

San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program Recommendations & Analysis

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Within San Luis Obispo County there are 40,000 people who go hungry on a regular basis or don't know where their next meal will come ("About hunger," 2011). For many residents this population of people goes unnoticed. It is hard to imagine that a city, like San Luis Obispo, surrounded by so much agriculture and often celebrated for its farmers markets and restaurants would be a place where so many would be hungry. In recent years the Food Bank has been the main source in assisting those in need of food.

The importance of assessing alternative ways in which different food systems can begin to bring food to those who are hungry within the City of San Luis Obispo is a topic that has never been more relevant. Food Bank donations have dropped as the current economic downturn has resulted in less giving. There is a need for sustainable systems in which those who are hungry can still obtain access to fresh food. Many cities have begun to distribute the excess food grown by residents in community gardens to help feed those who are hungry. Community gardens often yield excess fruits and vegetables with much of the food going to waste. Given the above-mentioned need within the County this research suggests that the City of San Luis Obispo could reevaluate its own community garden program and begin to implement strategies that can help make a connection between those in need and those growing surplus food.

San Luis Obispo has the opportunity to begin a movement that other cities within the County may follow eventually resulting in a sustainable food system network that brings food security to all citizens. For this to happen it is also important to understand the causes of food insecurity so as to ascertain what can be done to create more sustainable and healthy food systems. This work only begins to explore that aspect of the problem. It does look to evaluate how to better promote food security in the community through improvements to the Community Garden Program. Looking at case studies and literature to determine best practices for creating a more sustainable and equitable food system in San Luis Obispo through the Community Garden Program. Education, coalitions, and implementation strategies are essential in fighting local hunger, and will be focused on in the final chapter of the report. Strategies that refocus the community garden program on fighting food injustice within San Luis Obispo are proposed as the next step in alleviating the hunger problems that currently exist within the region.

Most work analyzing community gardens takes the position that community gardens are built

What does the literature say?

to promote public health. Many authors have espoused that they are enterprises that can simultaneously promote good nutrition and physical activity within neighborhoods, especially in areas with economic or structural barriers to accessing fresh produce and recreation opportunities (Alaimo, Reischl, & Allen, 2010). Economic benefits are talked about in some literature. Gardeners in cities such as Philadelphia and Milwaukee have saved \$100 to \$700 per family (Brown & Carter, 2003). Investment in the community gardens brings economic returns per dollar invested, and according to the U.S. government's urban gardening program the ratio is \$1 to \$6 for food growing projects. For every dollar invested, 6 dollars of vegetables are grown (Doron, 2005).

Role of Community Garden

A community garden brings with it benefits for both individuals and the community as a whole. Environmental education, biodiversity, improved waste management, employment, economic development are just a few of the benefits that are associated with community gardens. There are also aspects that are not as well seen; these include the health benefits for individuals and the neighborhood in which the garden is located. Individuals gain physical benefits directly from the process of farming itself. Social and mental well-being is also fostered as participants are able to interact with fellow farmers/gardeners, obtain relief from stress, interact with nature, and form a sense of stewardship towards the land and the community (Thompson et al., 2003). The gardens provide a gathering space for residents and bring together many diverse groups within the community. These are some of the significant benefits of the process of farming and gardening. The end result is in itself a major health benefit as well. The vegetables and fruit produced from these farms are providing healthy fresh food to those who can claim the products. Thus access to fresh vegetables and fruit will provide a greater incentive for residents to consume these healthy food products.

Role of Community Garden in Emergency Food Systems

Community gardens have the potential to not only benefit individual communities, but also a city as a whole. Seattle's P-Patch program works in conjunction with local non-profit, P-Patch Trust, to supply between seven to 10 tons of produce to Seattle food banks each year ("The role of," 2008-2010). This is an example of a set of community gardens reaching out beyond their individual and neighborhood benefits to supply food to those who need it most in their communities.

Oklahoma City has allowed their regional food bank to take over the City's community garden program. Urban Harvest, as they call it, manages over 25 gardens throughout the city (Harris, 2005). Community gardens have been brought to areas they can best serve those in need. Homeless shelter, rehabilitation centers, and low-income

neighborhoods work in coordination with the food bank to bring community gardens into their area.

Ultimately though the participation of community members is what will make a community garden successful. If areas of need do not have active participation the in the gardens they will fail. The Seattle P-Patch program takes this into consideration as it receives donations from active community gardeners. This way the emergency food systems can still receive the benefits of local fresh produce through neighborhoods that are highly engaged in the community gardens.

Social Capital Benefits

Public health also accompanies social capital as participation in gardens instills pride and positive emotions towards a place, bringing more social interaction and sharing (Alaimo, Reischl, & Allen, 2010). While social capital is a key component of creating community gardens a study done in Flint, Michigan provides evidence that social capital is “likely built neighbor by neighbor through investments that individual residents make in spending time with their neighbors and improving the neighborhood (Alaimo, Reischl, & Allen, 2010).” The gardens become a place where people can meet people regardless of their social status. The sociability that surrounds gardens is considered one of the main reasons why gardeners stay involved in the community garden (Kingsley & Townsend, 2006). Community gardens can provide a space to invest time and a place for residents to improve their neighborhood, but this is all dependent on the amount of people willing to participate. If social capital is the primary need and want for a neighborhood/ community then it is important that those within close proximity to the garden are the ones who should have priority to gardening in it.

Education Benefits

Social capital deals a lot with the well-being and cohesiveness of the residents living in the neighborhoods where community gardens are developed, but the educational benefits of community gardens extend not only to those near, but the entire community. Participants in community gardening learn skills related to urban agriculture through educational workshops, they get sensitized to issues of the natural environment and the importance of conservation. Leadership skills are developed, as the community members must take initiative in getting projects within the garden complete. David Sobel introduces the concept of connecting classrooms with the community through place-based education. He defines place-based education as, “ the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum (Sobel, 2005).” According to

What does the literature say?

Sobel this approach to education the real-world learning experiences increases academic achievement and helps students form stronger commitment to serve as active citizens. Sobel emphasizes, “Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school (Sobel, 2005).” In Berkeley, California a vegetable garden at Martin Luther King Middle School resulted in the idea of creating gardens at every middle school in Berkeley. Since a school garden cannot feed the entire school, discussions soon arose related to developing linkages between local farmers and the school district. Now implemented is the Food Systems Project, which aims to have all food in the Berkeley school lunch program are locally grown and organic within the next decade (Solen 2010). As students begin to learn hands about the process of how their food is grown and where it comes from, they learn that it is possible to bring fresh food into their schools. The Food Systems Project shows the power of a vegetable garden and its ability to educate students on healthy food and sustainable food systems. Community gardens offer the same educational opportunity to casual visitors that gain knowledge about eating healthy and the importance of creating local food networks.

Food Security Benefits

Paul Shigley makes it clear that the food distribution system, and its brother, the industrial food production system are to blame for the lack of access to healthy food (Shigley, 2009). This lack of access to healthy food is considered a lack of food security. In many cities “food deserts” exist that are areas within a city that lack access to healthy food due to a variety of socio-economic reasons (Shigley, 2009). Community gardens can increase access and availability to fresh fruits and vegetables and are perceived by gardeners to provide numerous health benefits including improved nutrition (Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007). The food grown in these gardens has the ability to not only improve the nutrition of those gardening their own food, but also there is room to expand to other community members. There are some good examples of this across the United States. Blandy Experimental Farm located in the Shenandoah Valley, about 60 miles west of Washington, D.C. provides free spaces for gardeners as long as they donate part of what they grow to a food bank and use organic methods. Steven Carroll, director of public programs at the University of Virginia, started the program that donates more than 500 pounds of vegetables to local charities (Lloyd 2011). Community gardens have the ability to go beyond just social capital and education. These gardens can provide food for the surrounding community and begin to improve food security within the City of San Luis Obispo.

Food Security: The USDA defines food security as “the state in which all persons obtain a nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable diet at all times through

nonemergency sources, including food from local production. Food security broadens the traditional concept of hunger, embracing a systematic view of the causes of hunger and poor nutrition within a community while identifying the changes necessary to prevent their occurrence (Cohen, 2002).” For a place to have proper food security there must be adequate food supply, food accessibility, and appropriate food use by those consuming the available food.

Hunger: A condition in which people lack the required nutrients(protein, energy, vitamins and minerals) for a fully productive, active and healthy lives. There are three main types of hunger that are seen throughout the world. Chronic hunger is when people lack sufficient nutrition throughout the year or on a seasonal basis. This is also known as being undernourished. Acute hunger occurs when people become severely undernourished often from emergencies. This type of hunger often leads to starvation. Hidden hunger is from micronutrient or vitamin deficiencies and is found in many people who have access to adequate calories and protein. (Peterson, 2010).

Food Injustice: The USDA refers to people who are unable to obtain an adequate diet as “food insecure” rather than “hungry.” It is important to understand that a person can eat large meals with no nutritional content and still experience food injustice. Food injustice thus includes the lack of healthy or culturally appropriate food.

Federal Programs and Emergency Food Systems: For low-income people with no other option, emergency food systems become a necessity for day-to-day meals. Food banks, pantries and soup kitchens have become permanent fixtures operating in a state of prolonged emergency. The original purpose was to help those in crisis and they are not meant to be long-term food suppliers. The food banks increase public awareness of food insecurity, but need strong partnerships with other non-profits or food suppliers to be considered an adequate solution to the problem.

Health Benefits

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, “Being out in the fresh air produces psychological benefits. Just looking at trees and plants reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and helps muscle tension (PHAC, 2006).” The community gardens are spaces that offer this escape from the daily schedule of people’s lives. The physical exertion provides stress relief and a sense of stewardship as people participate in nature (Francis and Hester, 1990). Studies done on young people and the benefits of having community gardens in their schools revealed an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption in schools where gardens were present (McAleese,

What does the literature say?

