

**PART 4**

**OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT MISSION**

Cemeteries

**Community Gardens**

The Emerald Necklace

Public Shade Trees



## PART 4 • OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT MISSION

*Community Gardens*

## INTRODUCTION

**I**n East Boston, vegetables and flowers flourish in the Joseph Ciampa Community Garden, just across the street from abandoned docks but also near the elegant Piers Park.

The sprawling Fenway Victory Gardens, the sole survivor of a long-ago World War II home-front food production effort, today is home to hundreds of urban growers who tend an eclectic array of plants and plot amenities.

Between Savin and Maywood Streets in Roxbury is a newly improved community garden, named after the two streets. This state-of-the-art garden includes an ornamental gazebo surrounded by a red-bricked seating area where gardeners and neighbors can rest on benches. Thick granite dividers separate individual plots while a metal picket fence encloses the entire garden. And at the main entrance, an arched trellis supports flowers that climb overhead into a welcoming bouquet.

On the banks of the Charles River in Allston, in easy view of power boaters, canoes, and sculls making their way along the watercourse, is the Christian Herter Community Garden. Here weeding, watering and harvesting are also forms of outdoor recreation just as are running, bicycling, skateboarding, and picnicking in the rest of the park.

These snapshots of Boston's more than 150 community gardens demonstrate the variety, care, and passion that typifies this special form of green space. An integral part of the open space network of parks, playgrounds, natural areas, and unbuilt spaces in the city, these gardens are perhaps the most personal and directly representative green space in their communities.

Community gardens are vital elements in many Boston neighborhoods and unique among the city's open space types. Many began as food-producing plots used by people of limited means

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but have grown to serve as important social and educational centers for gardeners, their families, and neighbors. More importantly, gardens facilitate the empowerment of people by involving them in community planning processes that define an appropriate balance of open and built spaces. Community gardens also serve to welcome newcomers to existing neighborhoods and offer neighbors common goals. The work involved in creating and preserving community gardens has brought many residents together, whether or not they are gardeners, to both protect neighborhood character and provide the space necessary for gardening and gathering.

Usefulness, self-sufficiency, beauty, productivity, cooperation, and education are some positives that grow out of community gardens in addition to the food and flowers raised. Well-managed gardens are a source of community pride while flourishing gardens contribute to the perception of gardens and their environs as secure spaces within Boston's neighborhoods. Residents use community gardens as safe meeting places, and by virtue of the variety of cultures represented by the city's gardeners, these spaces are also a common meeting ground for shared neighborhood experiences.

The community gardens of Boston range in size from the Clark Cooper Community Garden at the Massachusetts Audubon Nature Center (the former Boston State Hospital lands in Mattapan) and the Richard Parker Victory Gardens in the Fenway, each with more than 300 individual garden plots, to tucked away places developed on corner vacant house lots with as few as 10 plots. In these varied gardens, approximately 6,000 families produce about \$1.5 million of food annually, generating fresh, healthy produce that in turn contributes significantly to the household budgets of low- to moderate-income families. Gardens are located in almost every city neighborhood and are managed by homeless shelters, rehabilitation centers, housing developments, senior centers, and day care centers, as well as neighborhood residents. The vast number are located on formerly abandoned or undeveloped lots. Community gardens also reflect the city's diverse ethnic make-up with significant representation of Asian, Caribbean, Eastern-European, African-American, and Hispanic populations and foodstuffs.

This plan is the summary of information and goals defined by the many agencies and organizations instrumental in the development, support, maintenance, funding, and advocacy for community gardens in Boston. The plan's overall intent is to set realistic goals for the next five years, goals that will sustain a larger and more long-term vision for the gardens.

## HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

Historically, Boston has one of the oldest and largest community gardening systems in the United States. In the 1890s, with the onset of an economic depression, vacant lots and city land were set aside for food production by individuals. During World War I, community gardening surfaced again in Boston as “Victory Gardens,” providing food for local consumption as much of the nation’s commercial food supply was allocated for shipment abroad. During World War II, community gardening again became a critical component of the war effort by significantly buttressing domestic food production.

The Fenway Victory Garden (later named the Richard D. Parker Memorial Victory Gardens) is the only known victory garden across the country that still survives from World War II. However, in the 1970s additional community gardens arose like a phoenix from vacant house lots created by arson, abandonment, and demolition, especially in the most economically distressed neighborhoods. Strong grassroots efforts toward community development, self-help, and state legislation resulted in the creation of many new gardens.

