

**Homegrown Minneapolis**  
**Subcommittee on Community, School and Backyard Gardens**  
**December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from 8:30-10:00 a.m.**  
**Green Institute, Conference Room A**

**Attendance:** Aliyah Ali, Martin Adams, Jennifer Blecha, Ila Duntemann, Hilary Gebauer, Sarah Greenfield, Barbara Grossman, Jim Howitt, Geoff Maruyama, June Mathiowetz, Aimee McAdams, Jeremy McAdams, Brian Noy, Susan Reed, Linda Ridlehuber, Julie Ristau (Tri-Chair), Kirsten Saylor, Terry Straub, Lorrie Stromme

The meeting began at 8:33 a.m.

### **Introductions**

This committee's mission is to develop recommendations for the City to support greater food production via community gardens, schoolyard gardens and backyard gardens. A draft of our recommendations is due the end of March. A draft report of recommendations by all subcommittees is due out in April. A final report is due in June. With this in mind, this subcommittee plans to meet every third Tuesday on the following dates: **January 6<sup>th</sup>, January 27<sup>th</sup>, February 17<sup>th</sup>, March 10<sup>th</sup>, and March 31<sup>st</sup> at 8:30 a.m.** The co-chairs are looking into finding a slightly bigger conference room to accommodate the strong interest.

Our time was spent discussing three areas: 1) What's working? 2) What's not working? and 3) What's our vision?/How can we improve the local food system using community, school and backyard gardens?/What needs exist? General comments were as follows:

### **What's working?**

\*There is enthusiasm in north Minneapolis at three schools in particular (Cityview which has an active garden, Bethune (which does not have a garden), and Long International Academy (which has strong parent group and access to land).

\*There is a high level of interest among younger people and a growing general interest to expand knowledge in the area of food production.

\*There has been support from the city and county in a diffuse way. SooLine Community Garden has received valuable support.

\*There are a lot of people willing to volunteer to invest their time and energy in gardens.

\*Water has been accessible through the fire hydrants and stormwater credits through the City help keep costs low. \*Gardening Matters exists and has already done a lot of grassroots organizing around local food production and gardening. COMGAR, Gardening Matters' list serve, has already identified hundreds of community gardeners and others and serves as a vehicle for communicating and sharing resources.

\*Our gardens provide community engagement opportunities in addition to food production. They serve as meeting places for people and anchors for neighborhoods.

\*Surplus produce from gardens sometimes ends up at food shelves.

### **What's not working?**

Major themes that emerged included: 1) land and facility needs; 2) Further capacity building and education needs; and 3) Policy and system change/strategies needed.

## **Land and/or Facility Needs**

\*Land, land, land. There's not enough garden space and no permanency assigned to those that exist. There are few spaces and land available to meet the high level of requests, supply is not keeping up with demand. How do we make it easier for community gardeners to obtain land and keep it? How do we access foreclosed lands for potential gardens? How do we develop the concept of land trusts within the city? How do we raise funds to do it?

\*Preservation of school lands. How do we preserve schoolyard lands for transitions to gardens (such as Jordan Elementary's big parcel of land)? As the school system in the city undergoes closures, how do we ensure these spaces can be preserved for gardens?

\*Permanency of garden spaces. There is a need for long-term commitments to garden spaces. Gardens need to be thought of as essential elements of a community, not as interim uses of land. Soil is a resource that takes a long time to build and moving gardens around loses the quality ecosystem and safe, rich soil that has been built up over long periods of time. Gardens also cannot be moved without impacting the community's relationships nurtured through that space. How can gardeners have better input into what happens to gardens?

\*Gardens as integral to community living. What if every block or neighborhood had garden space for food production and storage space for excess produce?

\*Food Storage. What would community kitchens and community storage centers look like? (Current resources include home ec class rooms and church kitchens.) What about access to community freezers where everyone owns a basket, community vacuum sealers, community canning/preservation areas, flash freezing, community bread ovens, and other technologies? How does one retrofit a fruit cellar to an existing house? Better information is needed.

\*Security. Theft and vandalism of entire garden plots leave gardeners without produce and in need of new solutions.

\*Space for fruit and nut trees. Is there land available for orchards? Could the Park Board be interested in designating small areas for fruit trees? How can we organize to create mini orchards in our neighborhoods? Could the City plant, maintain and/or harvest trees for local food production? The Minnesota Project is rolling out a program on fruit trees.

