

The Madison Food System Project

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DRAFT REPORT

Susan J.M. Bauman, Mayor
Advisory Committee

John Bell, Madison Community Gardeners Coalition

Hope Finkelstein, Growing Power, Inc.

Evelyn A. Howell, City of Madison, Parks and Planning Commission

Jerry L. Kaufman, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Urban and Regional Planning

Sol Levin, Director, Madison Area Community Land Trust and Mayor's Designee

Caryl E. Terrell, Planning Commission

Barbara Vedder, Alderperson, Second District, City of Madison

Jewellester Warr, Community gardens organizer, Broadway-Simpson neighborhood

Joel D. Zweifelhofer, Community Development Block Grant Commission

Warren J. Kenney, Interim Director, Department of Planning and Development

Bradley J. Murphy, Director, Planning Unit

Mark A. Olinger, Principal Planner, Planning Unit

Project Staff

Archie Nicolette, Planner II

Bill Lanier, Planning Technician

Debora Morgan, Program Assistant III

Don Marx, Real Estate Manager
Hickory Hurie, CD Grants Supervisor
Nancy Dungan, Grants Administrator II
Si Widstrand, Parks Planner
Judy P. Olson, Assistant to Mayor

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I. Introduction

Community gardens are common ground for growing plants that feed, heal and give aesthetic pleasure. They are civic spaces where people work and recreate to nourish themselves, their families and friends; the gardener's shared labor also builds a stronger sense of belonging to their physical environment and connection to other gardeners. Community gardens are the collective effort of people with patience and determination to make things grow.

The individuals, families and households with plots in Madison's current 24 community gardens are a varied lot. They include people of all ages, many races and various levels of income. Many of them live in apartments or condominiums, others in homes on lots that are too small or shaded for growing food crops. Many have come to Madison from other parts of the United States and from other countries, bringing with them their connection to the earth and a wealth of gardening skills. Many of the gardeners live near their gardens, while others are neighbors in the community of their garden. For some, the strongest appeal of gardening lies in the private hours of building the soul and raising their plants; others enjoy the chance to share their passion and expertise with other gardeners.

Many community gardeners have taken plots to reduce their food costs. Some of them want the assurance of eating produce that was grown locally without synthetic fertilizers, herbicides or insecticides. Most gardeners take satisfaction in having filled some part of their diet with food they have grown themselves.

Historically, American government has given strong support to community gardening during the world wars. More recently, community gardens have blossomed in the vacant lots of inner cities. Community gardens have been adopted by schools and other youth programs, by churches, jails, and neighborhood centers and as part of urban food security programs. Whatever their setting or sponsor, community gardens provide places to raise food crops and enhance the physical and emotional health of the gardening community.

Like community gardeners in most cities, those in Madison have struggled to secure their plots and hold them against the pressures of development. Too often, community gardens are seen as an interim use of land that is eventually developed from other uses. Between 1983 and 1993, Madison lost 11 community gardens to roadways, parking lots, a car dealership and other buildings. Madison's Parks Division and the city-administered Community Development Block Grant program have provided critical support to many of the city's community gardens, but the city has yet to embrace community gardening as a viable, long-term land use or support the gardens with comprehensive planning policies or secure sources of funding.

In 1990, Madison's Common Council directed city staff to set policies for the creation and management of community gardens on city-owned land. The report was never completed. The City's Parks and Open Space Plan of 1991 set a goal of 2,000 new community gardening plots on public land. In fact, Madison has about 400 fewer community gardening plots today than it did in 1991.

More recently, the community gardening movement in Madison has undergone its own greening. Community gardeners have organized themselves and worked with allies to advocate for more secure land tenure and greater recognition for the role that gardens have taken to bring the people of Madison closer to their physical environment and to each other.

Since 1995, community gardeners have worked with neighbors, land trusts and representatives of city and state government to preserve their plots on Sheboygan Avenue and Troy Drive. A community garden in the Broadway-Simpson will soon start its third season, and Old Market neighbors are now organizing the first formally recognized community garden on the City's Isthmus. Without advertising, most of Madison's community gardens with unrestricted access are fully subscribed each growing season.

We, the members of this committee, feel the time has come for the City of Madison to recognize community gardening as a valued resource for growing food and fostering community, and we call on the City's residents, Mayor, members of the Common Council, and City staff to support, adopt and implement the following report and its proposals to make community gardens a permanent and fully productive feature of our landscape.

In addition to compiling and synthesizing information on the status and role of community gardens in Madison, we hope this report will help readers to recognize the importance and need for protecting and creating new community gardens in Madison. The report is divided into eight sections. Sections I and II provide the introduction and background to the working of the Community Gardens Advisory Committee and the report.

Sections III of the report provides a definition of community gardens, discusses the qualities that make them necessary to a community and profiles the interest groups that are involved in community gardening.

Section IV of the report is devoted to the current state of community gardens in Madison. The section discusses in detail the number, location, and size of the City's community gardens and describes some of their success stories. Many community gardens in Madison are in imminent danger of closing; this section also discusses local gardens that have been lost.

In addition, Section IV profiles community gardens and community gardening organizations in Madison. The section concludes with a discussion of the support that the City's community

gardens receive from local government.

Section V offers criteria for locating additional community gardens in Madison. The criteria are based on site characteristics and socio-economic factors of the potential garden sites.

Section VI discusses possible strategies for preserving and starting new community gardens in Madison, while section VII concludes the report with action plan recommendations to implement these strategies. The report also contains appendices of supportive maps and tables.

II. Background

On September 16, 1997, the City of Madison established "*an ad hoc community gardens advisory committee to identify potential roles for community gardens in stabilizing and improving neighborhoods and possible City actions to facilitate such efforts.*" (City of Madison Resolution 22346)

The current advisory committee is the city's second effort to study community gardening. In May 1990, the Common Council created a task force to establish policies favoring community gardens in Madison. The task force was asked to submit specific recommendations to the mayor and council to establish permanent community gardens on city-owned land, including parks. The group was also expected to recommend zoning ordinance changes that would encourage the creation of community gardens in newly platted areas of the city or as part of landscaping requirements for certain types of developments. However, the 1990 task force did not complete its study, and no recommendations were submitted to the Common Council.

A proposal from residents of the Old Market Neighborhood to build a community gardens on the Reynolds property rekindled interest in the issue. The neighborhood's alderperson, Barbara Vedder, sponsored a resolution to create a community garden on the Homestead site and an advisory committee. The initial proposal failed on a tie vote in the Common Council, but a compromise resolution from Mayor Sue Bauman won unanimous approval. On November 11, 1997, the Common Council approved the mayor's appointments. The committee began its work on March 30, 1998, and met bi-weekly until the completion of the report.

The following is the mission statement adopted by the Community Garden Advisory Committee.

Recognizing that Community Gardening improves the quality of life for residents of Madison, we seek to create a permanent system of long lasting, well-managed community gardens throughout the City of Madison, with strong government/public support.

To fulfill this mission statement, the Community Garden Advisory Committee proposes the following objectives:

1. Preservation of existing community gardens and the creation of new gardens at appropriate locations around the city.

2. Resources and management to make community gardening accessible and successful for persons of any/all ages, racial/ethnic groups and income levels.

3. Programming to inform and educate citizens about the benefits of community gardens and gardening.

4. Strong governmental support to community gardens, which also strengthen and empower neighborhoods, provide meeting places for a diverse group of people, create economic benefit from the harvested food and enhance neighborhood aesthetics.