Other early efforts such as the Revival Program resulted in 30 new community gardens during the 1970s. In 1976, Boston Urban Gardeners was founded to further the interests of gardening groups. Thanks to these many public and private non-profit garden support and neighborhood groups, community gardening emerged from the 1970s as a solid neighborhood-based system.

In the 1980s, community gardens faced important battles for property rights in a climate of aggressive development and rezoning. Because the city faced extreme financial cutbacks, the Boston Natural Areas Fund (BNAF) purchased and secured most of the Revival Gardens from the City of Boston. The South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust (SE/LR OSLT) was established and formalized between 1989 and 1991. A Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) contract was established with the national non-profit Trust for Public Land and Boston Urban Gardeners to assist with the formation of SE/LR OSLT. This effort permanently protected eight parcels of open space owned by the BRA, including five community gardens. Since the Land Trust’s establishment, the Berkeley Street Community Garden has been added to its inventory of permanently protected space.

The Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve is another example of a community-based organization formed to protect, manage and expand open space for gardening, such as the Nightingale and Hecla Street Community Gardens in that community. In 1993, Gardens for Charlestown was transferred from the BRA to a single garden land trust which owns and operates the garden.

The Parks Department – with funding assistance from the Environment Department – started and administers a Community Garden Small Grant Program, funding smaller-scale capital

improvements to community gardens such as fence repairs, tree trimming, new toolboxes or bulletin boards, and the like. Some 35 gardens and green areas were funded during the first year of the program.

In addition, the Environment Department – with input from the Parks Department – has created a resource guide for community gardens. This guide has been published in several languages and has put under one cover the plethora of resources available to gardeners, ranging from places to get gardening instruction to potential funding sources.

The Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) has assisted community garden planning and development with its Grassroots program funded by the federal Community Development Block Grant Program. Community gardens have also been past beneficiaries of the Boston Foundation's Fund for Parks and Open Spaces Small Grants Program, managed by the Boston GreenSpace Alliance, and numerous other private philanthropies.

To address continuing concerns for ownership, investment and support, Garden Futures was formed in 1994. The initiating organizations of Garden Futures were BNAF, BUG, Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve and Development Corporation (DGP) and SE/LR OSLT. (BUG ceased operations in early 2002) From 1995 to 1996 these groups collectively undertook a study of their 60 gardens in order to better able to understand capital and human infrastructure needs related to long-term sustainability. The report was issued in early 1997 and recommended new efforts toward education, networking, and public relations.

Most recently, BNAF and Garden Futures merged to become the Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN), a collaborative of 11 nonprofit organizations that own and manage nearly 100 community gardens. This new organization provides networking, education, and advocacy services. The member organizations as garden owners provide insurance, water system maintenance, capital improvements, fund-raising, and other support to the gardeners.

## **OWNERSHIP, INVESTMENT, AND SUPPORT**

### **Public Ownership and Support**

**T**he city of Boston owns many community garden properties through the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the Boston School Department, the Department of Neighborhood Development, and the Parks and Recreation Department. The Parks Department owns five community gardens within public parkland. The DND plays a crucial role in garden ownership as the agency that manages land, often vacant lots, that become city-owned property through foreclosure and abandonment. Some of these properties have been allocated for community gardens. In addition, the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) provides community gardening opportunities at a number of its residential developments citywide.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, via the MDC, also owns land in Boston where community gardens are located.

Public support for community gardens is evidenced through the Parks Department's outreach through its Community Garden Liaison and its Maintenance Division, working with other community garden service providers, and supporting spring and fall garden clean-ups with trash bags, tools, wood chips, and trash pickups. Additionally, the Department's greenhouses provide annuals for garden borders and summer youth crews offer assistance for special projects through the Boston Youth Fund. The Department's Park Partners program includes community gardens in its growing list of open spaces and their advocates. A tool bank for community garden clean-ups, managed by BUG, was established in 1991 with tools from the Parks Department.

The Department of Neighborhood Development administers the Grassroots Program, which channels federal Community Development Block Grant funds to neighborhood groups for converting vacant land into community gardens. Through Grassroots, existing gardens have been improved and new gardens created. In the past five years, some \$2.5 million in federal funds have been channeled to more than 45 community gardens throughout Boston under the Grassroots Program.