2007; Lautenschlager and Smith, 2007). The community garden program in Denver, Colorado interview those participating in community gardening and found that the participants identified relaxation, decreased stress, and the feeling of a spiritual connection with “Mother Earth” as benefits of gardening (Aboelata, 2004). Just as in schools with community gardens, a case-control study of health impacts of urban gardening in Philadelphia revealed gardening to have a positive impact on dietary intake. Blair et al. found that those gardening “ate significantly more of six vegetable categories than non-gardners...and they also consumed less milk products, sweets, and sweet drinks (Aboelata, 2004).” The research on benefits is clear in revealing that community gardens are a catalyst to improving the well-being and physical health of those participating in gardening.

Economic Benefits

Between the social, educational, and health benefits is the way in which a community garden can bring economic benefits. Community gardens bring job opportunities as it takes people involved in research, construction, landscaping, and food production to form the garden (Walker, 2006). For those participating in gardening the gardens bring healthier food at a lower cost (Walker, 2006). The fact that the gardens are organized and operated by volunteers allows the entire community to use the space while maintenance costs remain lower due to this volunteer support. Gardens are considered a source of beauty that increases the property value and desirability of neighborhoods that have gardens in close proximity (Aboelata, 2007). The beautification of neighborhoods also occurs when community garden programs find vacant lots that would otherwise be an environmental hazard, and utilize the new space towards the good of the community.

Sustainable Food Systems

Food justice, strong economy, environmental resource management, and effective planning policies are all components of creating sustainable communities. The ultimate goal of a sustainable community is to be self-sufficient and create “webs” with zero net waste production as stated by Paul Hawken, in *The Ecology of Commerce*. The definition of a just and sustainable food system is one in which food production; processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a community (City of Vancouver, 2005). The reemergence of community gardens is in an effort to create access to fresh food for all residents. Community garden programs are the start of cities incorporating food systems into the planning process, but this is not always the case. If food systems were a required element of general plans, planners and citizens would have to begin to analyze the status of current food systems and the ways in which planning decisions directly affect those food systems. It is logical for

What does the literature say?

planners to begin to consider food systems as they already are making decisions on key impact areas of food systems such as economic development, resource management, and land use. Planners often times react to planning decisions regarding food systems rather than take a proactive role. Strategies need to be developed that engage food system planning allowing municipalities to work with outside agencies in setting a direction that creates a more just and sustainable food system.

In conclusion, community gardens have many benefits that cluster around the topic of public health. San Luis Obispo's community garden program differs in many ways from community garden programs located in more urban areas. Knowing what the literature says is the benefits of most community gardens it is important to analyze how the San Luis Obispo community gardens compare. Many of the benefits community gardens bring especially in the realm of social capital are based on location. The next section will analyze the key differences between urban community gardens and San Luis Obispo community gardens.

Objectives & Methods

Project Objectives

This project is designed to accomplish the following things over the course of this project:

- To define food security and planners role in food system planning by review of relevant literature.
- To evaluate San Luis Obispo's current community garden program and compare its efforts to selected case studies.
- To make recommendations for ways in which the program can begin to increase food security in San Luis Obispo.

Chapter 1: This chapter identifies the importance of food systems and food security in relation to the planning process and defines the problems within San Luis Obispo.

Chapter 2: This chapter evaluates the existing conditions of the current community garden program in San Luis Obispo, and what the current role of the program is.

Chapter 3: This chapter determines how San Luis Obispo's Community Garden Program can improve through a list of strategies and programs that can begin to bring food to those who need it most.

Chapter 4: Summarize the findings and determine the next steps in implementing strategies.

Project Significance

With over 40,000 hungry on a regular basis within the County there are many groups looking to improve food security in San Luis Obispo. Organizations such as the San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department and the San Luis Obispo County Food Bank will benefit from this investigation, which will identify ways in which community gardens can begin to provide food for those in need. These recommendations will be based on successful efforts across the nation and through analysis of the current food systems.

Methods

Throughout the project several methods for collecting and analyzing information have been used including:

Literature Review: combined theories along with best practices for improving food systems.

GIS mapping: identified current locations of community gardens and possible locations for expansion.

Case Studies: used existing programs throughout the nation to provide strategies and possible agencies that could assist in San Luis Obispo.

This Document

This document is an assessment of the existing conditions of community gardens within San Luis Obispo and a set of strategies for achieving food justice through the community garden program. The document is intended for the use of City departments as well as outside agencies for ideas for possible partnerships and implementation strategies to enhance food security in the City of San Luis Obispo.

CHAPTER 2

Case Studies

City of Seattle: P-Patch Community Garden Program

Size:

The City of Seattle has one of the largest community garden programs in the United States. There are 73 P-Patch, or community garden, sites with four in development, 5 more in discussion, and 3 considered market gardens (meaning they allow sales of harvest at the gardens). There are over 4,000 participating gardeners with 2,056 plot holders. In total the number of volunteer hours put into the program was 18,500.

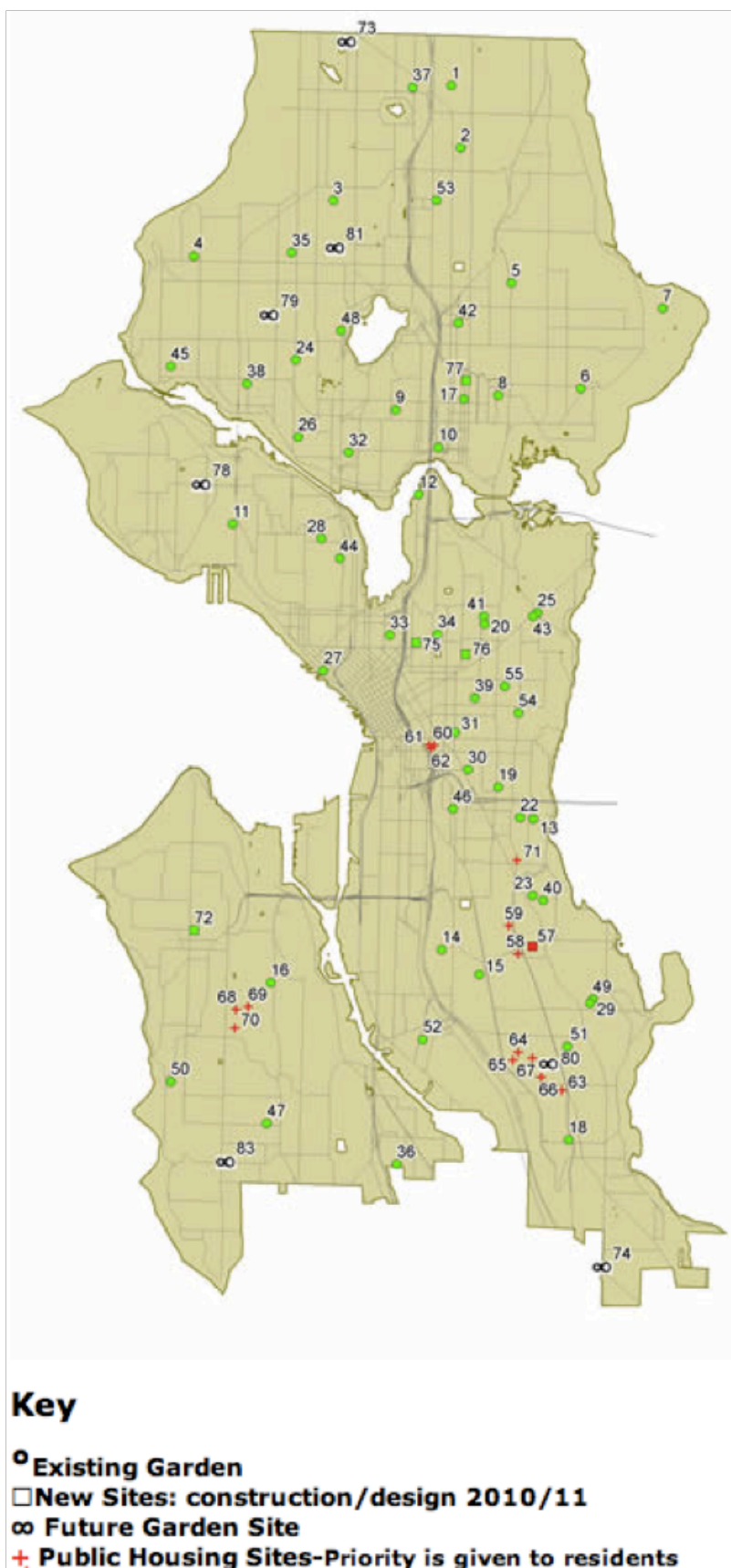
Location:

The community gardens throughout Seattle seem to have a fairly even distribution. With such a large scale program it is hard to get details from a map that locates every garden, but it is apparent that within the downtown of Seattle there is a lack of community garden spaces. Seattle's downtown mainly its Central Business District does not have many residents. As the map reveals many of the surrounding neighborhoods are where the gardens are located, and this is due to careful planning. Since the Seattle P-Patch program has been around since 1979 those managing the program have developed knowledge of the City that allows careful design and priority of gardens to areas that will most benefit. As the map reveals the sites located near Public Housing projects give plot priority to those residents.

Case Studies: Seattle

Seattle P-Patch Location Map

This map reveals the locations of the existing P-Patch gardens from 2008.