III. Community gardens

What is a community garden?

A community garden is first and foremost a garden where people share basic resources – land, water, and sunlight. Community gardens are the sites of a unique combination of activities such as food production, recreation, social and cultural exchange and the development of open space, community spirit, skills and competence.

Community gardening not only nurture green spaces but foster the development of a community identity and spirit. Community gardens that have adequate resources and support often set aside space for plazas, open air theatres, flower gardens, walkways, sculptures, children's enclaves, areas for community get-togethers, barbecues, harvest festivals, etc. Such gardens therefore serve as the modern day equivalent of the ancient plazas in urban areas where people would gather to meet and spend time together, but community garden spaces simultaneously allow for interaction with nature and the productive use of land. Community gardens are a transformation of the notion of "civic space" into a "sustainable, healthy, and productive civic space".

Why have community gardens?

Community gardens are essential to people and places in urban environments. Rather than visualizing Madison solely as a built-up environment, we need to pursue strategies that will make our natural spaces a primary aspect of neighborhood planning, economic development, education, culture, and history. This section describes a range of economic and non-economic benefits from community gardening. Although harder to measure, the non-economic benefits are the essential reasons why community gardening makes for better, more livable cities. The non-economic benefits are especially strong in neighborhood-based gardens that are woven into the fabric of the community, as opposed to allocation gardens where gardeners rent plots and come from anywhere in the region to use them (Herbach 1998).

Economic benefits. The economic returns of community gardening are partly dependent on climate. Certainly, community gardeners in California are able to grow more during their long growing season than are gardeners in Madison. However, the amount of vegetables that can be grown in Madison's climate is still significant (Herbach 1998).

Evidence from other cities regarding economic returns of community gardening is impressive. A Rutgers University study showed that the average New Jersey community garden plot (about 700 square feet) produced about \$500 in vegetables in an average growing season. Deducting the cost of inputs, these gardeners netted \$475 tax-free dollars each season (Patel 1991).

Larry Sommers, a Vermont Community Gardener and writer, claims that a 600-square-foot plot produces about 540 pounds of high quality produce. In 1984, that translated into approximately \$450 in savings (Sommers 1984), an amount that would be greater when adjusted for inflation. In addition, training gardeners in high-intensity techniques greatly increases the amount produced.

Community gardening can benefit government as well. In a 23-city program encouraging community gardening that was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and managed by university extension programs, a dollar of government investment led to the production of six dollars in vegetables (Hynes 1996).

Development and maintenance of garden space are less expensive than the same costs for parkland. A study in Sacramento, California, compared the start-up and maintenance costs of a park containing 140,000 square feet with the same costs in a community garden that contained 121,300 square feet. The researcher found that the park cost \$46,000 to develop and \$15,000 per year to maintain, while the garden cost \$2,200 to develop and \$550 per year to maintain (Francis 1985). It has been suggested that the costs of garden construction and maintenance have increased relative to the costs of parks since this study was completed. Climate-related differences undoubtedly affect these costs, but clearly, community gardens are less expensive to build and maintain than parks (Herbach 1998).

Food security and nutritional benefits. Community gardens allow people of all incomes access to low-cost food. In addition, there is evidence that community gardeners and their children eat healthier diets than do non-gardening families.

A study of Philadelphia community gardeners showed that gardeners were more likely to eat raw vegetables in salads. The gardeners' frequency of vegetable consumption was slightly higher than the non-gardeners' consumption in all categories of vegetables other than iceberg lettuce, celery and fresh salad-greens (Blair, Giesecke and Sherman 1991).

In a Rutgers University extension survey of New Jersey community gardeners, 35 per cent cited improved diet as one of the prime benefits of gardening. Forty-four per cent of those gardeners believed they ate more fresh foods and vegetables than their non-gardening counterparts (Patel 1991).

There are lessons to be learned from other nations as well. In developing countries, research into the benefits of urban gardening has focused on dietary improvement. A study of urban agriculture in Africa identified the nutrition produced by farming on city plots as the prime benefit (Maxwell 1994). A 1987 study by Save the Children Fund in Kampala, Uganda showed that growth rates among the children of urban gardeners was much better than those for the children of non-gardeners. In fact, the gardeners' children averaged a half standard deviation taller than the mean for the nation when compared with the average height for age (Maxwell 1995 in Herbach 1998).

According to Save the Children Fund, gardening in Kampala has eliminated the need for

supplementary feeding programs in low-income areas of the city. Children of urban farmers were found to be healthier than the children of wealthy families (United Nations Development Programme 1996). Because of cuts to entitlement programs in the U.S., the importance of community gardens as a source of nutrition is sure to rise.

Youth development. Community gardens are especially beneficial to urban youth, who have fewer opportunities to experience the natural environment. Community gardening is a healthy, inexpensive activity that can draw young people closer to nature. Gardening enables youth to interact in ways that are socially meaningful and physically productive.

In cities across the country, community gardens are used to teach subjects such as biology, mathematics and the environment. Elsewhere, gardens are part of teaching both job and life skills to at-risk youth.

Hundreds of volunteer Master Gardeners in the San Antonio area are teaching fourth-grade and fifth-grade students to grow plants in community gardens. As of 1995, the district had 133 schools taking part in the program with an average of 15 new schools added each semester. Although the program started out as a means for the Master Gardeners to share their love of gardening with young people, the benefits of the program have far exceeded this modest objective.

A study indicates that students participating in the San Antonio program have better school attendance and have gotten their parents more involved in their schooling than non-gardening students. Teachers say their gardening students' feelings of accomplishment and belief in the importance of being responsible are the primary benefits of the program (Finch 1995).

A children's community gardening program in Berkeley, California, called Strong Roots stresses two goals. First, gardening is seen as a way of restoring the lost agricultural heritage of African-American youth. Second, the program serves to teach job skills. Participants earn minimum wage through the federal Summer Youth Employment and Training Program. Again, coordinators and participants in the program highlight benefits that perhaps exceed the program's expectations. These benefits include developing dispute resolution skills and learning how to create rule schemes for participants. (Chavis 1997) Similar youth gardening programs exist in Boston (Naimark 1982); San Francisco (Nuru 1996); New York City (Sullivan 1996); and Dayton, Ohio (GWYN undated), among many others.

Madison also has a number of children's gardens. Low-income youth in Madison have benefited in many ways from the presence of community gardens. In programs such as the Youth Market Garden, children learn gardening, cash-handling and accounting skills. At the end of the summer, children are able to take home a portion of the total receipts based on the work they have done.

Growing Power, a non-profit community gardening/community empowerment organization in Madison, has facilitated a Children's Gardening Network that allows children from various community gardens to meet and share experiences and ideas on a regular basis. Along with cultivating social skills and encouraging sharing of ideas, the program allows children to feel part of a gardening community.

Service to diverse groups. Cities sometimes argue that community gardens should not be developed on parklands because they limit park uses and engage fewer people (City Farmer,

1997). Research done on the West Coast shows that community gardens actually attract people onto public space that would not otherwise use such amenities.