## **Capacity Building & Education Needs**

\*Greater capacity for outreach is needed to communicate opportunities to the public and to obtain enough support to keep gardens going. Who and how it will get done is the question. Stronger links/access to extension services would be helpful. One idea is to have a central educational site for food production and preservation like Vancouver's City Farmer program which has a demonstration-type site on one city lot which serves as a model for others. <http://www.cityfarmer.org/tour.html#CFtour>

\*What is the education capacity? What are the basics people need to know? How can we develop varying levels of expertise on topics? Does the Master Gardener program provide a model? How can inserts into utility bills be used to promote urban food production and to make people aware of how to ascertain soil safety? Does the Extension Service have the resources to help with backyard gardens?

\*How do we encourage the transition from backyard gardening to small enterprise urban agriculture? Possibly by improving education, increasing micro-finance loans and grants to get people started, and further enabling urban farmers by improving the regulations process and requiring grocery stores to carry a percentage of foods produced locally?

\*Project fatigue can occur with some gardens and volunteers wane. More help is needed to support the community within these gardens – more partnerships and more neighborhood participation. It is unclear how changes in NRP dollars and organization will affect neighborhood connections with gardens.

\*There may be opportunities for block clubs to engage more fully on gardens, food production and composting. How can block clubs become better engaged in gardens? What opportunities exist for neighborhoods beyond National Night Out?

\*Soo Line community gardens' surplus food sometimes goes to the food shelf, other times it does not. More networks for surplus food can be encouraged. Could churches be engaged to do the pickup and delivery to food shelves? Can we do more about bringing surplus produce to seniors?

\*Determining Soil Toxicity through prior use: Sanford Fire Insurance Maps are available at all libraries. They are block-by-block maps created in the 1800s by the fire companies showing how land was being used at that time. This may help some people determine the safety of their soil or at a minimum understand its prior use. Can gardeners find people to do the pro bono work of interpreting the history of plots. What resources are available to help people interpret soil toxicity test results?

-EPA superfund site issues. People located near EPA superfund sites have concerns about the safety of their soil for planting food. The extensive and, tiny printed EPA information that arrived at houses in the area is difficult to understand as far as what risks may remain. It would be helpful if a post-card could be sent out with graphic symbols explaining what is safe and what is not and simple ways to reduce risks for vegetable gardens from arsenic, lead paint, etc. and introducing people to local resources.

-How do people ascertain whether their soil is safe for food production? What steps can they take to minimize leeching of potential toxins in potentially contaminated areas?

### **Policy/System Changes or Needs**

\*There needs to be some parameters or a baseline of expectations established around gardens so schools know what can be expected of community garden relationship. Once those baselines are established, there are no limits to creativity.

\*Currently there are rather tight limits on the kinds of gardens people can develop – especially in terms of bees and hooved animals. One vision would see a wider breadth of options permitted in the City by enlarging the list of permitted animals for backyard, community and other gardens.

\*The overall health of our population indicates that many people are not accessing food that is healthy. What is preventing this (research is needed) and what solutions are people using now to overcome barriers to healthier eating?

\*There are still many obstacles in place for backyard gardeners wanting to become commercial growers. How does zoning or other city regulations get in the way? Boston provides some good examples around zoning and gardens.

\*Soo Line garden is prohibited from selling food that was grown on tax-forfeited land.

\*How can community-wide organics recycling be accessed for building up soil?

\*How do we create a way to do decentralized, coordinated composting that eliminates creation of green house gases at the neighborhood level? How can we help minimize use of trucks and substitute wheelbarrows, wagons and buckets for more block-by-block composting points and community building? How do we turn composting into community engagement events?

\*Insurance issues. Right now each garden has to chase down insurance. The need for third party liability by community gardeners is in question. What exactly is essential? There has never been a lawsuit around community gardens. New York City has waived the liability requirement for community gardens on city property. There are also issues around requirements of a background check for all gardeners at community gardens located on school district property, such as at the Dowling Community Garden.

\*Heat capture and reuse. In Vermont, heat energy released from a coal plant is used to heat greenhouses. Does the City of Minneapolis have any similar potential situations?

\*Access to water – the city’s hydrant policy – sometimes it is difficult to get access to water via a hydrant depending upon who is requesting the connection.

\*Where does the city stand on promoting systems such as cisterns?

\*Food packaging. Cornucopia was unable to serve salad at an event because of City’s regulations. How do we work with these regulations to ensure safety and access?

\*What impacts will cuts to the City’s budget have on this project? If no or limited funding is available, what changes can still be implemented?

The meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.

