

Madison Community Gardens Committee Committee Update Report for 2003-2007

Introduction

Community gardens serve as grass roots training grounds where neighbors acquire the leadership skills necessary to build strong and diverse communities. The Madison Common Council, concerned with the escalating loss of community gardens in the City of Madison, established the Community Gardens Committee (CGC) in 2005. Charged with preserving, expanding and enhancing opportunities for community gardening, the Community Gardens Committee works to raise the visibility of community gardening and create better understanding of its many benefits. The committee fosters collaborative partnerships and leverages limited resources by harnessing support for gardens from within the community and multiple units of city government. The Community Gardens Committee provides an invaluable public forum --a place where garden advocates and city government work together to build a productive and sustainable system of community gardens in Madison.

How the Committee Operates

Representatives of certain city committees (Plan, Parks and CDBG), citizen gardeners, and staff (from the Mayor's office and CAC) comprise the committee. Membership is open to anyone with an interest or role in Madison's community gardens. The committee meets monthly (except in the summer months). All meetings are open to the public, with Hmong and Spanish interpreters available to facilitate participation by all attendees.

The CGC addresses a broad spectrum of issues related to community gardening, including updates on particular gardens. Monthly meetings often include relevant city staff, the Madison Water Utility, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District, open space planners, and volunteer leaders of local community gardens. The committee fosters collaborative action to improve community gardening resources within the city.

The CGC works in partnership with all entities represented on the committee, including CAC, the Community Development Block Grant Program, the Parks Department, and the Plan Commission. CAC provides a full range of critical support services for 16 of the city's community gardens. The Community Development Block Grant Program provides critical funding in support of the CAC Gardens Program and serves in an advisory capacity to the committee. The Parks Commission and Plan Commission representatives on the committee form a crucial link to these city departments, and ensure that community gardens are considered by the Parks Department, as it expands or revitalizes city parks, and by the Plan Commission, as it develops comprehensive plans for development and conservation of city lands. Two other groups provide extraordinary support for community gardening in the City of Madison. The Streets Department routinely supplies compost to many gardens. This free and valuable resource both enhances the gardens and aids greatly in making gardening opportunities accessible to all income groups. The Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District recently collaborated with the CGC and leased critically needed acreage to CAC for a new community garden as well as a minority-owned microenterprise truck farm.

Garden Committee Activities

1) Preserving Existing Gardens and Facilitating Garden Expansions

Meeting increased demand for gardening plots, whether from a growing number of gardeners or in response to loss of an existing garden, constitutes one of the most vital functions of the Committee. Advocacy on behalf of threatened gardens is implicit in this activity. Table 1 demonstrates the efficacy of community

gardening advocacy. Despite the loss of two gardens, significant increases in number of plots and acreage under cultivation occurred.

Specific examples:

- Quann Expansion: 42 new plots were added in 2005, offsetting the loss of Nygard Community Garden.
- Reindahl Park Community Garden added 15 new plots, and welcomed 12 new families to the garden in the 2006 and expects another 10 or more in 2007.
- Marlborough Park Expansion: Marlborough Park Community Garden added 40 new plots in 2007. 28 new families joined the garden 2006 and 52 new families joined in 2007.

2) Establishing New Gardens

Committee members and CAC staff collaborated with the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District to establish a new garden on Moorland Road. CAC worked with residents in the area to develop this new garden site. An original proposal to found a new garden in nearby Baxter Park failed, due to small park size and incompatibility with an existing prairie restoration. After surveying the neighborhood and holding a large community meeting to gauge interest, CAC and CGC members negotiated a lease for garden space on nearby farmland owned by the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD). CAC embarked on an organizing campaign, engaging more gardeners and reaching out to nearby community areas not previously involved with the garden. They visited several housing complexes (apartments, small affordable condos, starter homes and a large trailer park) with limited access to tillable land. In 2006, 44 households participated, many of them living within one mile of the site. Gardeners reflect the demographics of their neighborhood, with a mix of Caucasian, Hispanic, and Hmong participants. The Mayor's Bike Tour featured this new garden in 2006 and plans are underway for an expansion in 2007.

Table 1.

Community Gardening in the Madison Area 2002 - 2007

Acreage of land in garden plots has increased 27% during the past five years.

Garden	# of plots in 2002 (adjusted to 400 sf standard)	Acreage in 2002	Acreage in 2007	# of plots in 2007 (adjusted to 400 sf standard)
<i>All Saints</i>	18	0.17	0.17	18
<i>Arbor McDivitt</i>	12	0.11	0.08	9
Atwood	80	0.73	1.01	100
Badger	80	0.73	0.73	80
Baird	12	0.11	0.11	12
Burr Oaks	0	0.0	0.14	15
<i>Drumlin</i>	0	0.0	0.14	15
<i>East High Ag Program</i>	15	0.14	0.14	15
<i>Eagle Heights</i>	400	3.67	3.67	400
Eastmorland	0	0.0	0.13	14
Gammon	26	.24	.24	25
<i>Joyce</i>	15	0.14	0.14	15
<i>Lapham</i>	2	0.02	0.02	2
Marlborough Park	164	1.5	1.9	204
<i>Midvale</i>	0	0.00	0.25	20
Moorland	0	0.00	1.36	148
Nygaard	40	0.37	0.0	0
Old Sauk	38	0.35	0.5	58
Prairie Hills	0	0.00	0.34	35
Quann	40	0.37	1.28	140