In Sacramento, for instance, three-quarters of city park users were under the age of 30. Three-quarters of the users of city-owned community gardens were over the age of 30. Community gardeners were more likely to use the land alone, while park users were more often in pairs or groups. Another finding in the study demonstrated the democratizing effects of community gardening. A total of five people made decisions concerning the development and maintenance of the city's parkland. Ninety-nine people had a voice in making the same decisions concerning city-owned community garden space (Francis 1985)

Community gardens spread the benefits of common open space to groups of people that may not be well served by traditional parks. In addition, because they are places where people interact, community gardens can serve as spaces where social integration takes place.

Community organizing and empowerment. Community gardening brings together people and encourages interaction. Interest in urban gardening has often led to community-based effort to deal with other social concerns. In Dayton, Ohio, for instance, a successful African-American community gardening group started the Edgmont solar gardens and eventually established a community center on the site of the gardens. This center provides a focal point for community gathering and trains local youth in computer skills. The neighborhood is now involved in programs for youth and the unemployed, neighborhood revitalization and cultural and recreational events. Cities such as Philadelphia and San Francisco have used gardens extensively to foster local activity that has evolved into larger community efforts.

In Madison, neighbors' efforts to secure community control of the Troy gardens and adjoining green space led to the creation of the Lehrdal Park Neighborhood Association. The Broadway-Simpson community garden has sparked interest in improving that neighborhood.

Increased Sense of place. Gardening promotes a community atmosphere and gives people an opportunity to meet others, share concerns, and solve a few problems together (Patel 1991)." Gardeners say that community gardening enhances a person's psychological, spiritual and physical sense of well being (Sommers 1984). Gardening adds beauty to the community and heightens peoples' awareness and appreciation for living things. Gardens are places for natural retreat in the midst of our built-up, urban environment. Community gardening helps to create a sense of place and a spirit of community in neighborhoods. A 1991 poll of New Jersey community gardeners by a Rutgers University extension agent showed that a third of the participants developed new friendships through the gardens. In addition, a third of the participants spent time helping other gardeners and nearly a fifth shared produce with other gardeners (Herbach 1998). Clearly, gardens help to create a tighter and richer social fabric among urban residents.

Environmental stewardship. Too often urban neighborhoods lack open green spaces. High population and housing density tend to increase traffic flow; the resulting noise and air pollution degrade environmental quality. High-density development reduces the available unpaved area that would allow surface water to percolate and refresh supplies of groundwater. It also creates inhospitable environs for plants and animal species. The presence of community gardens in urban areas -- especially those that are densely developed -- help to create cities that are environmentally sustainable.

Who is involved in community gardening?

Community gardens bring together a diverse groups of people and organizations ranging from local government bodies to non-profit groups. Above all, community gardening involves communities and people.

Community gardens may exist on land that is unauthorized for gardens, on city- or county-leased land or on land that is owned by a gardening group or land trust. The type of tenure arrangement influences the organizations involved in community gardens. Demographic features of the people involved in community gardening vary with the character of their neighborhoods. Community gardeners may be children, elderly, persons with disabilities and youth alike. In addition, it is important to remember that community gardens are not the exclusive domain of those who garden there. The level of involvement of a neighborhood in a community garden can vary from some people being the gardeners, while others use garden paths to take walks, while yet others relax in verdant surrounding offered by the gardens.

IV. Current state of community gardens in Madison

Community gardens involve communities. It would be unfair then, to describe the state of community gardens in Madison in terms of plain numbers, acreage, lot sizes, etc. Attached to these pieces of productive land are stories of people who toil together literally and figuratively in building healthy families and communities. A description of the state of community gardens necessitates a description of the people who use and benefit from them. Accordingly, this section provides not only an inventory of community gardens in Madison, but also offers a profile of community garden users and the important role that community gardens play in various communities in Madison.

Inventory and characteristics of existing gardens

There are 24 community gardens in operation in the greater Madison area. These garden sites contain approximately 1,600 individual plots. The total acreage (crop area) of land under community gardens in Madison is 13.39 acres. The crop area of individual gardens sites ranges from 4 acres (at Troy Garden sites) to .1 acres (at the Reynolds site). The sites are subdivided into plots for renters. After providing for adequate setbacks, pathways and community areas (in addition to crop area), the assessed value of community gardens sites on property owned by the city (including CDA owned property) in Madison was near 2 million dollars (see Table in Appendix B).

All but two of the sites are available to residents of the City of Madison; the Shorewood site is open only to the residents of the Village of Shorewood, and the Rohlich site is reserved for residents of Rohlich Court in Middleton. Just over half the garden sites are on publicly owned land; about a quarter of the gardens are on church property and a quarter on privately held land.

The publicly owned sites for community gardens in Madison are owned by the City Parks Division, the CDA, and the City Transportation Department. The State of Wisconsin owns the community gardening sites on Troy Gardens and Sheboygan Avenue. Garden sites on private

land are owned by churches, businesses and individuals. In addition, the University of Wisconsin - Madison owns the Eagle Heights gardens, which is more than 6 acres in crop area.

While the gardens may be owned by the aforementioned entities, their management often lies with non-profit gardening or neighborhood groups. During the past growing season, the Community Action Coalition had responsibility for 13 area gardens at 12 sites and gave start-up assistance to another garden. CAC's support for gardens ran from a minimal role of insuring the property, holding the lease, making referrals and providing access to compost, supplies, and water up to responsibility for all aspects of the garden, including publicity, plot assignments, policy, rules, layout, mowing, maintenance and tools. All CAC-operated gardens served primarily Madison residents, although only nine and one-half locations were inside city limits in 1998 (Mathers 1998).

Spatial distribution of existing gardens

Of the 22 gardens available to all Madison residents, only 16.5 are actually located in the City of Madison; the St. Paul garden is partly located in the Town of Blooming Grove. The gardens located within the City of Madison are distributed unevenly and somewhat to the periphery in areas to the south, west, and north with significant gaps on the far east, far west and far southwest sides of the city.

The Isthmus, Madison's densest, most renter-oriented area, is especially lacking in community gardens. The Isthmus is expected to open its first authorized community garden this spring in the Old Market.

Type of gardens

Community gardens may be of various types – rental gardens, youth gardens, pantry gardens, etc. At present the principal type of community garden in Madison is family use plot rental garden.

Community gardens in Madison also serve special purposes such as youth development, as places of therapy and for special needs of seniors, the disabled and other special groups. The children's gardening network (CGN) currently has nine children's gardens in the city. A program that teaches gardening has been in operation at Mendota Elementary School for several years, and in the summer of 1997, a Youth Market Garden was established by the CGN and the Early Childhood Learning Center in South Madison. In October, 1988, a garden was started at Lapham School that will serve as a "living laboratory" for the study of wide range of subjects.

Special purpose gardens, while generally smaller in terms of acreage and food production than rental gardens, provide other significant benefits to the users.

Demand for Community Gardens

Community gardens continue to be in demand in the city of Madison. It is important to note that even with the existing gardens, Madison residents are gardening on land outside the city limits. Many people who would like to garden are deterred by a lack of personal transportation or the time required to travel between their homes and outlying sites.

The committee is not aware of any studies in Madison or elsewhere in the country that address the demand for community gardens in a community. Nevertheless there is evidence to suggest that the residents of Madison view community gardening as important.

Community Action Coalition one of the leading groups facilitating community gardening in Madison reports that there are a number of people on their waiting lists for various community garden programs around the city. For instance, the Atwood gardens averages a turnover of only three gardeners per year and a waiting list that is nearly 150% of the 48 plots available.