Case Studies: Seattle

Ownership/ Partners:

The P-Patch sites are both City and privately owned, but all are operated under the P-Patch Community Garden Program. The program is part of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods, but is partnered with the P-Patch Trust, Seattle Housing Authority, and other agencies to support, develop, and manage community gardening in Seattle (City of Seattle, 2011). The P-Patch Trust was started in 1979 after years of grassroots organizing by the City's "P-Patchers." This original group started as the "P-Patch Advisory Council" representing the interest of community gardeners within the city. Over the years the Trust has played a leading role in advocating organic principles, ensuring access to low-income gardeners, encouraging produce donations to food banks, and preserving gardens through purchase. It operates as a nature conservancy by acquiring, owning, conserving, and preserving urban open spaces to be utilized as public community gardens (City of Seattle, 2009). Another outside partner that has contributed to the programs ability to connect gardeners' extra harvest to those who rely on emergency food systems is Lettuce Link. For over 20 years, Lettuce Link, a program of Solid Ground has partnered with the P-Patch Program to mobilize and support gardeners in sharing their bounty with neighbors at food banks, meal programs and shelters. Lettuce Link provides seeds, starts, scales, coordination and tips for engaging volunteer gardeners in tending food bank beds or in actively gleaning from individual plots.

Goal:

As the program has grown it has worked closely with respective community councils and neighborhood groups to set priorities for garden development. It has expanded with the purpose of being an "open space resource for all members of the community, not just gardeners, and are places to share love of gardening, cultivate friendships, strengthen neighborhoods, increase self-reliance, wildlife habitat, foster environmental awareness, relieve hunger, improve nutrition, and enjoy recreational and therapeutic opportunities (City of Seattle, 2011)."

Serving those in need:

From the largest gardens to the smallest, P-Patches across the city are generously engaged in growing and giving, thereby increasing the availability of organic, locally grown produce for the most vulnerable among us. In 2009, P- Patch gardeners donated 25,000 pounds of city-grown produce (City of Seattle, 2011). There are also 40 plots city-wide that are focused on youth within the city.

Take away for San Luis Obispo:

The P-Patch program shows the ability of outside agencies to work with cities in creating a community garden program that offers a wide range of services and is in a constant state of growth. The coordination with local non-profits brings in volunteer workers that are essential to the high success of the program. These volunteers work to expand the program and advocate for bringing more gardens and involvement into the program. Seattle was able to recognize that by partnering with non-government agencies they could expand the program the size that it is today. P-Patch Community Garden program is successful due to the partnerships with nonprofits and governmental organizations. These partnerships allow the program to grow much faster and cultivate ways in which gardens can become a place of community development providing benefits for all residents.

Case Studies: Louisville

City of Louisville: Community Garden Program

Size:

There are a total of 26 gardens throughout the County. Five of the gardens are within the City while another 5 are part of the County. The city gardens offer 10' x 20' plots while the county garden plot sizes are 30' x 30'. The city plots cost \$10.00 for one year while the county plots cost \$20.00 per year. There are 500 registered gardeners within the program and approximately 500 more friends and family that garden with those registered.

Ownership:

Jefferson County Extension Program oversees the community garden program and is assisted by various non-profits. The community garden program is unique in the sense that it is a public/private partnership that brings the Metro government together with citizens. It is considered a 501©3 and a government agency. This means that the government, city, state, and federal, fund all administrative expenses while private donations pay for the program. The individual gardens all play different roles throughout the community and thus different ownerships exist for each garden. Individuals tend some plots while others are owned by charities or non-profits. Jefferson County Cooperative Extension manages 10 of the 16 community gardens in Louisville. These 10 gardens total 26 acres of land and 838 garden plots (City of Louisville, 2010). The Brightside Community Garden Program, working with the Jefferson County Cooperative Extension, works to unite people in green activities to beautify the city and foster community pride.

Goal:

Brightside strives to find ways for all Louisville residents to become engaged in keeping the community natural landscape as well as cleanliness at a high level. They look to provide spaces for neighbors to come together and grow fresh produce to feed their families. Jefferson County Cooperative Extension developed and maintains four demonstration gardens. These gardens help educate new growers and allow the gardeners to learn new things by seeing them worked through on the demonstration gardens.

Partners:

Louisville's community gardens are managed through the help of Jefferson County Cooperative Extension and Brightside. The Cooperative Extension partners the University of Kentucky and Kentucky State University with counties of the

Commonwealth. The Extension office provides education through four seasonal electronic newsletters, garden visits to answer questions, and assistance with diagnosing problems. They offer additional education through office visits, classes, the Horticulture Hotline, a website and publications. To improve horticultural practices, Jefferson County Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners developed and maintained four demonstration gardens (City of Louisville, 2010).



Louisville Community Garden managed by the Jefferson County Cooperative Extension

Serving Those in Need:

No data is available showing how much the gardeners contribute to local emergency systems, but Brightside states that every year community gardeners donate many tons of vegetables to local shelters (City of Louisville, 2003-2011). The program states the significance the garden plot has on feeding the gardeners family as well. Young Money, a group of students from the California neighborhood, has created their own food-producing garden at Brandeis Apartments on 26th Street. Young

Case Studies: Louisville

Money is a part of the California Collaborative and works in conjunction with the Community Foundation of Louisville and NeighborWorks for financial and technical support. The group has cleaned up vacant lots and the neighborhood at large, in addition to caring for the community garden. Young Money participants remark that the impact on the neighborhood is positive, as well as a great opportunity for young people (City of Louisville, 2010).

Interview:

Denise Peterson, employee of the Jefferson County Cooperative Extension Program, was able to provide some insight into the how the community garden program is managed and what it provides to the Louisville citizens. Denise began clarifying that The Jefferson Cooperative Extension (JCE) has been running the community garden program for the past six years. She explained that the funding is through city, county, state and federal money. The budget is paid mostly by the city while the workers at the extension program are paid through state and federal grants. The program began from federal funding 25 years ago. The main purpose was to provide spaces for senior citizens to socialize. JCE does not have any formal relationships with food banks in Louisville, but there have been in the past according to Peterson. She explained that strong networks are formed in the community gardens and most people share excess harvest within their neighborhoods. She did mention that some gardens have a place within the garden where plot owners can drop any excess food and this drop box zone is labeled as free to take. Some plot owners had designated rows of crop to donate to local youth organizations or their local church. Peterson explained her efforts to allow gardeners to sell food at farmers markets failed because the gardeners had no interest in making money. The gardeners were already giving most of their food away to people at local churches, or people in need in their community that they had none left to sell. It seemed that without any formal food bank relationships the food grown in the Louisville community gardens were still getting out to people in the community. This was reliant on existing relationships with plot owners, but was encouraging to hear that little food was going to waste.

Take-Away for San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program:

The strong point of the community gardens in Louisville was the diversity the roles of the plots have, and the financial support from both the government agency and private donors. San Luis Obispo's community garden program is entirely funded by the city. The only expansion that has taken place was paid for by an outside non-profit. The program may look to develop a financial system in which they still fund the administrative aspect, as Louisville does, but pursue more private donors as they look to expand. While the Jefferson County Cooperative Extension and Brightside are responsible for the management of a majority of the plots, the plots

within each of the gardens play a variety of roles. Individuals own some plots while others are owned by non-profits. The organizations that own plots will often times use the plot just to grow food for donation purposes. Community gardens go beyond recreational use and begin to draw individuals to the garden for a variety of reasons. Whether that is to grow their own food, grow food for another, or just help a friend with their plot, a sense of community is strengthened through the process. Another innovative concept that is taking place in the Louisville community gardens is the use of demonstration gardens. The demonstration gardens allow gardeners to gain further knowledge and ultimately produce more food and better quality food. These demonstration gardens also function as sites for other community members and school groups to be educated through seminars and hands on demonstrations.

Case Studies: Minneapolis

City of Minneapolis: Community Garden Pilot Program

Size:

In 2009 the City of Minneapolis made 18 plots of City land available to residents for community gardening. Of the 18 plots five have been leased. The program also planted 275 fruit trees around the city as part of the City Trees Program. EMERGE Youth Community Garden was also started and focuses on teaching teens about local food production and sustainability in connection with the Minneapolis Employment and Training Program (City of Minneapolis, 2009).

Location:

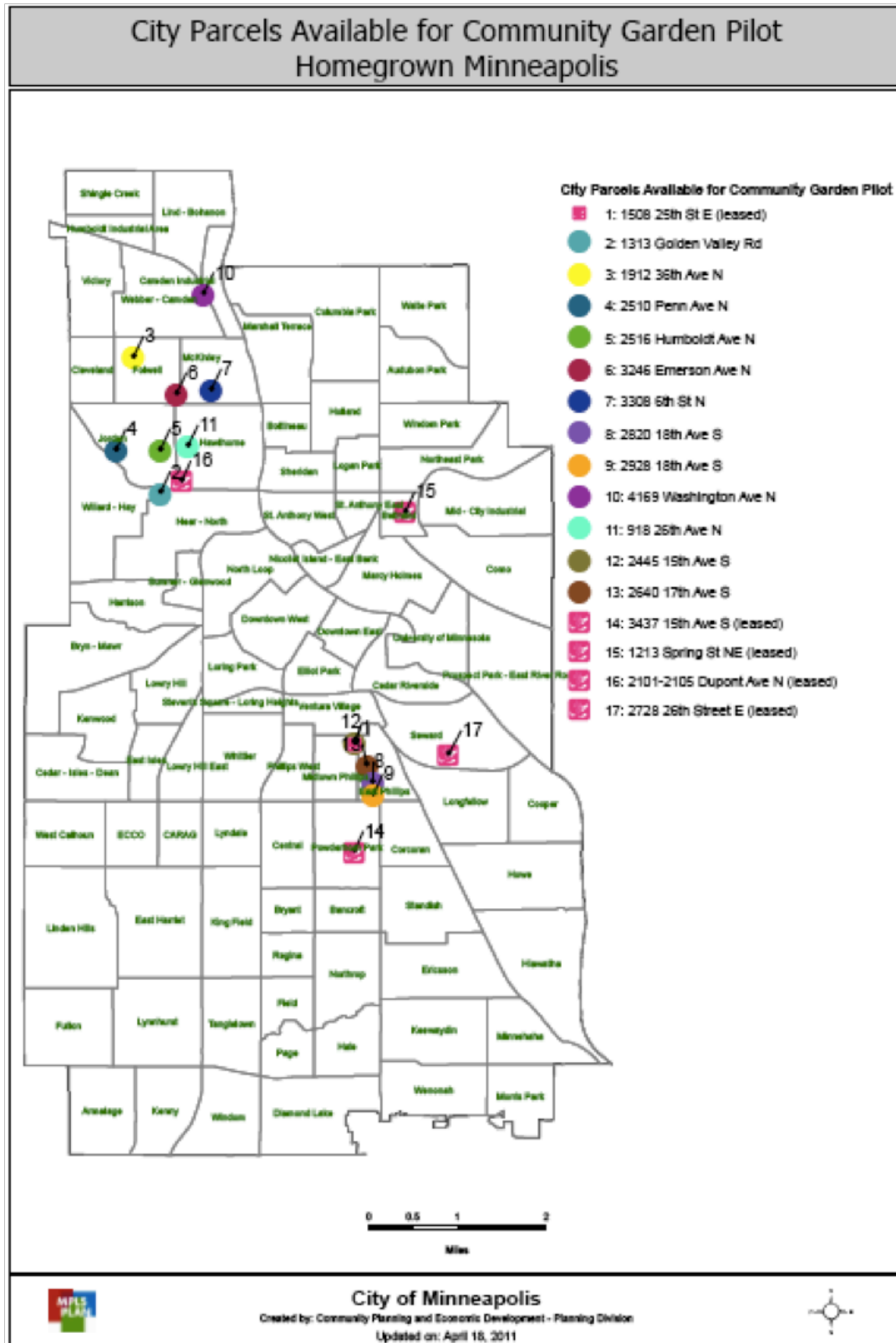
The City of Minneapolis has created a map for potential garden leasers that show the location of city parcel sites that are available to be used as community gardens. The parcels seem to be clustered in the northwest and middle southeast of the City. As the program expands it will be important for the City to make spaces available on a more even distribution.