Reindahl	200	1.84	1.84	200
Reynolds	6	0.05	0.05	6
Rimrock (in Fitchburg)	70	0.64	0.68	74
Sheboygan	48	0.44	0.55	60
<i>Shorewood (in Shorewood)</i>	50	0.75	0.75	50
St. Paul	72	0.66	0.66	72
Southdale	5	0.04	0.00	0
<i>Tamarack Trails</i>	15	0.14	0.14	15
Troy	250	2.30	2.98	325
Truax	30	0.28	0.28	30
<i>University Housing</i>	72	0.66	0.66	72
Waunona	20	0.18	0.18	20
Totals	1780	16.63	21.12	2249

Most plots are 400 sq ft. At gardens where the plots are much larger or smaller, they are listed as the approximate number of 400 sq ft plot equivalents (for instance Reynolds Garden has 27 plots, but each is about **90 sq** ft, Reindahl has 50 plots, but each is about 1600 sq ft; Lapham has 21 plots, but each is about 5' x 7'). Non-CAC assisted gardens as shown in italics.

3) New Garden Fund

An anonymous donation of \$10,000 was made in the late 1990's to the City of Madison for support of community gardens. The money, administered by the Mayor's Committee for Community Gardens, remained unspent at the time that Dave Cieslewicz took office. Mayoral aide Jeanne Hoffman recommended that the Committee for Community Gardens put the money to work.

Augmented by a Community Development Block Grant of \$13,000 in 2004, Community Action Coalition (CAC) staff and committee members established a fund to support new garden development. Called the New Garden Fund, the program provides seed money to support volunteers as they improve existing gardens or launch new gardens. A CGC subcommittee comprised of gardeners designed and manages a simple competitive grants process. The panel awards funding based on proposal merit. CAC staff advertises the New Garden Fund widely and proactively consults with prospective applicants. Following an award, CAC provides ongoing support services to ensure project success. The Panel also develops funding proposals and encourages donations to the fund, successfully raising over \$2000 in additional support. The Madison Community Foundation holds all monies in the New Garden Fund.

In 2005, four grants were awarded:

1. Quann Gardens - garden expansion and fence extension (\$1,000)
2. Reindahl Gardens - tilling, irrigation and wheelbarrows (\$925)
3. Baxter Gardens (which became Moorland Garden) - tilling, irrigation, hoses, fence and wheelbarrows (\$1,077)
4. Northport Packer - irrigation and tilling (\$750)

In 2006, two grants were awarded:

1. Sheboygan Gardens - irrigation (\$1,300)
2. Burr Oaks/Lincoln - soil enhancements, lumber & hardware (\$700)

In 2007, four grants were awarded:

1. Eastmorland Garden – city lease fee, hose and tilling (\$500)
2. Marlborough Garden – water expansion and tools or tilling (\$500)
3. Prairie Hills Garden – city lease fee, tilling, hose, tools (\$750)
4. Moorland Garden – fence (\$500)

4) Public Events

The CGC and CAC jointly sponsor the annual Mayor's Community Gardens Bike Tour. In addition to augmenting the Committee's knowledge and of challenges and opportunities facing community gardening in the City of Madison, this event highlights the wide range of community gardens in the city and their benefits to residents, while also building support for gardens. For the past three years, the Wisconsin Bicycle Federation has co-sponsored the Bike Tour and provided invaluable logistical and safety assistance to help make the tour a safe, fun and accessible event.

In addition to the Bike Tour, many committee members work with the CAC's organizer to promote community gardening at various public events or meetings of garden groups, for example the annual Food For Thought or Troy Garden festivals.

5) Providing input to the City's Comprehensive Plan

The City of Madison adopted a comprehensive plan in 2006 designed to guide its growth and decision-making for decades to come. During the process of drafting and revising the plan, the City solicited input from numerous stakeholder groups including its various boards and commissions. This Committee advocated for including community gardens in the comprehensive plan, particularly in the "natural and agricultural resources" where Objective 14 reads "Protect existing community gardens in the City and establish additional areas for new community gardens" and sets a goal of providing one site for every 2000 households in the City. Policies adopted to help achieve this goal include using city surplus and parklands, extending existing leases, and making garden sites permanent wherever possible on city-owned property.

6) Water Systems and Billing

Affordable and accessible water directly affects the appeal and success of a garden. The Madison Water Utility provides invaluable support to many community gardens by allowing access to city fire hydrants. The Water Utility also subsidizes the gardens, through CAC, charging a reduced flat rate based on area and usage. Unfortunately, the Madison Water Utility will not be able to provide the "flat rate" again beyond the 2006 garden season, and has encouraged the committee and CAC to develop alternate ways to provide water access to the gardens. Our committee is exploring a range of options for providing this critical gardening resource. One option involves improving garden water systems by installing a separate lateral line off the water main. Initial bids for water improvement projects at all CAC-run gardens demonstrate that dedicated water systems are very expensive. Such significant capital improvement projects are only appropriate for larger gardens with secure land tenure. Some gardens may be able to improve their water systems in conjunction with street improvements. Gardens situated in parks have water provided through the park system water lines. The committee and CAC will continue to explore options to assure that all gardens have access to a secure and reliable source of water.