Moreover, this demand is persistent, despite the fact that CAC has stopped advertising any of its garden programs because nearly all of the lots are filled by gardeners from the previous growing season. The coalition often must refuse applicants for the lack of available garden space, although at some gardens, CAC has tried to cover the shortage by sub-dividing garden plots into smaller sizes.

The lack of community gardens is especially evident in the Isthmus, with a high number of renter units on small lot sizes and limited green spaces; such traits suggest a high need for community gardens. Lack of community gardens in the Isthmus forces some numerous residents of the area to garden in other parts of the city. For instance, a large percentage of garden plot holders in the Troy Gardens at the north side of the city commute from the Isthmus area. In addition, the Eagle Heights garden which is primarily for the residents of university housing, also caters to the residents of the City of Madison who lack access to garden plots elsewhere. The Isthmus therefore is a priority area in terms of establishment of new community gardens in the City of Madison.

Success of community gardens

Despite the loss of gardens and increasing development pressures, a movement to maintain existing community gardens and to create new ones is alive in Madison. The effort has had notable successes, especially on the city's Northside, where a large community garden on Troy Drive has been preserved.

In October 1995, the State Department of Administration declared surplus a 15-acre parcel abutting Mendota Mental Health Center and announced its intention to sell the land to a private housing developer. For nearly 15 years, the land had provided more than 220 gardening plots and open space for neighboring residents.

Alarmed at the prospect of losing this resource, a coalition of garden, neighborhood, housing and green-space advocates, university representatives and non-profit groups fought to protect the land for gardens and open space. In the fall of 1996, the state listed as surplus another 20 acres of a land-locked parcel north of the original site. After nearly a year and half of concerted effort by the coalition, the state removed entire 35 acres from the surplus list, and a 16-year lease was signed with the Northside Planning Council, Madison Area Land Trust, Urban Open Space Foundation, and the Community Action Coalition, to use the land according to the desires of the community.

By the summer of 1998, further negotiations with the state led to an agreement that keeps a portion of the site in community gardens for at least 50 years. Eventually the coalition will acquire full title to the land. Meanwhile, gardeners and other members of the community

continue to design and plan the site with renewed vigor. The Troy Gardens Project has become a model for community-driven land use decision-making, and the consortium of public owners offers a blueprint for garden acquisitions elsewhere in Madison and throughout the U.S.

Other gardens in Madison have also drawn considerable success and community support.

Loss of community gardens in the past 10 years

Despite success stories, community demand and consistent community support for them, community gardens in Madison continue to compete with other forms of development as a land use. According to Madison's Parks and Open Space Plan, 60 percent of community gardens in the city are in imminent danger of being converted into other uses (City of Madison 1997 in Herbach 1998).

The lands on which community gardens in Madison are located are owned by a variety of interests. The Dryden II community garden, for instance, is on land owned by a shopping center. Other Madison garden sites are held by the university, state, city, churches, and railroad companies. In only a few cases is community gardening a permanent use of these lands. Because of the gardens' short-term tenure arrangements and increasing development pressures, the city has lost 12 garden sites since 1991 - nearly 400 plots comprising 40 percent of Madison's community garden plots (Herbach 1998).

It is imperative for the city to stop this loss; to create a sustainable, environment friendly, socially healthy, hunger free and livable communities, community gardens must be recognized as a high-priority use of land in Madison.

User profile of community gardeners

In this city, a profile of users by race is very different for community gardens than it would be for city parks. Many of Madison's recent immigrants, including Southeast Asians, Eastern Europeans, Central and South Americans describe gardening as their connection to home (CAC staff person 1997). It is interesting to note that some of them are not from rural settings, but garden to get access to food that they are unable to purchase here. Community gardens appear to be successful and in demand in places where there are concentrations of Southeast Asian immigrants (Herbach 1998).

Seniors are another group that exhibits a strong interest in community gardening. Of all the CAC gardeners, 19 percent of the users were households with seniors. In some instances, the senior member of the household is the primary gardener, although he/she may not be the primary registrant.

Although low-income populations are often cited as predominant users of community gardens, middle - and high-income persons are major users of community gardens as well. The gardens at Eagle Heights and University Houses serve a primarily low-income, student population. Gardens at Shorewood Village, Tamarack Trails, and All Saints Lutheran (Fitchburg) are used primarily by middle and upper-income groups. In fact, some users are homeowners who prefer community gardening because it provides a social and community experience that is not available by gardening in their own yard

In addition, there are single family homeowners whose yards are not suitable for gardening because of shade, soil conditions, surrounding vegetation, lot size, traffic, etc.

Community gardening organizations

The Madison Area Community Gardeners Coalition (MCGC) is a voluntary organization that works to secure garden tenure and advocates for more garden space. The organization represents the interests of community gardeners and gives assistance with garden organization and leadership. It is a citywide umbrella organization, with representation from many gardens in the city. It has had great success in raising awareness about community gardens.

Although MCGC's members are dedicated, the organization lacks the resource endowment necessary to have a bigger impact on community gardening in the city. The group depends entirely on volunteer labor. Core members of the organization are employed full-time in other positions. Moreover, its mission does not include management of gardens. MCGC would need to change its identity if it were to become the kind of organization capable of shaping the community garden movement in the city.

For the past 18 years, the non-profit Community Action Coalition (CAC), has been managing community gardens for low-income residents. CAC sites contain about 600 plots. In developing these garden sites, CAC places emphasis on sustainable self-managed, mixed-income gardens that will meet the needs of low-income households. In this context, CAC currently manages five self-reliant gardens. Self-management and self-reliance is encouraged in the development of all new gardens. CAC also collaborates with most of the other gardens in the city to place people of all incomes, wherever the opportunity to garden exists. With some gardens, these collaborative placement arrangements are constrained by their location and priorities of the landholder.

Other than the CAC gardens, all community gardens in Madison are managed by neighborhood or garden-based organizations. In allocating the plots of their gardens, many of these organizations give priority to residents of the immediate neighborhood. Some gardens are associated with community centers; one is part of homeowners' association. Those that are tied to the university give priority to students, faculty and staff. The actual supply of community garden space thus varies depending on where gardeners live.

In Madison, gardens have been successful where a strong organization exists to manage and maintain them. Examples of such success stories are the Atwood community gardens (run by the Atwood Community Center), Eagle Heights (run by the Eagle Heights Community Center) and the CAC gardens. An organization that oversees the physical appearance of garden sites and provides education and assistance to gardeners can facilitate the continuance of community gardens (Herbach 1998, Mathers 1998).

Another garden support organization, Growing Power, Inc., was formed in 1998 to develop and preserve multigenerational and multicultural community garden initiatives for people of all income levels in both educational and entrepreneurial settings.

Existing city policies regarding gardens

Two resolutions of the city's Common Council -- one in 1990 written by then Alderperson Sue

Bauman and another in 1997 that came with the growing support for a community garden on the Isthmus -- have called for greater municipal support of community gardening. Community gardening is also endorsed by the Isthmus 2020 Plan and the City's Parks and Open Space Plan of 1991 and 1997. The language in the earlier Parks and Open Space Plan is particularly strong (Herbach 1998).