Finally, the state provides some resources to urban community gardeners. The Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture facilitates the establishment of farmers' markets. The University of Massachusetts Extension Service in Amherst offers some technical assistance, such as soil testing, to gardeners.

### Private and Non-Profit Ownership and Support

**T**he BNAN is a private non-profit entity that has worked hard to secure land for community gardens. Today nearly 30 non-profit organizations own from one to over 30 community gardens each. Over the past 15 years, these non-profit organizations have raised some \$12 million in private and public funds to construct and renovate gardens in conjunction with individuals and community groups. Up to an estimated \$5 million in additional funds are needed to meet the current capital needs. They have also constructed gardens in conjunction with individuals and community groups.

Maintenance support and technical information for gardens and gardeners are ongoing needs. A consortium of agencies, voluntary efforts, and private firms continues to support community gardens.



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## THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Since the 1970s, community gardens have emerged as an integral element of Boston's open space system. Today community garden space is in demand in a number of city neighborhoods, yet stability and permanency remain issues for many established sites. Recommendations should respect the delicate balance between external support services and self-sufficiency. The following list delineates areas of focus over the next five years:

- Community Gardens and Community Development
- Acquisition and Permanency
- Capital Investment
- Maintenance and Support
- Productivity
- Management
- Education, Training, and Programming
- Resource Development

### Community Gardens and Community Development

Community gardens serve many functions in a neighborhood: as gathering areas, facilitating communication among neighbors; as a recreation resource (annual Gallup Polls continually show gardening to be one of the most popular leisure activities); and as crime-free areas which can provide an extra measure of security to neighboring homes.

In short, a flourishing community garden can help grow not only healthy foods, but a more livable neighborhood as well.

#### *Goals*

- Involve neighborhood organizations, residents and youths in planning, building and maintaining community gardens.
- Find new owners for gardens being planned by neighborhood residents.
- Enhance skills, experience, and confidence of gardeners as open space advocates, community planners, and stewards.

#### *Recommendations*

- Support BNAN's City Gardener Certificate Program and other initiatives that provide leadership training for community gardeners and include current leaders as resources.
- Encourage gardeners and their leadership to participate in neighborhood-wide organizations.
- Advocate for a balance of open space and built areas in both publicly and privately funded development projects.
- Develop sources of financial support for community-based organizations to be able to assume long-term responsibility for maintaining community gardens.



### Acquisition and Permanency

Great strides have been made to secure established community gardenlands in Boston through purchase by non-profit organizations.

Yet some community gardens, owned privately or by the city of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, remain unprotected or threatened by development. As the city of Boston and non-profit groups plan for Boston's open space, the need for gardens will be considered when setting priorities for acquisition.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino, a childhood gardener and long-time supporter of urban gardens, gave a boost to community ownership in early 1999 when he announced the transfer of permanent ownership for some 30 gardens on city property to non-profit associations. A second round of garden ownership transfers is currently in the works.

#### *Goals*

- Provide long-lasting protection to community gardenlands.
- Encourage the establishment of new community gardens and encourage other non-profit organizations and groups, such as CDCs, to become garden owners or partners with a public agency owner.
- Investigate including community gardens in the Open Space Acquisition Program.

#### *Recommendations*

- Establish processes by which non-profit groups such as CDCs and multi-service centers can own community gardenlands.
- Develop a defined process to secure and manage long-term community gardenlands through the coordination of public, non-profit, and community resources.
- Assess needs for new community gardens.
- Evaluate opportunities for incorporating community garden space on public recreational land through the appropriate agency's capital redevelopment process.

### Maintenance and Support

Although the gardeners themselves manage most day-to-day maintenance and operations within nearly 150 individual community gardens, maintenance support on both public and private land is provided by non-profit organizations such as DGP, BNAN, and SE/LR OSLT. In addition, city agencies such as the Parks Department and the Public Works Department contribute to this effort.

Maintenance activities are, therefore, spread among both gardeners and garden support groups. Technical assistance and education from organizations such as SE/LR OSLT and DGP for neighborhood-specific needs and BNAN as an umbrella group,



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helps small garden groups accomplish realistic maintenance goals. Larger or more complex needs such as waste removal, utilities, emergency repairs and delivery of compost, soil, woodchips, or manure are best addressed with a scale of support represented by the Parks Department, Public Works Department, and the Water and Sewer Commission. The importance of public sector maintenance support to the success of the community gardens across Boston cannot be over-stressed.