Ownership:

The City of Minneapolis has designated lots of City property that were designated due to the fact that the site is not developable site. The program advertises the site and allows groups to lease the lots for one, three, and five-year leases. Groups that are inexperienced in gardening are forced to start with a one-year lease. In order for a group to qualify for a community garden lot they must be a non-profit or have a non-profit sponsor (City of Minneapolis). The leasing group then has the ability to layout the community garden, decide management techniques, and how it will engage and benefit the community. The city will be engaged in the discussions of these topics.

Goal:

Homegrown Minneapolis is a citywide initiative that states the goal of programs such as the community garden program as part of an greater goal to, “ develop recommendations and implement strategies to increase and improve the growing, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management of healthy, sustainable, locally grown foods (City of Minneapolis, 2009).” The city supports community gardens as it looks to provide access to good nutrition, improve the ecological footprint of the city, encourage healthy living spaces for human interaction, food production, and beauty in the daily lives of Minneapolis residents.



City of Minneapolis Community Garden Location Map

Case Studies: Minneapolis

Partners:

Minneapolis is unique in the fact that there is not one non-profit or a group of non-profits that support and manage the entire program. The city has taken a different approach that allows many groups and non-profits be involved in the planning and managing of the gardens. Gardening Matters is a non-profit dedicated to promoting and preserving community gardening across the Twin Cities by connecting gardeners to each other and to the communities in which they reside. Minneapolis Local Food Resource Hub, run by Gardening Matters, brings together community members that look to grow their own food. Whether that is in their own backyard or at a community garden, Local Food Resource Hub looks to provide the knowledge, tools, and resources to connect residents with each other and the land. The Hub works as a connecting point where gardeners can sign up for a yearly membership. For someone gardening at their own house it is \$10.00 per year and this includes 20 packets of seeds and 28 seedlings, along with access to classes and connection with a network of Minneapolis based hubs. For a Community Garden/ Non-profit organization the cost of membership is \$30.00 per year, but they receive 60 packets of seeds and 84 seedlings (Saylor, 2011). Members are asked to participate in at least on Hub event in order to be eligible for the resources beyond seeds and seedlings. There are three hubs established in different geographic areas of the city, but what member also benefit from other hubs as they can go to classes and events that take place in any of the city's hubs. The members of the three hubs, a taskforce, the City of Minneapolis and Gardening Matters, make decision-making. Gardening Matters is responsible for connecting the hubs and maintaining the database of members and fees. The resources hubs are not physical spaces, but a group of stakeholders that work together to grow food within the community.

Serving Those in Need:

This program has the ability to contribute a lot of produce to emergency food systems as it grows. With each plot requiring a non-profit to sponsor or lease the plot, there is a greater likelihood that these groups would be looking to contribute to those in need.

Take-Away for San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program:

Minneapolis has a unique approach to the formation of community gardens. The city only works to designate the spaces in which the community can form the gardens and the rest is up to individuals and non-profit organizations. This program was intended to draw interest from outside organizations with flexibility in the planning of the community garden. Groups can organize the community garden as they choose and decide in what way they want to contribute to the community. The Local

Food Resource Hub is another model that works well for this system. With so many different groups gardening and often times not interacting with other community gardens this program brings these groups together. The hubs act as a way for all the gardens and gardeners within the city to interact and connect through the process of growing food. As the hubs grow a coalition forms that can unite to progress the way in which the city thinks about the food systems in Minneapolis and hopefully support new community gardens as they form.

Case Studies: Sheridan Community Garden

Riverdale, Maryland: Sheridan Community Garden

Size:

There are a total of 22 community garden plots that are assigned for \$10.00 per year. If the gardener continues to garden the whole season the money is returned. The ½ acre farm is split into three sections: a youth garden, where middle school students are taught how to plant, seed, and harvest, an urban farm that grows a lot of food in small spaces using urban farming techniques, and a community garden with plots for local residents to farm their own food (Harris, 2008).

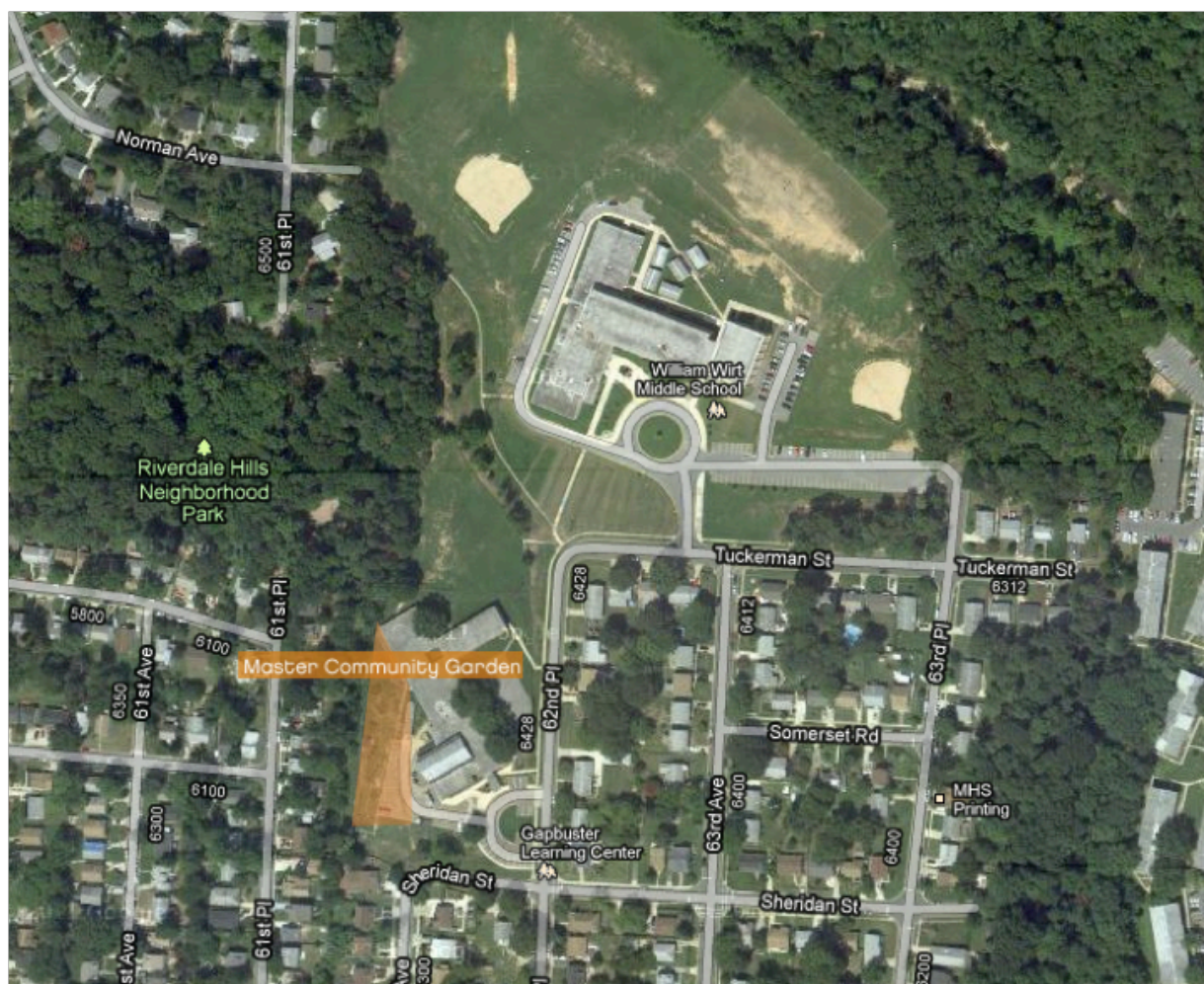


Educational workshop at Sheridan Community Garden

Location:

The Sheridan Community Garden is located next to William Wurt Middle School and allows the garden a unique ability to teach middle school students the benefits of community gardening and eating healthy foods. The map below reveals the close proximity of the school and garden.