In June of 1990, the Common Council adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of permanent community gardens on city-owned land including city parks. The resolution also called for changes in the zoning ordinance designed to encourage the inclusion of community gardens in newly platted areas of the city. The resolution cites the multiple benefits of community gardening, and the language used to justify city action is particularly strong: *whereas, community gardens assist City residents in improving the quality of City life by revitalizing neighborhoods, stimulating social interaction, conserving and recycling resources, reducing family food budgets and creating opportunities for recreation, therapy, and exercise...*(City of Madison, Resolution 7256, 1990).

A new community garden resolution was adopted by the Common Council on October 6, 1997. The language in the new resolution is not as strong as the language in the 1990 resolution. *Whereas, the City of Madison has recognized the value which community gardens and voluntary efforts can add to the health of a neighborhood...* (City of Madison 1997) The resolution calls for the establishment of a Community Gardens Advisory Committee to research appropriate and effective ways that the city of Madison can support and help to create community gardens.

Language in the Parks and Community Places section of the Isthmus 2020 Plan supports the introduction of community garden space in the city's central area. "*Common places, where neighbors can meet, help define the character of a neighborhood* (City of Madison 1997)." Community gardens are one of the recommended common places.

The 1991 Parks and Open Space Plan contains stronger language. "*This Plan further recommends that the Parks Division be capital funded to acquire suitable sites for as many as 2,000 City-owned, permanent garden plots of approximately 200-800 square feet in size each...*(City of Madison 1991)."

The current plan drops the strong language, although justification for acquisition—a shortfall of about 2000 sites- remains in the description of the problem. (Parks and Open Space Plan 1997) In fact, since the 1991 plan, the city has lost 400 plots. Thus far, the recommendations in the plans and resolutions have not been followed.

Existing governmental support

The city supports community gardening in several significant ways. First, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) unit has supported the CAC Garden Program with funds for a number of years. This funding is provided in recognition of the fact that community gardens serve as a focal point for neighborhood activities, and as a source of low-cost food for some families. CDBG support of CAC gardens was initiated as part of the city's effort to strengthen the community's alternative food systems, including food pantries and food banks. CDBG funding for CAC gardens has increased annually over the last 10 years. Funding in 1983 was \$6,500, and by 1998 the allocation had increased to \$44,910. CDBG continues to be an

important and much needed source of support for community gardens in Madison.

In addition, the Community Development Authority (CDA) helps facilitate community gardening by allowing community gardens to exist on some of the grounds of subsidized housing complexes. There are community gardens at the Truax housing site, at Baird Street in Broadway-Simpson. The most recent arrangement with the city is that of the Homestead site on CDA land in the Old Market Neighborhood, where Mayor Sue Bauman designated a portion of the site for community gardens.

Finally, the city also has permitted community gardens on land at Reindahl and Marlborough parks.

V. Location of Community Gardens

Two areas of concern need to be addressed when choosing a site for community gardens. The first is neighborhood characteristics that support the successful introduction of a community garden or create demand for a community garden. The second is the attributes of a site. These site and neighborhood characteristics are important not only to assess where gardens should be located but also to anticipate where these characteristics will occur in the future and plan for gardens in new neighborhoods.

Neighborhood characteristics

Community gardens can be successful in any neighborhood -- whether wealthy, low- or mixed-income, but certain characteristics of the neighborhood may take priority in setting up community gardens. For instance, "*[T]he City of Seattle encourages that expansion of the P-Patch [community gardening] program and outreach, should give special emphasis to low-income families and individuals, youth, the elderly, physically challenged, and other special populations.* (City of Seattle Resolution 28610, 1992)

Average age of household. Community gardens should be a priority in areas where there are higher concentrations of senior citizens -- near retirement homes, for instance, or in apartment complexes where many elderly residents live. Community gardens not only enable senior members of the community to engage in a healthy activity, they provide other neighborhood residents a place to get to know a segment of the community they might not otherwise have the chance to meet.

Percentage renters or condo-owners. Many renters and condominium owners do not have access to land. Community gardens are more likely to work in neighborhoods where a critical mass of people are looking for a place to garden. Neighborhoods with high percentages of renters and/or condominium owners provide that critical mass.

It is important to note that high densities provide the same conditions. Homeowners in several neighborhoods on Madison's Isthmus have access to land, but because of small yards and

building heights that limit periods of direct sunlight, they are unable to garden in their yards.

Percentage of census tract that is low-income. The benefits of community gardening draw people from every socio-economic category. However, priority in siting a community garden should be given to neighborhoods with higher percentages of low-income residents. With the introduction of welfare reform and the paring down of food subsidies, community gardens could play a more important role in feeding low-income residents. Community gardens can have significant value for people who are stretching their food budgets. Money freed up from food budgets could also be used in meeting other needs of those families.

Percentage of recent immigrants from agrarian backgrounds. More than half of the plots in CAC-managed gardens are tended by immigrants from Southeast Asia. According to a CAC staff person, many of the recent immigrants describe gardening as their connection to home (Finkelstein 1997). For many Southeast Asians, gardening is a multigenerational activity of extended families and serves to maintain a sense of cultural continuity. Some of these residents were not farmers in Asia but garden here so that they can eat a traditional diets of foods either unavailable to them locally or which they can grow more cheaply than they can buy. Community gardens are likely to be successful in places where there are higher concentrations of Southeast Asian immigrants.

Does another garden serve the neighborhood? Community gardens should be sited in neighborhoods that are not served by other gardens. Madison's Northside contains several community gardens, including Troy, which is among the city's largest. It is important that all parts of the city that need gardens get gardens, not just the places that have a tradition of community gardening. Currently, the Isthmus and parts of Madison's west, south and far east neighborhoods are underserved by the number of community garden plots available to them.

Neighborhoods with inadequate space. Neighborhoods that are park/open space deficient can benefit from the use of smaller lots and mid-block or interior locations as community gardens; even when those plots might not meet current Madison Parks Division threshold standards. The presence of an organized activity with defined users, would address the need for compatible and responsible use of the land. Standards of conduct, noise level, hours of use and related concerns would be set to match the needs of adjoining users.

By sharing parts of adjoining lots, residents and building owners can build gardens in neighborhoods that lack other options for parks and open space. The Mifflin Street Community Co-op has sponsored a plan to build a small park with a garden and benches behind the store and along the middle of the block that the Co-op shares with nine other property owners. The City banned commuter parking in the neighborhood's back yards in 1998, and the Co-ops Mifflin 2000 Committee wants landowners on the block to meet the City's landscaping requirements by replacing some of the parking lots with grass and vegetation.

Pooled together, the grassy areas would provide space to garden and help reconnect urban residents to nature and each other. The open space would also increase the neighborhood's aesthetics and allow residents to take a stronger stake in their community. Two surveys of affected residents show strong support for the plan, which has been endorsed by the Capitol Center District neighborhood group. The use of community gardens would bridge a deficit that present strategies have failed to address. The mid-block plan of Mifflin 2000 offers a relatively inexpensive method to secure open space in the City's Isthmus, where user demand is high and available space is limited.

Families with young children or new families. Families with young children and new families often go through a period of intense domesticity with emphasis on developing the skills and routines related to food and cooking. Several of Madison's successful community gardens are located near the housing of these families.

Other areas with a high proportion of younger couples (the Trillium neighborhood near the University Avenue, for example) are also likely to support a nearby garden. Access to a garden could help sustain the families both physically and emotionally at a time when their budgets and outside activities are restricted and their needs are shared with many of their neighbors.

