income youth. The program was funded by King County and as of 2005 was in its incubation stage under the P-Patch Trust, but the plan was for it eventually to become integrated into the city government's programs, as occurred with the Cultivating Communities program.

The gardens in low-income neighborhoods experience their own, unique problems. One problem is crime, as Schutte described: "In one garden, when it was first formed, there were police chases through the garden, literally, with guns drawn. Now a city council person gardens in that garden. It's a rough neighborhood that turned around." A related problem is theft: "There are no fences for P-Patches. They're not under lock and key. We have a few problems with the homeless, and last year someone came through cut all the oriental lilies in our garden. Last year we caught a woman loading up a bushel basket with tomatoes. We took the food away and sent it to the food bank. I found that the theft goes down when we post a statement that says, 'If there is any theft in the

garden, please call the police at' and then give the police report number. We also invite the police to come down and take their breaks here, to come in to the garden and have lunch."

Another problem is teaching organic gardening techniques, especially to immigrant gardeners who have their own horticultural traditions. One solution has been for P-Patch Trust to sponsor field trips to bring new gardeners to the existing gardens such as Interbay to teach them about organic gardening. As Schutte explained, "A little bit of education goes a long way. Organic gardening is still not as heavy as it is in Interbay, but there's far more organic gardening going on than before the field trip."

There are many possible new avenues for P-Patch Trust to explore. Unlike some community gardening organizations, P-Patch Trust does not work with backyard gardeners. In conjunction with Lettuce Link, the Trust did sponsor a "Day of Giving" for backyard gardeners, but as Schutte explained, "At this point we don't have backyard gardeners dropping off surplus produce. However, this year Lettuce Link will pilot a backyard fruit tree donation program. We also have them on tour all the time. One of the outreach programs that we were involved in at one time attempted to help people in an African-American neighborhood establish backyard gardens, so there have been some attempts, but none of them have stuck." Another area of possible expansion is community gardens in schoolyards. The city council supports the idea, and P-Patch Trust is looking at expanding cooperation with schools in its next strategic plan.

Policy Issues and Recommendations

Seattle is a model for American city governments in terms of developing a comprehensive plan with a clear goal for community gardening, decentralizing the planning process by supporting neighborhood-based planning, and supporting the neighborhood plans with funding. In addition to the support from the city government, Seattle has had an active, grassroots gardening community that developed over the years into a formal, nonprofit organization that has increasingly secured independent funding to support community gardening. Because the city itself has made a commitment to shift toward sustainability goals in its urban planning, and it has included community gardens as part of those goals, the relations with the grassroots organization have been much more of a partnership than in other cities.

Why has the partnership been so successful in Seattle? One reason is probably related to land tenure. Unlike some of the eastern cities, community gardens are not located on abandoned lots owned by the city. When that happens, increases in land values coupled with decreases in city budgets can set the city on a collision course with gardeners. In Seattle, most of the gardens are on dedicated public land or land held by the P-Patch Trust. However, there have been some clashes. As Schutte described it, "The city was going to sell Bradner Park to develop it into condominiums. The activists said no and developed a plan to turn it into Bradner Gardens Park with a P-Patch, and the Trust had an involvement with it. People were at Parks Commission meetings, lined up out the door to speak, filling the hall at city council, in the press, and on TV." The

outcome was again positive. Not only did Bradner Park become Bradner Gardens Park, but a voter initiative resulted in a city ordinance that mandated that the city could not sell park land without exchanging it for another property of equal value in the neighborhood.

The conflict with the Department of Parks and Recreation brings up another factor in Seattle's success with community gardening. In other cities, departments of Parks and Recreation can be fickle partners or even adversaries, because there are many other competing uses of the limited resources of park budgets. Asked about the effect of the departmental affiliation with Neighborhoods, Schutte noted that it had been a very positive factor for community gardening in Seattle. He noted that at one point the community gardens program was located in the Department of Health and Human Services, but it was not part of the department's mission, so the shift to the neighborhoods department was positive.

He then explained the changing relationship with the parks department: "Up until very recently the Parks and Recreation Department was unfriendly toward P-Patch. When building a new park, they never thought of putting in a P-Patch, even though it is a multi-use property. Now they often think about using a portion of the park as a P-Patch, and they're even thinking about using a portion of the parks' funds to buy a property and turn it into a P-Patch. In the last three or four years this adversarial relationship has really changed. We kept a very friendly relationship with them. Several new parks have been developed by community groups that include a P-Patch within them, such as the Trolley Hill Park. The gardeners share a tool shed with the Parks Department, and they help maintain the park. So the symbiotic relationships developed, and they've come to accept that a P-Patch is an acceptable use. It's not just the gardeners who benefit; all sorts of people benefit from walking through the garden. People also come here to learn about gardening. There's more interchange that takes place in a community garden than on a tennis court or a golf course." In 2005 the Parks and Recreation department even took the step of naming one of the leading activists of the Bradner Park controversy as a community leader.

A fourth reason for the success of the partnership is that the gardeners have been very careful politically. As Schutte explained, "The second director of P-Patch was very politically astute and very well respected. That was part of it. The first five-year plan although supported by the Director of the Department of Neighborhoods was very difficult to develop, but the city now recognizes that a five-year plan for community gardens is a good thing. Everyone on the city council has a suggestion about how to make community gardens better, and we don't run into an adversarial relationship.

"We're careful as an organization when an election is coming up. As an organization we do not take sides. I think it's important whenever someone is elected to meet them as soon as possible. We let them know who we are, what we do, and what our relationship is with the community. P-Patch has a lot of good will in Seattle." For example, when the new mayor came into power and was looking at budget for places to cut, the P-Patch Trust (then Friends of P-Patch) worked with him in a non-adversarial way. As Schutte explained, "The

mayor knew very little about P-Patches when he first came in. We met with him and didn't confront him. We wanted to make him a friend, and we said, 'This is what we'd like to see, and we'd like to know what you'd like us to do to help get that.' We didn't come in with demands such as, 'You need to do this and that.' It wasn't adversarial. He said that there were going to be cuts, and they would be all over the city, and he promised that he wouldn't decimate the program. In the end, we never lost anything, and the mayor has changed his mind and has a very positive attitude about gardens."

According to Schutte, one of the biggest barriers that P-Patches face in Seattle is the increasing land values and the associated problem of raising funds to purchase properties. "I'd like to raise more funds and find some large donors who we could depend on to put together campaigns or help us buy properties. We're working on giving and planned giving, where people can leave money to the Trust. We have a beautiful piece of property that a woman wants to see preserved. It's a \$1.5 million property, and we could never afford to buy it, but she has written the Trust into her will. The barrier is figuring out how to get the message out there and how to court a donor."

Web site: <http://www.ppatchtrust.org>

Based on an interview by David Hess with Ray Schutte, June 6, 2005, and a visit to the Interbay Garden.

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