Case Studies: Sheridan Community Garden



Sheridan Community Garden location in relation to William Wurt Middle School

Ownership:

University of Maryland's Cooperative Extension Service established the Sheridan Community Garden as part of their food stamp nutrition education program. The program provides free tools, water, and vegetable starts, which are grown in the University of Maryland's Agriculture Program. These plants are delivered to the garden and then the University of Maryland students volunteer teaching gardeners how to grow them.

Case Studies: Sheridan Community Garden

Goal:

Sheridan Community Garden was developed to teach residents in Riverdale about nutrition and engage them in the process of growing food, but also as a way to grow relationships. Students that volunteer and run the farm begin to form relationship with outside community members as they teach them about farming/ gardening techniques.

Partners:

Local Master Gardeners, a group of local knowledgeable volunteers, offer their time to design, maintain, and train people who own plots within Master Peace Farm. The program is heavily dependent on volunteers from Master Gardeners and from students at the University of Maryland.

Serving Those in Need:

The farm utilizes its youth garden to teach local middle school students about the process of growing food. The students benefit from the farm by learning about proper nutrition and ways in which they can lead healthy lifestyles. While the community garden does not have any formal relationships with food banks its relationship to the youth center and William Wurt Middle School brings healthy food system education to the surrounding community.

Interview:

Esther Mitchell explained that the Sheridan Community Garden was once called the Master Peace Farm, but was not in use for a few years. It is just now getting started again working to where it once was. The garden operated under the University of Maryland's Cooperative Extension Program, and is starting to form relationships again with the youth center and William Wurt Middle School. One of the plots she mentioned is being run by the College of Agriculture from the University of Maryland and will look to provide students with learning space as well as a way for community members to gain knowledge. The program is a way in which the University can be apart of community outreach and strengthen the ties with the surrounding community. Students are still an integral role as they help with the cleaning of the garden and part take in the gardening experience within their specialized plot.

Take-Away for San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program:

The aspects that stood out in the Master Peace Farm were the use of the farm as a community garden, educational space, and testing grounds for innovative urban farming techniques. While this type of farm is not extended throughout Maryland, the

Case Studies: Sheridan Community Garden

resources available, namely the student volunteers, allow this farm to function for a variety of purposes. San Luis Obispo has similar characteristics in that it can take advantage of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo as a resource. With so many agriculture classes and projects taking place at the university, it is time the City takes advantage of this resource. Cal Poly has an organic farm on campus, but why can't it extend its volunteers and knowledge into the community just as the University of Maryland has done? It is this synthesis of knowledge and relationship building that brings more people to the gardens and helps a city gain more interest in the community gardening program.

Comparisons of the Case Studies

Successful Aspects of Community Garden Programs	San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program	City of Seattle: P-Patch Community Garden Program	City of Louisville: Brightside's Community Garden Program	Riverdale, Maryland: Master Peace Farm	City of Minneapolis: Community Garden Pilot Program
Partner with outside non-profits		●	●	●	●
Educational Workshops	●	●	●	●	●
Partnership with local food banks		●			
Community Garden as public space	●	●			
University involvement		●		●	
Non-profit ownership of gardens		●	●		●
Strong volunteer support		●	●	●	●
Neighborhood Support Groups		●			●
Local school educational workshops	●	●	●		
Gardeners can sell the food they grow at farmers markets		●			
Plots designated for refugees		●			
Donation of excess harvest	?	●	?		?
Financial support from government and private donors	●	●			

Comparisons of the Case Studies

The following matrix reveals successful aspects of community garden programs featured in the case studies and which aspects each had within its program. The City of Seattle's P-Patch Program proved to have the most successful aspects within their program. This matrix reveals the aspects of the San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program that are successful, but more importantly the areas in which the Program can expand.

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CHAPTER 3

Current Status of San Luis Obispo Community Gardens

San Luis Obispo Community Gardens

The City of San Luis Obispo currently has four community gardens. Laurel Lane, Broad Street, Emerson Park, and Meadow Park are available for City residents to lease. The program began from a Cal Poly student's senior project. The first garden was established where the current fire station on the corner of Madonna and Los Osos Valley Road. This site was moved to Emerson Park when the Parks and Recreation Department took over the Emerson Elementary School site in 1997. The Parks and Recreation Department manages the community gardens and establishes the plots within each garden. Each plot within the garden offered on a first-come first-served basis. The annual fee for a plot is \$24.00 with a \$.03 assessment charge per square foot. All of the gardens within San Luis Obispo currently have waitlists, with a total of 45 people on the waitlist. The Program requires all community gardens to be located on City property. The City considers location of water, housing densities, and views of garden site from roadways to be important factors when considering new garden locations. Expansion currently relies on outside groups/agencies, as the City has no funds to bring new community gardens into the City.

Laurel Lane: 16 plots

Broad Street: 17 plots

Emerson Park: 38 plots

Rotary Garden, Emerson Park: 40 plots

Current Status of San Luis Obispo

San Luis Obispo's community gardens were not built on the strong principles of social justice that many urban community gardens are built for. The gardens are used as recreational spaces with the majority of users in no need of the economic benefits community gardens bring. While San Luis Obispo's gardens do provide gathering spaces for neighborhood residents, green space within the City, and educational opportunities, these are not as defined as in urban community gardens. San Luis Obispo's four gardens are not considered integral amenities within their respective neighborhoods. Community gardens provide many benefits to residents and the surrounding neighborhood, but the community gardens in San Luis Obispo are not fully utilizing the potential benefits they could bring the surrounding community.

Role of Community Gardens in San Luis Obispo

San Luis Obispo's current community gardens are used for recreational purposes. Some users do feed themselves with the vegetables they grow, but they do not rely on their plots as a source of food. Amy Voorhies from San Luis Obispo Parks and Recreation Department explained that many of the plots are used by people simply wanting to garden for recreational purposes. The Downtown and Meadow Park sites are the most popular because they have the most traffic from people living and working near their gardens. Accessibility is seen as key for people that are using their gardens for food. The program does not mandate that people grow fruits and vegetables, which mean many of the gardens, are not contributing to the role of increasing food security in San Luis Obispo. Gardeners grow food mostly to supplement part of their grocery spending. Very few if any users actually rely on their garden plots for feeding themselves entirely. For those that do grow fruits and vegetables, according to Voorhies, they all are growing too much food. While the program gives all who use the plots a handout listing the food banks in the area that they can donate the excess food, it is unknown how much is actually donated. Voorhies suspects there is very little connection between the excess crop grown and local food banks. The program has no connections with any non-profits or other government agencies, but does offer educational seminars through volunteers. The volunteers are often professionals or experts in a field that offer their knowledge and services through seminars that range from topics of gardening to sustainable lifestyles. These educational seminars are helpful for expanding and sustaining the program as it allows those who own plots to expand their skills and knowledge while also educating those who are looking to get into gardening. While there is no relationship between the community garden program and any emergency food systems such as food banks, Voorhies explains that the reason no connections exist is the cost of gas. The San Luis Obispo County Food Bank cannot afford to send a truck to every community garden in San Luis Obispo to pick up surplus food. The roles of community gardens in San Luis Obispo currently do not reflect the roles that typical inner city gardens are associated with. These roles include food security

Current Status: Emerson Park

and nutrition, social integration, and access as a public amenity. While San Luis Obispo has different needs and users as community gardens in urban centers, it is possible to use aspects of successful programs as a reference during expansion. Many programs implemented in semi-urban and suburban cities are related to San Luis Obispo and reveal the room for improvement in the San Luis Obispo Community Garden program.

Observations and Interviews

Emerson Park

Observations

Emerson Park Community Garden is located in an existing park and has turned an underutilized section of the park into a space for gardening and farming. Visiting Emerson Park Community Garden multiple times showed very similar results. There was a steady user base that frequented the garden and strong social connections were present between gardeners. Emerson Park, based on observations, seems to be well used by both gardeners and park users. Boundaries between plots ranged from small ankle high wooden perimeters to shoulder high fencing. Most plots had waist high fencing that was merely served as a psychological boundary and would not provide any true security. There were multiple gardeners present observed in these visits. These gardeners were harvesting, planting, and engaging with other gardeners. The Emerson Park Community Garden draws visitors who just like to enjoy the aesthetics of the garden. Each visit I witnessed park users that did not own garden plots walking through the paths and observing the gardens. The gardeners seemed to be growing a wide variety of vegetables and flowers. A majority of the plots were well maintained and provided a bountiful harvest. Based on the literature Emerson Park Community Garden supported the social benefits, educational benefits, and economic benefits for all its users.

Interviews

While visiting the site interviews were conducted with those who owned plots in the garden. Many of the users expressed a strong sense of community facilitated by the garden and mentioned organized potlucks were a regular occurrence between plot owners. Two gardeners mentioned the need for more educational workshops for the gardeners and also the entire community. Most of the workshops up until this point have been only for plot owners and the gardeners stressed the importance of educating the entire community, especially the children. When asked about excess harvest from the garden all those interviewed claimed that there was not too much extra harvest once the food was shared among fellow gardeners, family, and friends.

Current Status: Emerson Park

Emerson Park Community Garden's strong community ties seemed to be creating a network of sharing and trading of food. In this case if any donations were to exist they would have to be started by a plot owner who would specifically grow a row of crop with the intentions of donating it.



Various pictures showing the spatial arrangement and spatial interconnectedness of the garden



Current Status: Emerson Park

Rotary Garden, Meadow Park

Observations

Rotary Garden, just as Emerson Park community garden, lies within a preexisting City park. Visits to the Rotary Garden failed to find any gardeners working in their plots. The site was very exposed to wind and this seemed to be deterring both gardeners and showing negative effects on the plants growing. This site was much more structured and laid out in a grid shape. The plots did not have any fencing surrounding them, but more plots seemed neglected in comparison to Emerson Park. The site seemed well used, but without witnessing garden users it felt that many of the social, economic, and health benefits were not being fully utilized. With the Rotary Garden being the newest addition to the community garden program, the site seemed well kept and the location of the plots were all preplanned.