Large parks. Since land availability is a major constraint in urban areas, community gardens should take advantage of opportunities to exist with open spaces such as parks. For instance, the Benjamin Wagerson Horticultural Center (BWHC), a municipal park in Dayton, Ohio, owes its popularity in part to the multiple functions that it serves. The BWHC park provides and manages community garden plots, children's garden, wedding reception gardens and flower gardens as part of a large park complex.

Site Attributes

Gardens cannot happen just anywhere. Even with adequate neighborhood activism and support, they sometimes fail. Along with enthusiastic people, community gardens need helping hands from both nature and municipal infrastructure. The following is a list of technical factors that influence the selection of a site for a garden.

Good Soil Quality and availability of compost. At least eight to nine inches of topsoil are necessary to raise vegetables. Topsoil and/or compost can be brought in from other places, but such measures add to the development cost of the garden. Gardeners need to be concerned with the chemical content of the soil, which should be tested for its pH and nutrient content (Sommers 1984). It is especially important that the soil be tested for lead and other contaminants if the garden is located on the site of a demolished building.

Slope. No established degree of slope is considered prohibitive for gardening, but gardening on a slope is likely to cause erosion. The Eagle Heights Community Garden on the UW campus has gotten around the slope problem by terracing. Major landscaping, like bringing in soil, adds to the development costs.

Adequate sunlight. The garden should have an open south face to maximize the access of plants to sunlight. This is especially important in northern climates such as that of Madison. Vegetables need six to eight hours of sunlight a day. When choosing a site, the more sunlight, the better.

Accessibility to water. Reliable water sources are essential for the success of community gardens. Because we cannot rely on adequate rainfall, it is necessary to have access to water. In some gardens, people put out barrels to collect rain, which have a tendency to collect mosquito larvae. Other gardeners take water from nearby buildings or get hooked up to the municipal water supply or to the nearest fire hydrant.

Distance from major streets. Boston Urban Gardeners (BUG) recommend that gardens be at

least 100 feet from major streets in order to prevent airborne pollutants from getting into the soil and settling on the vegetables. There are other safety concerns, as well. Gardens tend to attract children. It is important to make sure the garden is situated in such a way that children will not be playing next to busy streets. There is some concern about the safety of children at Madison's St. Paul community garden, which is situated on an active rail corridor.

Site configuration. Sites that require long, narrow corridors of gardens, such as those adjacent to rail corridors, can hinder community development goals. Gardeners tend to have less contact with each other at these gardens. Thus, the social infrastructure that might otherwise develop from community gardening is less likely. The water costs are higher at these sites, as well, because less land is served per running foot of water pipe.

Visibility from neighboring residences. Community gardens are best protected from crime and vandalism by easy visual access from the surrounding neighborhood. Gardeners will feel safer and criminals will be dissuaded if they know that neighbors will hear calls for help or will see if something is going wrong.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities and the elderly. It is preferable to place gardens in locations that can easily be accessed by elderly gardeners and those with disabilities. Steep slopes and long walks from access points are poor choices for these groups.

VI. Preserving existing and creating new community gardens in Madison

Despite their many contributions to the quality of life in Madison, the city has seen a significant loss of 12 community garden sites in the past 10 years, and the existing gardens are vulnerable to development pressures. This section discusses strategies that could help to preserve and create community gardens in Madison.

Strategies and tools for preserving and developing community gardens

The following strategies can be used both, to preserve gardens and to create new gardens in Madison.

Inclusion in plans. Community gardens are often lost because gardening is seen as an interim use of land that is ultimately earmarked for other purposes. Starting new and secure gardens is a challenge unless gardens are established as a priority land use. One of the ways of ensuring this is to have community gardens be included in neighborhood (and other) plans.

For instance, the city of Seattle approved a resolution that clearly identifies community gardens as part of the comprehensive plan of the city. The resolution recommends that: "*P-Patch gardens be a part of the Comprehensive Plan and that any appropriate ordinance be strengthened to encourage, preserve and protect community gardening, particularly in medium and high density residential areas. The City of Seattle will include the P-Patch program in the*

evaluation of priority use of city surplus property (City of Seattle Resolution 28610, 1992)." The incorporation of this resolution is evident in the neighborhood planning process started in Seattle for 38 of its neighborhoods. These plans will include community gardening as a neighborhood use of open space. The plan is likely to be adopted early next year (Macdonald 1998). Berkeley, California, is also in the process of adopting a resolution to include community gardens in its planning efforts (Linn 1998).

In Madison, a community garden can become eligible for certain grants if the site for that garden is identified in a master plan. For instance, the clause on urban gardens in the Parks and Open Space Plan for 1997 states:

To be eligible for site acquisition grants under the Urban Green Space portion of the State Stewardship Program, public or nonprofit conservation groups must have the site identified in the City Master Plan for Land Use. Including a site in the Master Plan means that one or more official purposes of the Master Plan will be achieved."

It is evident that, to incorporate urban gardens in our neighborhoods, we must recognize them in city comprehensive plans and other development plan documents.

In addition to starting new community gardens in urban areas, it is also necessary to ensure their success after their establishment. In situations where adjoining land is developed after the establishment of community gardens, it is important to recognize the needs of the established garden. For instance, high rise developments around the community garden that block its sunlight will undoubtedly ruin the prospects of a well functioning community garden. Inclusion of community gardens in master plans and land use plans will allow that such matters are addressed beforehand.

Zoning. Austin, Minneapolis and Boston have zoning provisions for community gardens. In Austin, the city has specific guidelines regarding what are qualified community gardens in their zoning ordinance. A qualified garden is then allowed some provisions from the city.

Minneapolis is in the process of rewriting its zoning ordinance. The current draft includes a section that recognizes community gardens as a temporary permitted use under all zoning districts.

In Boston, the zoning code denotes community garden as an open subdistrict within special zoning districts. The clause reads: *Community Gardens open space sub districts shall consist of land appropriate for and limited to the cultivation of herbs, fruits, flowers, or vegetables, including the cultivation and tillage of soil and the production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any agricultural, floricultural or horticultural commodity: such lands may include vacant public lands* (Boston Zoning Code).

A zoning enactment that recognizes community gardening as a permitted use would allow local governments to earmark land for community gardens in comprehensive or other general plans. Zoning may also reduce development pressures on existing gardens since the gardens would be protected by the zoning ordinance.

Budget allocation. Budgetary support is a crucial ingredient for start-up of new gardens and for the success of existing gardens. Budgetary support may be provided for acquiring new garden sites or for establishing ownership of existing garden sites.

For instance, Seattle raised \$650,000 through real estate foreclosures. The citizens of Seattle also agreed to a \$1 dollar increase in their property tax for youth development and recreation. The revenue was placed in a fund and disbursed as grants to community garden groups and other applicants. Seattle's budgetary support for community gardens is also evident in the following resolution: *"The City of Seattle recognizes the economic, environmental and societal value of gardens and will attempt to provide budgetary support for the management of the P-Patch program (City of Seattle Resolution 28610, 1992)."*

More recently, the Los Angeles City Council has approved \$150,000 for new farmers' markets, community gardens, and "market basket" programs, as part of an anti-hunger and food security initiative. The market basket program links consumers with a box of farm fresh produce purchased directly from farmers' markets through schools, day care centers, and workplaces. Lower income customers receive a box with over \$10 worth of produce at \$7. The newly created Los Angeles Food Security and Hunger Partnership (the food policy council of LA) brokered this legislation. The funds will go to Southland Farmers Market Association to organize three new markets in low income parts of the city; to LA Grows to create three new community gardens; and to Occidental College for the development of two new Market basket sites.