### **Goals**

- Reinforce and systematize basic maintenance services to community gardens citywide.
- Encourage environmentally sound and efficient gardening practices such as composting and water conservation.

### **Recommendations**

- Encourage materials recycling, including composting, by the gardens, garden support entities, and public agencies.
- Continue regular removal of trash by the Parks Department and expedite a program for the Public Works Department to include such items in its regular contracted waste removal process.
- Continue to provide wood chips and compost to community gardens.
- Continue the Parks Department's yearly donations of bulbs and annuals to gardens.

### **Capital Investment**

**B**uilding a garden can be a process that radically transforms an area from a derelict wasteland into a source of pleasure and pride. A garden encourages neighbors to be outdoors, to talk with each other, and to get involved. A garden that is built by a community will reflect its spirit—the uniqueness of each site, the characteristics of the larger community, and the talents and efforts of the individuals involved.

Capital items such as water systems, soil enhancement, and equipment are essential elements in the life of a community garden. Investing in new gardens or improving existing ones may be the first step toward investment in other neighborhood facilities.

Areas of potential need for capital funding encompass land (discussed in “Acquisition and Permanency,”), initial garden construction, and ongoing re-investments:

**Water** Install hook-ups including meters and backflow prevention devices; upgrade and repair watering systems.

**Development** Design services for a community-determined plan for the garden infrastructure; contractor, technical, and project

management services needed to build infrastructure; develop programs to train new gardeners and establish long-term maintenance strategies.

**Materials** All the supplies and hardware necessary to construct and sustain a garden.

**Equipment** Tools for initial construction but more crucially, the hoes, rakes, shovels and other tools needed for day-to-day gardening.

**Maintenance** Develop a plan for the infrastructure and common areas.

### **Goals**

- Support community-based initiatives to develop new gardens and improve existing ones.
- Target neighborhoods where community garden improvements will help leverage other funding and support other community development initiatives.
- Seek long-term funding for the Community Garden Small Grant Program. This will continue an important effort that enables gardeners to acquire vital tools, supplies, and services not available through other grant programs.

### **Recommendations**

- Act upon, where feasible, the findings of Garden Future’s Conditions Survey and Needs Assessment for existing community gardens to determine investment priorities and funding requirements.
- Continue to earmark through DND’s Grassroots program a substantial portion of federal Community Development Block Grant funds for development of community gardens.
- Work with gardening organizations along with appropriate public and private sector representatives to address community garden water needs and potential solutions.

### **Education, Training, and Programming**

**C**ommunity gardens have both a great need for and the substantial promise of education and training that will ultimately enhance their communities. Appropriate educational programs can assist gardeners of all ages in a mutual quest to grow nutritious food, beautify neighborhoods through site improvement, and manage gardens equitably.

Several grassroots organizations that pursue goals directly or indirectly related to nourishing community gardens are already in place and productive.

The City Gardener Certificate Program initiated by Garden Futures (now BNAN) three years ago, meets many of these community garden education and training needs. The program includes 40 hours of classroom instruction, discussions and hands-on demonstrations of gardening skills that range from plant propagation to establishing community garden rules. Those who complete the City Gardener Certificate Program agree to give back at least 40 hours of garden volunteer time.

The annual Boston Gardeners Gathering provides an opportunity for many gardeners to attend workshops and learn from each other.

The Food Project operates two “urban farms” in Boston where produce is raised for city markets and city youth are trained and utilized in all phases of growing food.

EarthWorks Projects is another community-based organization that includes education and training programs that work in partnership with neighborhood groups and schools to build ecological awareness and community. Among its efforts is the Urban Orchard Project which establishes and cares for productive fruit-bearing plantings in undeveloped open spaces, schoolyards, housing developments, and other sites which integrate community gardening with fruit, berry, and nut growing.

Community gardens can also lead to neighborhood efforts beyond the garden gate. Leadership development training is the basis of the City Gardener Certificate Program and community support activities of BNAN and its member organizations. Gardeners are increasingly being encouraged to provide greening projects, education, food donations, and other services to their neighborhoods.

### *Goals*

- Continue to form partnerships with and provide resources to organizations such as BNAN and its member non-profit organizations to further training.
- Support training programs in landscape skills, gardening, and leadership to promote both the proper uses of materials and environmental awareness.
- Develop and encourage citywide programs and efforts to build a network of gardeners, such as a city garden Internet list service, and an accurate database of the gardens.