Interviews

Each visit to the Rotary Garden saw no one gardening or even walking through the garden. The plots showed signs that people were indeed growing food, but many site visits showed no sign of plot owners. The spring wind seemed to be extremely harsh at this site and may have attributed to there being less people gardening during this time of year.



*Underutilized
communal
gathering space*

*View from the
South Street*



*Relationship
to the rest of
Meadow Park*



Current Status: Broad Street

Broad Street

Observations

Broad Street Community Garden seemed much different in comparison to Emerson Park, Rotary, and Laurel Lane community gardens. The plots are much more individualized and separated with high fences. Some of these plots even had locks around their fencing, as the garden is located in a space that is less public and may be prone to more theft. There is a large space in the middle of the community garden that serves as a public space to talk, eat, and in some cases park a car while hauling supplies to the gardeners plot. The garden is less structured and has a feel that it is a space that is almost neglected or forgotten by community members. Yet, when looking around it is obvious that the space is highly trafficked by gardeners as many plots are producing large amounts of vegetables and flowers. The garden is tucked away and truly seems to be a place of escape that could be a draw for some gardeners. This tucked away presence seemed to draw other community members that were not gardeners. One day a family on a bike ride used the garden as their lunch stop. The communal space in the center served as a picnic area.

Interviews

Various members of the Broad Street Community Garden were able to provide insight into the unique setting and users of the garden. The plot they had acquired was given to them within the last month, and they had been on the waitlist for one year prior to that. One man gardening mentioned while he had only been in the Broad Street Garden for less than a month he has been growing food his entire life. He and his family shared a plot with another family. Though many times the garden is seen vacant and without any communal presence, it was during this interview I realized that there are relationships within plots between family members and other families that form. The two families use the gardening time as a way to socialize with one another and grow food for each other. The gardeners expressed their love for the location of this garden. Despite what the literature suggests about having community gardens with good neighborhood access, which Broad Street lacks, the gardeners loved the secluded feel. One gardener even stated that he was happy the garden was not in a park. It created a unique atmosphere and an escape from the rest of the neighborhood. As witnessed, garden users find their location as place of enjoyment. One of the gardeners mentioned that some people use the communal open space in the center to practice Tai Chi. Many of the gardeners at this location do not grow enough to donate, but those interviewed believed if more people knew what they were doing and used better soil, the garden would produce plenty of excess harvest. Recommendations the gardeners had included providing some group tables for the open space in the garden. This area could be used for people to leave left over

Current Status: Broad Street

harvest for other gardeners or community members. One gardener mentioned the benefits of having neighborhood commercial centers close to the garden. Many gardeners take advantage of the items sold at Lincoln Market & Deli located on the corner of Broad Street and Lincoln Street. The gardeners interviewed lived “close enough” to walk daily to water their vegetables, but still lived over .25 miles from the Broad Street Community Garden. They seemed to love the disconnection of the site and had waited a year to get a plot specifically within the Broad Street Community Garden.



View from Broad Street (below) with pictures of the garden path (left) and individual plot above (right).



Current Status: Laurel Lane

Laurel Lane

Observations

Laurel Lane Community Garden is located on a city parcel in between business buildings and condos. It is adjacent to Laurel Lane and a City bus stop. The garden plots are less defined at this garden with no high fencing separating plots. With limited observation time spent at Laurel Lane I only observed a few gardeners. These gardeners drove to the site and lived all the way across town. While the garden is located adjacent to a public street and sidewalk it did not seem as inviting to outside users. There are less defined boundaries and no gathering space within the garden. No community members were seen walking the gardens that did not own a garden plot.

Interviews

The gardeners interviewed mentioned they lived across town and recently acquired the plot after being on the program's waitlist. They have seen a variety of gardeners from families, retired couples, and people in their late twenties, but claim that there are only a select few that garden regularly. When asked if they had participated in any educational workshops, they mentioned they were unaware of any occurring. Part of their recommendations included an email newsletter that informed them of any events or workshops taking place that dealt with the community garden program. They specifically had not harvested anything up until that point, but had been given excess harvest by a fellow garden plot owner. It seems that just as at Emerson Park the gardeners look to share excess harvest with those closest to them.



*View from
Laurel Lane*



View from garden to Laurel Lane

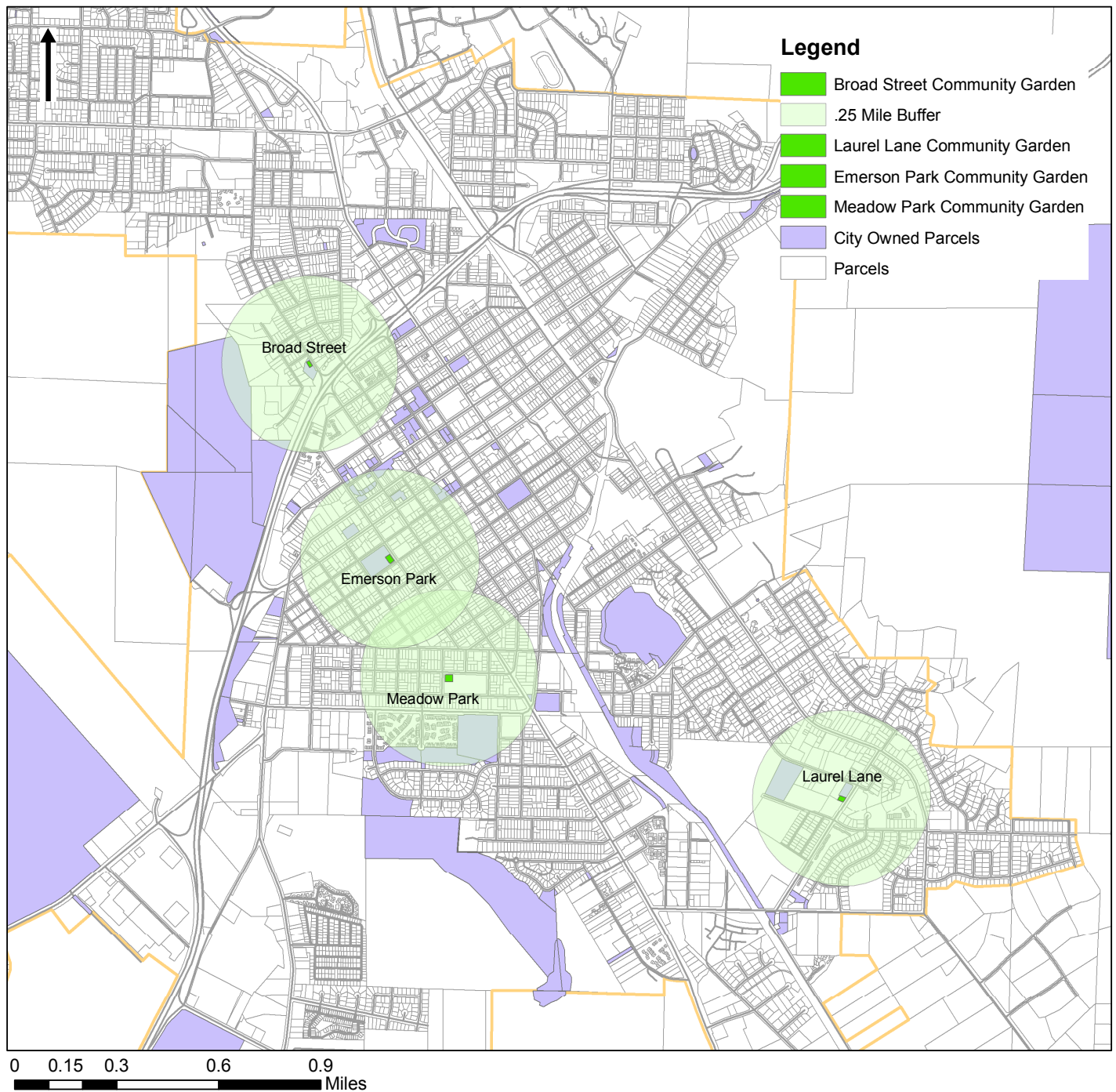
Conclusion

If the program expands it must decide the principles it wishes to grow upon. San Luis Obispo's program, just as all community gardens, provides health and economic benefits. Social capital and food security are two benefits that residents of San Luis Obispo are generally not as concerned about. Gardens can serve different purposes based on their location and users. San Luis Obispo has many users that do not necessarily need the gardens for food, or to bring a stronger social capital into the neighborhood. This leaves room for gardens to be used for growing food for the residents around and beyond the location of the garden. San Luis Obispo residents that are looking to garden, but do not necessarily need the food should be given opportunities to distribute that food into the community for those in need. The remainder of this project will look into ways San Luis Obispo's community garden program can expand based on its unique attributes and user base.