In Madison, CDBG funding support for CAC has been essential to the coalition's ability to provide community gardening programs.

Staff support by local government. The presence of a staff person within local government not only provides institutional support for community gardening programs but delegates responsibility for seeking out new ways of funding and opportunities for community gardens in the city. The staff's position within the city structure allows access to information about available resources within different agencies. The staff can also work with various city agencies in collaborative ventures with community gardening programs. Such a role cannot be consistently fulfilled by non-profit and community gardening groups outside the structure of city government.

A number of cities have hired staff persons to coordinate community garden activity. Seattle, for instance, has two full-time staff people who manage its P-Patch program. Dayton, Lima, Newark and Portland are other cities that have hired staff to coordinate community garden activities and serve as liaison between garden groups and land-leasing agencies.

Public/private/non-profit partnerships. Community gardens cater to numerous interests. It follows that community gardens are more successful when different groups form a partnership in the interest of a community garden.

Gardening partnerships are generally formed for two basic purposes: to deal with the issues of land tenure; and to facilitate garden management. Partnerships for management of community gardens are more common, but partnerships for securing land tenure are essential to permanence of community gardens.

Boston boasts what is likely the nation's largest number of community gardens with permanent land tenure. Much of its success is due to a strong coalition among the city's various community garden interest groups. Partnership through the local land trust, which owns and holds 50 community gardens in perpetuity, has ensured secure land tenure for the gardens.

Seattle provides a fine example of public / non-profit, partnership for management of community gardens. The city's P-Patch program and the non-profit Friends of P-Patch, have formed an effective collaborative to manage community gardens on leased land.

Coalition building and collaboration. Often times, community gardens are pitted against other development uses such as affordable housing and parks. This conflict can arise from a lack of interagency cooperation. Further, greater coordination and collaboration among agencies can increase the scarce resources available for community gardens.

Attention to this issue is raised in a Seattle resolution that states: "*The City of Seattle will promote inter-agency and intergovernmental cooperation among agencies such as the Parks Department, the Engineering Department, the Housing Department, the School District, Metro, the Port Authority, the Water Department, City Light and the Department of Transportation to expand opportunities for community gardening (City of Seattle Resolution 28610, 1992).*"

Education of elected officials, bureaucrats and the community. A major disadvantage for community gardeners is a lack of visibility in the public arena. Elected officials and city staff are often unaware of the benefits and demand for community gardening in their communities. An outreach or awareness program will provide a clearer understanding of the value of community gardens in urban areas.

In Madison, a well-publicized rally by community gardeners and their supporters at the Capitol Square farmers' market in the fall of 1995 helped preserve the Sheboygan garden from conversion to a parking lot.

Tools for preserving existing community gardens

The following strategies can be used to preserve existing gardens in Madison.

Extension of leases for existing gardens. The most common tenure arrangement for community gardens, unfortunately, is a lease of one year. Consequently, gardens often struggle under the threat of imminent cancellation of their yearly leases. Short-term leases tend to keep gardeners from planting perennial crops such as asparagus and berries; gardeners may also be reluctant to improve their plots with compost and other amendments if they have no assurance that they will be able to use that soil the following year. Lacking a sense of permanency, gardeners are less willing to commit themselves to their garden's long-term future.

One way of ensuring permanence is to convert the short-term leases of gardens to long-term leases of 5 years or longer. One need not look far for an example of such an arrangement: the Troy Drive gardens are currently operating under a lease of 50 years.

Tools for getting new gardens.

The following strategies may be used to start new community gardens in Madison.

Planned Unit Developments. Policies that encourage developers to include community gardens as part of planned unit developments (PUDs) can help to bring community gardens into urban areas with scarce land resources. A PUD allows some flexibility with density requirements, thus

enabling the developers to include community gardening in their development proposals (Cullingworth 1993).

Development agreements. Like incentives and bonuses, development agreements are generally seen as a convenient mechanism that facilitate the private provision of infrastructure finance. In addition, development agreements have been used to protect natural resources or provide for community civic facilities such as day care centers (Cullingworth 1993). Under this model, a developer would be allowed to deviate from certain planning standards such as a zoning requirement by providing a portion of the developable land for community gardens.

The following example demonstrates a type of development agreement. In New York City, as an effort to clean up and reclaim an 89,000-square-foot blighted urban renewal site, the local community established the West Side Community Gardens in 1976. Because of enormous community support for the garden, the garden group and the Trust for Public Land were able to negotiate a garden-saving agreement in 1984. The developer was selected by the City of New York to construct apartments and townhouses on a portion of the site. The agreement provided area for a permanent replacement garden on a portion of the land. In addition, the developer was required to build the garden, financed jointly by the garden group and the developer. The title was then conveyed to the garden group upon completion of construction.

Development of community gardens on city parkland. The Parks Division of the City of Madison has played a significant role in local community gardening in Madison. Currently the Parks Division allows community gardens as interim uses on parkland and provides occasional maintenance support in collaboration with CAC. However, there is even greater potential in the relation between community gardens and parks in Madison. On larger size parks, the city can encourage the development of parts of parkland as community gardens thereby increasing the diversity of parkland uses and users. A greater diversity of users in the open space use will raise the popularity of the park space; community gardening on parkland will also increase community ownership and responsibility towards parkland.

The strategies outlined above are a starting point for preserving existing and starting new community gardens in Madison. In the course of developing this document, the committee found cities across the country engaged in activities that are making community gardens a permanent part of the urban landscape. In most cities, including Madison, the efforts are more at a programmatic and grass roots level than at a policy level. Community gardens not only make cities sustainable by increasing local food production and protecting the local environment, they also make the communities sustainable by encouraging healthy social interactions.

To realize the city's goal of sustainable development, the committee endorses long term policy support for community gardens. Consequently, based on the previous discussion on community gardens, the committee has developed the following set of specific action recommendations.

VII. Action Plan Recommendations

In recognition that community gardening improves the quality of life for residents of Madison, we seek to create a permanent system of long lasting, well managed community gardens throughout the City of Madison, with strong government/public support. (Mission statement of

the Community Gardens Advisory Committee, 1998)

The committee was specifically charged by the Common Council to recommend actions to facilitate the role of community gardens in stabilizing and improving neighborhoods. In this section of its report, the committee proposes a plan of action that city government, its staff and policy boards can take to foster such efforts.

We believe that the city government, in collaboration with neighborhood organizations, land trusts and other public and private agencies, will be instrumental in fulfilling this vision.

Policy 1: Land security is critical to the sustainability of community gardens.

Most community gardens in Madison operate on an annual lease. A significant number of the city's community gardens have been lost in the past ten years because of their tenuous lease status. Longer-term leases will allow existing gardens to become permanent features of our urban environment. Tenure security will protect the investment of time and energy and the economic and emotional contributions of neighborhood residents in community gardens. At least five years are needed to enhance soils, establish perennial plants and for individual gardeners to connect with the land and each other.

