growing the greenway: design sustainability

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Mission

To advocate for and create community gardens along the Lafitte Greenway, which will improve health outcomes of local residents, strengthen neighborhood bonds, support environmental stewardship education, and foster economic growth in the Lafitte Corridor.

Vision

To improve community health and vitality:

- **Physically:** by increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables, providing educational classes for all ages on nutrition and sustainable growing practices, and increasing opportunities for physical activity.

- **Socially and Culturally:** by creating a space for families and neighbors to come together to exchange ideas and share traditions while acknowledging the history of gardening on the land, fostering multi-generational relationships, creating opportunities for local residents of all ages and ethnicities, displaying community assets, and reclaiming the native food culture.

- **Environmentally:** by planting native species, utilizing good storm water management practices, growing produce sustainably, recapturing food waste, creating a space for biodiversity to naturally flourish, and creating environmental stewards through education and practice.

- **Economically:** by creating new economic opportunities for Lafitte Corridor residents, supporting the development of a sustainable local food system, improving community resilience, and improving food security for Lafitte Corridor residents.

Background

On May 27-28, Friends of Lafitte Greenway and partners hosted the Local Foods Local Places Workshop. Over 80 residents and stakeholders gave their ideas to develop a Strategic Action Plan to increase access to healthy local foods in the Lafitte Corridor. We are pleased to present Building Our Local Food Economy: A Strategic Action Plan for the Lafitte Corridor, a community-based plan to advocate for and create community gardens along the Lafitte Greenway, available for download below.

The following information came from the LFLP sustainability section of the Local Foods Local Places (LFLP) Report (Kelly Bond Local Food Intern, Pgs. 172-256).

Spark Words

Elements	Considerations	Models	Accessibility
Growth	Protection	Comfortability	History/Culture
Requirements	Resources	Goals	Assets

Planning

There is a lot that goes into thinking and planning a community garden in neighborhoods. Each garden is unique, but they all share the goal of building community through gardening. Cooperation and sensitivity to the people in the neighborhood is most important. It helps to have local people help initiate and make decisions. Once the garden is built, we have found that it is most sustainable when it belongs to a coalition of gardens or a municipal entity that can provide continuity and back-up resources. (Pohl-Kosbau, 2015)

Key Components

Consider the following when choosing a site for community gardens: access to water, direct sunlight, accessibility to the community (proximity to older residents' homes and those with limited transportation), visibility to community, truck access (for deliveries of mulch and soil, and access for small growers), and relevant city zoning codes (Kato, 2015) (University of Missouri Extension).

Considerations:

- Access to water
- Direct sunlight
- Accessibility to the community (proximity to older residents' homes and those with limited transportation)
- Visibility to community
- Truck access (for deliveries of mulch and soil, and access for small growers)
- Relevant city zoning codes (Kato, 2015) (University of Missouri Extension)

Basic Elements:

- Garden Plots

- A community garden should have at least 15 individual plots, some of which should be disability friendly (i.e. raised). Pathways between plots should be at least 3 to 4 feet wide, allowing space for both disabled people to pass through and garden equipment (i.e. wheelbarrows) to fit (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015). Boundaries for plots can be made of many different materials including: concrete masonry units, modular block retaining wall units, recycled plastic lumber, cast in place concrete, and stacked or mortared stone wall. These materials will not rot (Harmon, & Harrington).

- Materials used around the plots should be accommodating to people using all forms of travel. Smooth hard surfaces work well. High contrast and easily detectable edges should be incorporated for those with low-vision (Harmon, & Harrington). Create a weed barrier in the soil by placing a semi-permeable material down in and around the plots. All pathways should also be capped with a weed barrier. This barrier also prevents soil contamination (Mickley-Doyle, 2015). A simple layer of wood chips can be used and generally donated to the garden (Willson & Bantuelle, 2015).

- Raised bed plots should be no more than 4 feet wide (to allow access to plants from all sides without stepping into the bed), and be between 8 and 12 feet long. It's recommended to raise them 8-10 inches from the ground (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015). Advantages of raised beds include better drainage, beginning with healthier soil, easier maintenance, potential for higher yields, disability friendly, and an extended growing season. Disadvantages include more up-front costs, and soil that dries out faster during periods of heat (Denver Urban Gardens, 2012)

- In-ground plots can be anywhere from 10 x 10 feet to 20 x 20 feet (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015).

- Water Source
  - The University of California Cooperative Extension recommends that once every four garden beds, a hose bib or faucet be placed in a simple irrigation system. Hand watering is an efficient way to water crops in raised beds.

Established plants, such as trees or shrubs, can be watered with drip irrigation. The ultimate type and layout of an irrigation system will depend on where the water is initially coming from. A landscape architect or garden center consultant will be able to provide a recommendation specific to the Lafitte Greenway. (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015).