Spatial Analysis of San Luis Obispo Community Gardens

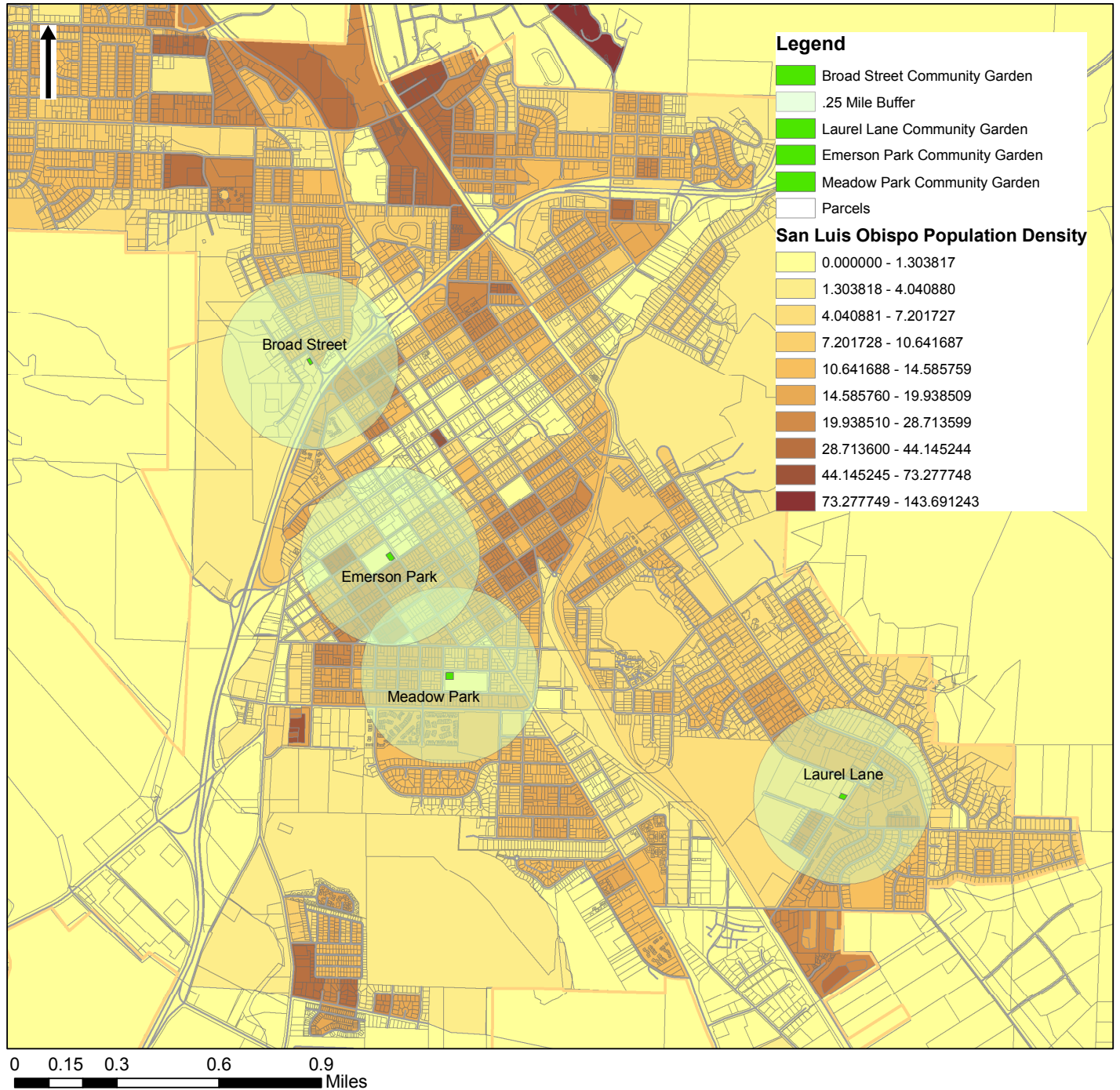
A community garden's success is highly dependent on its location. The garden's location can attract outside community members, or be tucked away from the neighborhood. It can be easily accessible by multiple modes of transportation or more difficult to access. San Luis Obispo's community gardens are spatially very different, and each site has advantages and disadvantages to its location and the way it is spatially arranged. Community gardens that are spatially successful are easy to access, designed to facilitate a sense of community through communal gathering spaces, and be well used by the surrounding community. San Luis Obispo's Community Gardens seem to lack communal gathering spaces and are not used by the community as an open space resource. These gardens have the ability to be spaces where plot owners and community members interact sharing knowledge of growing food, increase self-reliance, build a stronger community through friendships, and share the resources amongst themselves. It is important to analyze each location separately as the needs of the surrounding neighborhood and community are different near each community garden. The spatial location and arrangement of a community garden is one of the biggest keys to its success. It is important when determining new locations that those residents surrounding possible sites be closely involved in the planning process.

Spatial Analysis: Location Map & Potential Future Garden Sites



This map reveals parcels that are City owned and thus potential community garden sites. With a .25 mile buffer around each existing site it is possible to see the areas within the City limits that could most benefit from a community garden. Sites off Foothill seem to have a lot of potential for possible partnerships with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo given its close proximity to Campus. The map does not encompass any land off of Los Osos Valley Road and this area is also an underserved area in the realm of community gardens.

Spatial Analysis: Population Density Map



The above map displays the population density in relation to the current community garden locations. The current community gardens locations are arranged in areas with relatively high population densities. Higher densities surrounding the community gardens is good as it allows more users to have access to the gardens. This map can also be used as a reference to determining best locations for future community gardens. It is important to place the gardens in neighborhoods that will have a high amount of potential users within .25 miles of the site.

Emerson Park

The community garden located at Emerson Park seems to get the most foot traffic of all the garden sites. Its proximity to downtown and the surrounding higher density neighborhoods brings a variety of users and easier access as many live or work near the garden. The garden is located within a City park, but still has a feeling of detachment. It is not arranged as an attraction for park users, but is still walked by curious individuals wanting to enjoy the aesthetic qualities of the community garden. Emerson Park Community Garden seems to be most frequented by users, and has a unique plot arrangement. The plots are spaced out around a circular path that really seems to make a person in the garden feel that they have escaped from the outside world. Spatially Emerson Park Community Garden is located in an area that is easily accessible to people working downtown or living within the surrounding neighborhood. It has a connection to a frequented park and thus is easily seen and admired by the public.

Rotary Garden, Meadow Park

Rotary Garden was built in the preexisting Meadow Park. The garden was placed away from the center of the park and located next to The Village Apartment complex. It is located within .25 miles of a large amount of residential units. The garden itself however does not have a quintessential garden feel. Rotary Garden is very structured and rigid in its design. The garden is set up on a grid-system with plots resembling blocks of streets. The walking surface in between the plots is gravel. While the plots have no fencing around them and only separated from the gravel by a small wooden frame, there is a sense of less community at this garden in comparison to the others. The lack of individualized plots and the lack of presence of users seen at the site made the garden feel stagnate. The spatial arrangement could be a major contributor as the garden's structure made it feel very sterile and less tactile. The space is not inviting as a community gathering space and offered no seating for plot owners or other users. The location in relation to the surrounding community seems ideal. Community gardens often work well in parks as they are surrounded by preexisting park users and the Rotary Garden is utilizing a space previously underutilized.

Broad Street

The Broad Street Community Garden, unlike Rotary Garden and Emerson Park, is not located in a City park. The site is somewhat disconnected from the surrounding neighborhood and more difficult to access. Located next to a freeway on/off ramp the site is tucked among a canopy of brush and trees. The garden plots have higher than average fencing partially due to the lack of line of sight into the garden. Being secluded allows much easier theft, and the high fencing and sometimes locks on the

Spatial Analysis

garden plots is an attempt to deter this. Broad Street Garden does have a communal open space in the center of the garden that allows for people to socialize, eat lunch, or place supplies. Spatially the layout of the garden works well, but in context to the outside neighborhood and City of San Luis Obispo the location is unorthodox. With that being said the unusual location of this site is what attracted many plot owners in the first place. It seems that the secluded nature of the garden is what these plot owners valued in a community garden. Even though the plot owners may be satisfied with the location of the garden, it is still very hard to access, and at times unsafe. Allowing a more pedestrian-friendly access point would create a more inviting garden to both plot owners and outside users alike.

Laurel Lane

Laurel Lane though surrounded by businesses and residential units seems to have a state of disconnection from the surrounding community. The entire garden is fenced off except for its point of access on Laurel Lane. Facing a busy street the garden is often overlooked and does not lend itself as a community gathering space. Some of the users do not live in the surrounding neighborhood and it would be hard seeing any plot owner walking to this location unless they lived within very close proximity. The plots within the garden are laid out in an unstructured manner, and the space contains no communal gathering area.

Conclusion

Every garden in San Luis Obispo is spatially different in its location and the arrangement of the plots. The City lacks community gardens in areas near Foothill Blvd. and towards Los Osos Valley Road. Currently these underserved areas should be the priority for new community garden sites. As for the existing community gardens it should be crucial to analyze ways in which the gardens could be improved to strengthen communal spaces and provide better access points.



Broad Street Garden (above) hard to access with freeway on/off ramp.

Laurel Lane (below) lack of communal gathering space.



CHAPTER 4

Strategies and Programs

The San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program has room to expand, and the potential to become a very progressive community garden program. The Program has strong support from the community and a growing waitlist that proves there is plenty of outside interest. The City of San Luis Obispo has the ability to begin to focus its planning on creating a more sustainable food system. There are opportunities to implement measures dealing with urban agriculture and community gardens that will take the first steps in creating an equitable and sustainable food system. The following strategies and implementation measures provide an initial framework for future action.

Strategy 1: Create a Clear Mission Statement

In order for the San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program to begin to take the steps necessary to expand or develop new strategies it must first establish a clear mission statement. The mission statement should encompass what the program currently looks to provide the community and what it looks to provide in the future. The development of this mission statement will set the framework for future decisions relating to the Community Garden Program and provide those looking to get involved an idea of what the program looks to accomplish and provide.

Strategy 2: Develop partnerships with local non-profits

Seattle's P-Patch Community Garden Program is run almost entirely by the work of the P-Patch Trust. Its purpose is to be an "open space resource for all members of the community, not just gardeners, and are places to share love of gardening, cultivate friendships, strengthen neighborhoods, increase self-reliance, wildlife habitat, foster environmental awareness, relieve hunger, improve nutrition, and enjoy recreational and therapeutic opportunities (City of Seattle, 2011)." While this statement encompasses a wide variety of topics the program is able to accomplish these through the unique partnership between the P-Patch Trust and the City of Seattle. The P-Patch Trust manages, funds, and plans many of the new community gardens that are formed in Seattle. San Luis Obispo lacks the support of a large non-profit or group of non-profits. Many community-based non-profits exist within the city, but none have jumped on board to support the community garden program in a partnership role. The San Luis Obispo Rotary Club funded the most current garden built at Meadow Park. The partnership between the City and Rotary Club proved to be successful as the Rotary members offered funds and volunteered hours to help build the garden and make it operational. Soliciting other community groups to play a more long-term and integral role in the community garden program would help to sustain growth and interest. The program could also ask private companies to sponsor a garden or help fund a certain aspect of the program. Allowing individuals, businesses, or service organizations to "adopt-a-garden" would bring additional support to the program.