Actions:

- The City of Madison should adopt a policy in support of existing community gardens on leased land having their leases extended five years or longer.
- Private landholders who lease their land (parcel) for community gardens should have their assessment reviewed based on the new use, the length of the lease and possible restrictions on the use of the land. Without something that restricts the use of the land, the assessment would probably not be changed.
- City departments and agencies that lease land for community gardens should extend those leases to a minimum of five years. Leases should provide for evaluation in the fourth year for renewal after the following year.
- Private and nonprofit landholders that extend garden leases to a minimum of five years should be given public recognition with a City of Madison Community Gardens Award.

Policy 2: Community gardens are to be developed as permanent public assets.

Community gardening is a way for people who lack access to land to grow flowers, fruits, vegetables and herbs. Gardens help grow neighborhoods by creating conditions for people to gather, work and play in a local setting. To sustain this sense of community, neighbors must be able to count on their garden as a permanent fixture. The actions in this report are designed to show support and help facilitate neighborhoods that want gardens in their neighborhood.

Community garden success is based on grassroots support.

Actions:

- City government should institute a gardens acquisition program that will create at least one new site every year for the next ten years or until a balance has been reached between the demand for and supply of community garden plots. City government should establish an annual set-aside fund of \$60,000 for the purchase of land for community gardens that have been identified as needing them. The City should also pursue funds for the purchase of land for community gardens from other sources, such as State Stewardship funds, Federal funds, Dane County Open Space Initiative and private foundations.
- Recognizing that the development and management of community gardens is a public/private neighborhood initiative; the City should establish support/operating funds that will be made available to community garden groups as a grant program to assist the improvements of their gardens. Grants could be awarded on the assessment of needs of each neighborhood garden group that requests funds. This would encourage groups to provide in-kind services and supplies as a match.
- City government should assist in acquiring land for a community garden in the Isthmus within the next two years. The Isthmus was identified as an area with high need and little accessible land.
- The City should fund non-profit organizations to acquire and hold lands for community gardens and arrange for the management of the gardens and otherwise steward the land. A model for this type of program is the Troy Gardens Coalition, in which the Madison Area Community Land Trust will own the land and the UOSF will restrict its use through conservation easements. This model should be strongly considered for use in other parts of the city.
- City government should continue to support organizations like Community Acion Coalition (CAC) that are responsible for managing gardens. In addition, the city should provide support for other non-profit groups to manage community gardens.

Policy 3: City government can support community gardens through planning and zoning actions.

Too often, community gardens are lost because gardening is seen as an interim use of land that is ultimately marked for other purposes. Starting new community gardens and securing existing ones are difficult, and sometimes impossible in this circumstance. Supportive city planning and zoning ordinances can help to secure permanent community garden spaces by establishing them as a relatively permanent principal use of land, one having high priority and as an important element of neighborhood plans.

Actions:

The city's Common Council, departments of government and their staff, boards and commissions should support and implement the following actions:

- incorporate community gardens in the city-wide land use plan as a recommended "civic space" ;
- include community gardens in the city-wide land use plan in areas that are under-served by community gardens;
- support community gardens as a valuable asset in all neighborhood plans, with priority being given to community gardening associated with neighborhood centers;
- implement the 1991 Parks and Open Space Plan, which recommends that the Parks Division be capital funded to acquire suitable sites for as many as 2,000 City-owned, permanent garden plots of approximately 200-800 square feet in size each. The City should encourage community gardens in City parks, especially in community and area parks to aid in accomplishing the goal stated above.
- give priority to planned urban developments that incorporate gardens as an accepted use of open/civic space;
- As a cost effective method of providing additional garden space throughout the City, the City Parks Division should assist community garden groups and neighborhoods in finding sites in city area, community and regional parks. As an example, Quann Park is slated for reconstruction, and a garden site could be included with an efficient use of park funds. The City should also:
- Give priority to planned unit developments that incorporate gardens as an accepted use of open/civic space;
- amend relevant zoning ordinances to include community gardens as a permitted use in all zoning districts;
- support the efforts of neighborhood groups to develop community gardens within city- owned subsidized and unsubsidized housing projects;
- show flexibility in considering community gardens as a viable use of terraces, and
- The committee also requests that the Parks Department, in cooperation with Olbrich Botanical Society, consider developing a demonstration community garden in the planned expansion of Olbrich Botanical Gardens.

Policy 4: Community gardens require a strong organizational structure and public support to ensure their continuity.

Community gardens remain an essential part of the urban landscape when there is strong public and private advocacy for their existence. Municipal support in the form of staff, budget allocations and grant opportunities reflects the important role that gardens perform in maintaining a healthy community.

Actions:

- A coordinator should serve as a liaison between existing community gardens organizations and city departments working on behalf of the new or existing community gardens. In the committee's judgment, the city should create an ongoing position of Coordinator for community garden issues.
- The Mayors staff working with the Community Gardens Coordinator is essential to a successful implementation of the plan.

The Community Garden Coordinator should:

- Organize a Community Gardens Council comprising members of all local groups involved in community gardening, including land trusts and City staff. The gardens council will be given primary responsibility for organizing, detailing and overseeing the acquisition program for community gardening sites. The garden coordinator will work with the council and the City's neighborhood coordinator to develop a neighborhood prioritization plan.

City government should:

- provide office space and equipment support for the gardens coordinator, garden council and a community gardens information clearing house;
- give priority to initiatives of the garden coordinator in the Urban Community Enhancement match grant program;
- continue to provide grant opportunities and develop new methods for garden organizations to use public monies in support of local community gardening initiatives; and
- support land acquisition and revenue development for gardens at the state and county levels with the DNR Stewardship Fund and Open Space Initiative, respectively.

Policy 5: To achieve maximum environmental and social benefits, a partnership is required of the city, community gardening organizations and individual gardeners.

Community gardens work best when they are neighborhood-based and managed by leaders arising from each garden who are supported by community gardening groups and the city.

Gardeners are responsible for:

- physical maintenance of garden sites, including such tasks as plot layout, site design and maintenance of above-ground watering systems; and

- care of their garden sites in such a manner that gives consideration to neighboring homes and business and creates an aesthetically pleasing landscape.
- Community gardening organizations are responsible for:
- regular communication with the city to provide such information as numbers of registered gardeners, physical condition of the gardening sites and projected demand for plots.

City departments and staff should:

- construct and maintain permanent water systems at each garden site;
- deliver compost and other commonly available soil amendments (e.g., mulch, topsoil, lake weeds) to the garden sites;
- pick up refuse from the garden sites;
- support local garden groups efforts to provide educational programs for community gardening; and
- write letters of support or proclamations to help with fund raising and related needs.
- The city also will continue to provide grant opportunities to neighborhood groups and garden organizations for start-up expenses. When available, it will donate the use of heavy equipment for site clearing, plowing, road maintenance and hauling bulk materials.

Conclusion

As charged by the City of Madison in Resolution No. 23429, and after considerable research and deliberation, the Advisory Committee on Community Gardens has completed the following:

- reviewed the opportunities presented by the growing interest in community gardening;
- catalogued previous and current city activity to support garden development;
- created a definition of community gardens and developed appropriate city roles and standards for the development and management of community gardens; and
- recommended cost-effective ways that city boards, community agencies and city line agencies can achieve the recommended goals for community garden.

Members of the committee are enthusiastic in presenting this report and its recommendations with a fiscal note to the Common Council for action by the City of Madison and its neighborhoods.

Please send your comments/suggestions to Mark Stevens at mstevens@facstaff.wisc.edu

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This page is currently under construction.