### *Recommendations*

- Establish a broad-based advisory group to strengthen, expand, and coordinate with the environmental education efforts for children and youth in all areas of Boston.
- Develop expanded opportunities for field trips, hands-on training, environmental education, and awareness for the Boston Youth Fund.

- Continue to support the annual Gardeners Gathering and Open Garden Day, both of which strengthen the network of community gardeners citywide and highlight urban gardening techniques.

### Management

**E**fficient management of community gardens comes from the strong leadership of coordinators who are typically responsible for most garden-wide functions. Leadership, however, must empower gardeners rather than create dependency. It is essential to the creation and continued existence of such leadership that there be strong outreach and support from a network of public and non-profit agencies.

A garden coordinator is generally a liaison/contact who collects plot fees, calls for services, and coordinates clean-ups and special efforts.

As noted in an earlier section, BNAN's City Gardener Certificate Program now addresses many of these concerns. Coursework includes classes related to garden coordinators, their various roles, and how they can create leadership teams to better accomplish the multiple tasks involved with managing a community garden open space.



### Goals

- Identify strong leadership in gardens and increase the percentage of gardeners involved in garden leadership and maintenance.
- Sustain the network of agencies and community organizations committed to the support of community gardens as a permanent part of the city's open space.

### Recommendations

- Support and expand programs such as the City Gardener Certificate Program (see above) that develops leaders and formalizes a support network among them, on both a citywide and neighborhood basis.
- Support organizations such as BNAN that institutionalize a support network of city and state agencies, landowners, non-profit organizations, and garden leaders by identifying relevant organizations, defining their contributions, and developing their commitments to gardens.
- Provide weather-resistant bulletin boards within each community garden to facilitate the dissemination of information pertinent to garden management and for general informational purposes.

### Productivity

The influx of immigrants from gardening and farming cultures along with others of lesser means results in many people turning to gardening as a vital source of nutrition for their families. Garden plots in the city are generally small and there are not enough to meet the demand from new gardeners each year. Thus, only by increasing productivity can more food be made available to more people.

Another issue related to productivity is the soil's condition: often it is shallow, lacking in organic matter, and must be tested for lead and other pollutant toxicity. There is also a lack of topsoil to compensate for erosion and years of intense growing and the necessary organic matter is either unavailable or too expensive for most gardeners.

#### *Goals*

- Develop and implement an educational program that emphasizes safe, low-cost intensive gardening techniques.
- Provide materials and equipment that will increase productivity.

#### *Recommendations*

- Design new gardens and redesign older ones to promote intensive production of food.
- Deliver additional topsoil and compost to gardens where significant erosion has occurred or enhancement is needed.
- Educate gardeners on closer spacing, improved varieties, spot placement of fertilizer, advantages of mulching and compost-making, use of season extenders and preventive measures, and prompt action for pest control.
- Support non-profit organizations such as BNAN and its member organizations to create demonstration gardens at locations throughout the city, emphasizing safe, low-cost intensive gardening techniques.
- Make a variety of tools available to community gardeners through a tool bank provided by the Parks Department.
- Educate gardeners to minimize the unnecessary use of pesticides and herbicides for the good of the public, the environment, and their own health.



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### Resource Development

**T**he mosaic of support for community gardens is broad and complex, combining government, voluntary, and private support for maintenance, materials, labor, and special projects. The need exists to further develop this support network so as to achieve all the goals of the community gardening system.

#### *Goals*

- Develop, through the initiative of garden support agencies and organizations, public/private partnerships and expanded private financial support to assist community garden programs, special initiatives, and vocational training efforts.

#### *Recommendations*

- Continue to earmark through DND's Grassroots program substantial portions of federal Community Development Block Grant funds for community garden land development by non-profit organizations. Maintain DND planning for Grassroots program grants as a public/private process, involving neighborhood residents and garden support entities.
- Utilize city capital funding for community garden development and a renovation of gardens on land owned by city agencies.
- Pursue state and city resources for community gardens. Support efforts to again fund Massachusetts Cooperative Extension community gardening programs.
- Continue Parks Partners, the Community Garden Small Grants Program, and other sources of low-level funding as a means for providing grants of \$500 to \$4,500 to community groups for specific open space improvement projects, including community gardens and neighborhood programming.