- o The EPA estimates that "manual watering with a hand-held hose tends to be the most water-efficient method" (Denver Urban Gardens, 2012), in comparison to other methods such as drip irrigation. When a water source is not available, onsite water collection can be considered. Rain barrels and cisterns are options (Mickley-Doyle, 2015). One of the most important considerations is making watering convenient for gardeners (Kato, 2015).

- Fencing
    - o The University of California Cooperative Extension recommends fencing to, "keep out unwanted animals and secure the garden at night, consider placing an 8-foot fence around the perimeter. This should reduce theft and vandalism significantly" (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015). Orchards, demonstration gardens, and program spaces generally do not need to be fenced in (Harmon, & Harrington).

- Tool Shed
    - o A tool shed or other structure for storing tools, supplies, log books, and other shared materials is important to have. Depending on the size of the shed, individual storage areas can be designated for each gardener. Recycled metal shipping containers make excellent storage sheds, and are resistant to destruction (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015). Morgan Tool Sheds are also a great option. They are more expensive, but highly storm resistant and do not require replacement (Burley, 2015). This storage space should be placed centrally in the garden, easily accessible to all gardeners. If the garden is going to have larger expensive farm equipment, have two separate tool sheds. Store expensive farm equipment (that also requires skill to operate) in one shed, and more communal hand tools in

another. Only a select number of people should have access to the first shed (Gorman, 2015).

- Compost System
  - Incorporating a compost system into the garden is very important for sustainability. Place it somewhere easily accessible. Explore the different types of systems used and establish what can and cannot be composted by the gardeners (Harmon, & Harrington). It is not recommended to have individual compost bins because they can look disorderly (Denver Urban Gardens, 2012). All permissible material should be broken down into one-to-two inch pieces. This helps speed the natural composting process (Denver Urban Gardens, 2012). One inexpensive option for construction is to use wood pallets to create bins by standing them on-end, attaching in a U-shape, and lining the inside with galvanized rabbit-wire (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015).

- Space to Rest
  - Include somewhere for gardeners and the general community to rest (preferably shaded) such as a bench or picnic table. If no trees are available, construct a simple arbor from wood or pipe, and plant mirliton or another edible vine (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015).

- Signage
  - A sign with the garden's name, sponsors, and a contact person's phone number for more information should be placed near the garden's entrance (University of California Cooperative Extension, 2015). Post signs for the community gardens in several locations along the Greenway to educate people on their existence and where they are specifically located.

Site Plan Elements: (The following garden elements should be considered when designing a site plan.)
- Edible Landscapes
  - With the goal of connecting people to real food, landscape architects and community members around the United States are looking at public

walkways and spaces for ways to integrate fruit trees and vegetables into their planning. For inspiration look at the Los Angeles initiative called the Urban Farming Food Chain Project.

- Wildlife Habitat
  - o To bring native wildlife into the garden (for both aesthetics and benefits to garden plants) create small habitats for them. Wildlife includes birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects (bees, lady bugs, etc.)
- Specialized Garden Plots
  - o I.e. berry patches or an heirloom garden.
- Water Features
  - o Irrigation, fountains, rain gardens, etc.
- Restrooms/Water Fountains
  - o Consider proximity to available restrooms and drinkable water if installing these in the garden is not possible.
- Car and Bike Parking
  - o Sufficient car and bike parking
- Community Gathering Space
  - o A central space for larger groups of the community to come together in the garden for events and programs.
- Play Space
  - o For children to use while their parents are gardening. This could be something as simple as a sandbox. Ideally children are helping their parents in their plot and learning about the garden.
- Historical Markers and Pathways
  - o Include some type of signage to document and respect the history of the site. Consider plaques, a timeline, and the inclusion of personal community stories.
- Art
  - o Incorporate local art into the garden, allowing artists to participate in this project.

Food for Thought:

- Garden site should be no more than a short bike, walk or drive from intended gardeners
- Target demographics where a community garden can fulfill a need. Consider communities such as: elderly, low-income, renters, immigrants, handicapped
- If it is a transient community make sure to include a diversity of demographics

Resources (Appendix X)

- Forsyth Community Gardening o Extensive resource list on: starting a community garden, legal and safety considerations, composting, container and raised bed gardening, diseases, food preparation, flowers and herbs, fruits and vegetables, fundraising, insects, plot gardens, soil, youth, and Spanish materials - http://www.forsythcommunitygardening.com/PrintedMaterials.aspx

- National Recreation and Park Association o Building a Community Garden in Your Park (information on materials and other physical planning features) - https://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpaorg/Grants_and_Partners/Parks_and_Conservation/Resources/Community-Garden-Handbook.pdf

- A Look at Sustainability in Action: http://www.sustainable.org/

- 82 Sustainable Gardening Tips: http://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/gardening-techniques/sustainable-gardening-zm0z11zsto.aspx

- Tips and Techniques: http://www.gardeningmatters.org/tips-and-techniques