Strategy 3: Expand partnership with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

University of Maryland has worked with the Master Peace Farm in Riverdale, supplying vegetable starts, water, and tools to those who rent plots. The students volunteer their own time to the community helping with the maintenance and educating those growing in the Master Peace Farm. Cal Poly San Luis Obispo has one of the most respected agriculture programs in the nation. There is an untapped opportunity to begin to expand the Cal Poly Organic Farm to sites throughout San

Strategies and Programs

Luis Obispo. The organic farm has begun to gain public recognition with more and more people buying from the farmers stand and supporting students who are learning the intricacies of organic farming. While Cal Poly's current organic farming land produces plenty of vegetables, it would be of benefit to students and faculty to begin to take the education outside of the campus. Cal Poly Organic Farm Enterprise class enrolls roughly 40 students each quarter to assist and learn about the organic farm. If students were given the ability to volunteer time in the local community gardens and receive school credit, I believe there would be a tremendous amount of interest in the partnership. Interacting with community members in the farming process and possibly helping feed those directly near the community gardens would be integral in the partnership. The community garden program began as a Cal Poly student's senior project, and should look to partner again with the institution that spurred its creation. Using City property or existing community garden sites to bring new expansions to the Cal Poly Organic Farm would allow students to not just learn the growing process, but the social benefits the community gardens bring. Currently the Organic Farm is very focused on the growing and selling process of organic vegetables, but there is a lot more to learn about the role agriculture has within a community and the differences involved in farming within a community garden.

Strategy 4: Allow non-profit ownership

The case studies examined outside of San Luis Obispo revealed that each Program had developed a relationship with local non-profits. For Seattle this meant that a non-profit played a large role in management, organization, and funding of the P-Patch Community Garden Program. The non-profit was solely dedicated to bringing success to the community garden program. While ideally every city would love to have a non-profit that plays a large role in their community garden program this may not be realistic for San Luis Obispo. The City of Minneapolis Community Garden Pilot Program had a unique way of bringing in support from local non-profits. The City offered land, but did not produce the garden. Instead they allowed any non-profit willing to develop the land with their own resources and labor the ability to do so. The City still plays a role in approving design and use of the garden, but a great deal of freedom is left to the non-profit. San Luis Obispo currently cannot fund any more community gardens, but remains open to approving sites that outside agencies can fund. The Parks and Recreation Department can begin to develop a land bank of usable or preapproved sites that non-profits can reference if they wish to develop a community garden. By taking initiative in the process and being able to meet with an outside agency/ non-profit and allow them to pick from a list of given sites in the city, it will make the program more attractive for expansion.

Strategy 5: Design community gardens as public amenities

Public amenities such as playgrounds, benches, and public art provide reasons for people to visit the gardens even though they do not own a plot. Viewing the community gardens as public space that is respected and tended to by the community increases their value as community centers. Community gardens when viewed as a public space instead of a private space integrates a diverse group of community members together building stronger civic engagement, and allowing more people to gain awareness of food security and local efforts to growing food. The education gained from gardening and being around local gardens can strengthen land stewardship and provide a springboard to greater environmental awareness (City of Seattle, 2000). As the program grows it can expand to include garden spaces for special-needs groups such as physically disabled, youth, homeless, and immigrant populations.

CHAPTER 4

Implementation

Implementation strategies draw from the strategies previously listed, but look at realistic ways in which the Community Garden Program can begin to improve. The implementation measures are separated into short-term and long-term strategies. This allows the Community Garden Program to begin making changes right away with very little new funding. As new funding arrives the long-term implementation strategies can begin to be implemented. This distinction is key during a time when the Program lacks the funds to begin expansion in the near future.

Short Term Implementation Strategies

Develop Inventory of Potential Non-profit Partners

Strong support from outside agencies especially from the work of a partnering non-profit has been proven to bring success to all community garden programs analyzed in the case studies. The first step in creating partnerships is determining what non-profits are out there, and how each party can benefit from a partnership. By creating this inventory and developing a cooperative plan, it will begin to move the San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program to strong local partnerships.

Host Cal Poly Class at Community Garden Site

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo is a major resource in both of terms of education and possible volunteers for the Community Garden Program. There is a wide-variety of classes that could benefit from the Community Garden Program. The Community Garden Program could begin to contact faculty and departments at Cal Poly and offer to host an educational lecture at Emerson Garden. A Community Garden Program Representative could speak on everything from how things are grown to the benefits the program brings to the community. These quarterly educational lectures will expose students to the program and begin to spur a stronger relationship with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

Community Garden Opinion Survey

Develop two surveys to administer to garden plot owners and surrounding residents. The garden plot owner survey would ask those already participating in the community garden program about their experiences and allow them to give recommendations, suggestions, or just their general opinion of how the program is doing. Community members would also be surveyed across San Luis Obispo to determine knowledge and attitudes about the Community Garden Program. It would be important to determine whether residents want more gardens, would use the gardens, and what kind of spaces they see any new gardens being developed. This community opinion survey would be helpful in determining priorities for the Community Garden Program based on the community's interests and desires.

Develop an Inventory of Potential Future Community Garden Sites

As the San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program expands, it is important that if funding for a new garden presents itself, the selection process of location is not drawn out. An inventory of potential sites can be made analyzing a variety of factors such as land ownership, location to other amenities, and socioeconomic conditions. Each site proposed for the inventory would have descriptions as to why the site would work as a location of a community garden and the vision for that specific community garden. Working with an inventory map would allow potential partners to make decisions on which sites they prefer and streamline the process to getting more gardens developed.

Begin attending “SLO Community Gatherings”

The “Gathering” is a place where Cal Poly faculty, staff, students and community partners meet to nurture and develop community-based learning projects. Monthly meetings take place at the Vet’s Hall on Grand Ave. in San Luis Obispo. These meetings could serve as a way for the Community Garden Program to form partnerships and develop relationships with other community organizations and residents. The meetings have been catalysts for large volunteer based efforts and the San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program could use a stronger volunteer base.

Prepare Site Specific Task Lists

Each garden’s current condition should be analyzed in order to prepare a task list. The task list would provide the base to what changes need to occur within each garden or what resources need to be added. With each site having a specific task list it will be much easier to prioritize spending and improvements to each site. This task list will also help serve as a way for volunteers to begin to know ways in which they could provide for the gardens.

Long Term Implementation Strategies

Form Partnership with Local Non-profit

One of the main keys to a successful community garden program is a strong partnership with one or multiple non-profits. The Program should increase collaborative efforts with other jurisdictions in addition to non-government partners including local businesses, citizens, and non-profits. Through more widespread and sustained collaboration, long-lasting partnerships can form resulting in increased support and pooling of resources. The new partnerships will begin to facilitate the implementation of policies and strategies that will benefit the San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program.

Create a Community Garden Commission

Forming a Community Garden Commission will begin to help community members become more involved in the decision-making process and take more ownership of the gardens within the Program. The Commission would meet every month and discuss events, issues, and future decisions relating to the Community Garden Program.

Allow Community Gardens to be Owned by Non-profits and Built on Non-City Land

Currently San Luis Obispo's Community Garden Program is underfunded and is unable to expand due to financial shortages. It should be possible for an outside agency or non-profit to come to the Community Garden Program looking to either build a garden on property they have acquired themselves or on one of the city-owned parcels that have been identified as possible community garden sites. This strategy would allow expansion of the program without City funding.

Expand Education and Resources Available to the Community

The Community Garden Program should look to offer more educational classes and even gardening resources such as tools, dirt, and seeds. Through volunteer coordination or non-profit partnership, more classes on the growing process and better access to all the items needed to garden will make it easier for community members to garden. These resources could be paid for through an annual membership fee, and would be offered to those who own garden plots and any outside community members. The annual fee will cover gardening classes and a select amount of tools to begin the gardening process. This resource group will not only encourage more use of existing gardens, but spur community members to use their own yards as a place to grow food.

Develop Incentives for Donating a Portion of Harvest to the Food Bank

Currently there is not enough excess harvest amongst the San Luis Obispo Community Gardens to significantly contribute to the local Food Banks. In order to get people to donate a portion of their harvest, it would be wise to create incentives. Incentives may include free classes or use of a selection of resources if a plot owner donates a certain amount of their plot to grow food strictly for donation purposes. Only a few users donate a portion of their harvest to food banks. Most users circulate their food among other plot owners, family, and friends. This communal sharing is what creates a successful community garden and thus should not be stopped, but an alternative form of donation should be encouraged.

Develop Compulsory School Educational Workshops

Assist in the creation and management of a school-based program that integrates nutrition and gardening in order to raise awareness about the connection between healthy food choices and locally grown fresh produce.

Conclusions & Reflections

The San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program has the ability to be the catalyst to encourage a more sustainable food system within the City of San Luis Obispo. With a solid base of interest and management the Program can grow to become an example for cities within the rest of County and State to follow. Even with the current economic downturn there are creative solutions and strategies that can begin the process in expanding the current program. With a strong community support and the commitment of outside agencies there is potential for the San Luis Obispo Community Garden Program to begin to not only offer itself as a recreational opportunity for residents, but as a contributor to the local emergency food systems and as an option for residents looking for economic, social, and health benefits through gardening. There is rising support of sustainable food systems and San Luis Obispo is a prime example of a City ready to take the next steps and become a City that others look to for inspiration on how to create their own sustainable food systems.

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