**Homegrown Minneapolis  
Kickoff Meeting Breakout Session  
Subcommittee on Community, School and Backyard Gardens  
December 10, 2008**

**Minutes:**

Introductions were made and the group discussed the date, time and location of future meetings. The group generally agreed that day meetings were better than night meetings and that meeting at the Green Institute would work as a meeting site. Subcommittee meetings will tentatively occur every three weeks on Tuesday mornings at 8:30 am and our next meeting will be on Tuesday, December 16th. This will provide us with an opportunity to meet up to six times before the end of March. If there is anyone missing from the subcommittee that people would find helpful to have in attendance, please send their contact information to the chairs so they can be invited or invite them yourself.

There was interest in understanding what already exists as far as city policies are concerned when it comes to community, school and backyard gardens. June Mathiowetz will work to compile any existing policy language for future meetings.

There was interest in seeing a map of existing community gardens. Kirsten Saylor noted Gardening Matters has a map of existing gardens from 2006. If the group needs something more than this, the subcommittee can discuss exactly what is needed at a future meeting and find ways to obtain that information.

There was also interest in the map of the corner grocery stores in the city that was mentioned in the earlier large group introductions. June will see if she can obtain a copy of that map from City staff.

One suggestion was that since the final outcome of our work is recommendations, let's start writing! If you already have thoughts and ideas regarding a recommendation you would like to see, please draft a statement in 50 words or less and send them to June Mathiowetz at [june.mathiowetz@ci.minneapolis.mn.us](mailto:june.mathiowetz@ci.minneapolis.mn.us) so they can be compiled for easier group discussion going forward. The co-chairs will also work to find ways to help the group brainstorm possibilities and draw out expertise and ideas of the group for other recommendations.

The approximately twenty minute meeting adjourned at 12 noon.

**Brief notes about this Subcommittee:**

The purpose of the Subcommittee on Community, School, and Backyard Gardens is to examine current resources and potential opportunities related to such gardens in Minneapolis. As defined in a "Roles and Responsibilities" handout at this Kickoff meeting, this group could develop recommendations related to increasing the number of community, school and backyard gardens throughout the community, linking City resources and programs to community gardeners, and simplifying the process by which gardens are developed and managed.

The timeline for our very specific task of coming up with recommendations requires us to complete our work near the end of March. A draft report of recommendations by subcommittees is due out in April. A final report on all recommendations from all subcommittee groups is due out in the month of June.

Kirsten Saylor of Gardening Matters and June Mathiowetz from the City of Minneapolis will serve as co-chairs of this subcommittee.

## Homegrown Minneapolis

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### Kick-Off Meeting – Gardens Subcommittee Meeting Notes

Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Currie Conference Center, 1<sup>st</sup> floor conference room

11:30am – 12:00pm

- Participants included: Co-Chair June Mathiowetz, Co-Chair Kirsten Saylor, Gayle Prest, Susan Reed, Barb Grossman, Geoff Maruyama, Martin Adams, Steph Hankerson, Scott Pampuch, Georgianna Yantos, Brian Noy, Jen Blecha, Aimee McAdams, Jeremy McAdams, Jennifer Ringold, Tamara Downs Schwei, Ila Duntemann, Michael Ansel.
- Introductions were made and the group discussed the date, time and location of future meetings. The group generally agreed that day meetings were better than night meetings and that meeting at the Green Institute would work as a meeting site. Subcommittee meetings will tentatively occur every three weeks on Tuesday mornings at **8:30 am and our next meeting will be on Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at the Green Institute**. This will provide us with an opportunity to meet up to six times before the end of March.
- If there is anyone missing from the subcommittee that people would find helpful to have in attendance, please send their contact information to the chairs so they can be invited or invite them yourself.
- There was interest in understanding what already exists as far as city policies are concerned when it comes to community, school and backyard gardens. June Mathiowetz will work to compile any needed policy language for future meetings.
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- There was also interest in the map of the corner grocery stores in the city that was mentioned in the earlier large group introductions. This map will not be available until the end of December but June will see if she can obtain a copy of that map from City staff when it's ready.
- One suggestion was that since the final outcome of our work is recommendations, let's start writing! If you already have thoughts and ideas regarding a recommendation you would like to see, please draft a statement in 50 words or less and send them to June Mathiowetz at [june.mathiowetz@ci.minneapolis.mn.us](mailto:june.mathiowetz@ci.minneapolis.mn.us) so they can be compiled for easier group discussion going forward. The co-chairs will also work to find ways to help the group brainstorm possibilities and draw out expertise and ideas of the group for additional recommendations.
- The approximately twenty minute meeting adjourned at 12 noon.