Steps Beyond the Physical Garden

MAKING POLICY

It's green thumbs up for neighborhood plots

Cultivating a new spirit for the city, gardening

The city of Seattle, with its urban gardens,

has been recognized as a city of green
density and a source of fresh produce. The

Community gardens are transforming Chicago's landscape,

and providing a new sense of community for residents.

In Philadelphia, the city's urban gardening

programs continue to grow, with the

aim of promoting health and

sustainability through urban farming.

New York City, under Mayor Michael Bloomberg,

is also making strides in urban gardening

and community food production.
Protecting Community Gardening

The interruptions are part of your work.” So I was instructed in my first job as a public policy advocate. When I entered the community gardening world, I expected to leave all that behind. Not so! For community gardeners these past few years, the interruptions from typical horticultural activities have included meeting with public officials, testifying before hearings, organizing coalitions and other general advocacy tasks. Some are even organizing voter registration campaigns!

Public policy that supports green space may be the only means to assure the protection needed for community gardening. Community gardeners all over the continent are increasingly engaged in struggles beyond the garden gate to protect and preserve their chance to plant in the community. As increasing numbers of people flock to the cities of the world, and as the cities expand into the suburbs and rural areas, the demands on public space for any purpose promise to become more, not less, intense.

With this issue of Community Greening Review, ACGA offers perspectives and strategies from a host of cities: Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Madison (WI), Seattle, Portland, Austin, New Orleans, Atlanta and Arlington among others. Writer Pam Kirschbaum describes the evolution of events to preserve community garden space in these cities in her feature article “Making Policy in a Crowded World.”

Other articles provide tips for influencing public policy as well as guidelines for a community garden ordinance. As we look to the future there is hope in the new national program “Millennium Green” which is led by the USDA with a call to action for every business, school and citizen to become involved in community greening. Details are outlined in the special report “Partnering with Millennium Green” and in an interview with Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman.

These issues are not new to ACGA. In its 1996 national conference in Portland, garden preservation was a hot topic. Charlie Hales, City Commissioner of Parks, challenged “whether as a planned part of new housing, or by acquisition and development in the city’s own capital improvement program, we must consider neighborhood parks and community gardens part of the necessary ‘green infrastructure’ of a healthy city.”

ACGA will make more strides toward this vision in its national conference next September 7–11 in Atlanta. With the theme “Planting Millennium Seeds for Future Urban Growth” gardeners are invited to join together their passion for planting and their planning for preservation. “Atlanta: Old City, Hip Sensibility” invites each one to be part of this ongoing process.

Ellen Kirby
Publications Committee
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FEATURE

In May 1999, at the “eleventh hour,” the Trust for Public Land and the New York Restoration Project were able to reach separate agreements with the City of New York to rescue from auction 115 community gardens. The cost: months of anxiety and frustration, a national rally, law suits, last-minute negotiations, parks committee resolutions—and $4.2 million.

While pressures on the land may be particularly ferocious in New York City, one factor is not very different from many American cities: New York had no overall policy for reviewing gardens for preservation. Although through its popular GreenThumb program the city had been leasing and supporting garden development for 20 years, no review process, beyond a case-by-case basis, was in place. In late 1995, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and nine other nonprofits “began to press for a review process,” says Andrew Stone of TPL’s New York City office. They set up a blue ribbon committee, but found no receptivity for their proposal to create a process. The city would be taking land for revenue and development, including housing, officials indicated. In early ’99, when it became clear gardens would be auctioned for revenue, Stone says, “the Trust for Public Land crafted an offer to buy some of the gardens, and in return the city would remove the gardens from auction, set up a review process, and the gardens would go through that process.” Rebuffed by the city, the two site-buying deals that eventually were made have no policy attached.

“This is not the ideal way to do business,” says Stone. But making policy under the gun may be equivalent to shooting for the moon. “You may accomplish the most when you are not in a pressure situation,” he notes. “When there is not a lot of land-use conflict—in Philadelphia where they are saving sites ahead of time, in St. Louis and Detroit and other cities with vacant land and less pressure—that may be the best time to try for policy.” For those groups especially who are intent on building a community resource for the future, who are not doing a short-term beautification project, policy is vital. “They may need to reconsider their priorities,” Stone says, taking time to build strong constituencies, community-wide coalitions, and links with city government.

Establishing policy means engaging in the political process, often emphatically. Community gardeners, in order to give teeth to the underlying assumption that community gardens are a legitimate, proper and permanent use of land, must be part of the discussion. They must be seen as contenders with important goals and allies. As participants at the policy level, community gardeners almost certainly have a better chance to demonstrate the effectiveness of community gardens as a tool to achieve desirable and quantifiable goals: food security, neighborhood stabilization and revitalization, reduction of crime, job training, recreation, therapy, and community building. The question, then, is how, unless already seated, can community gardeners pull up a chair at this table?
Preservation Techniques

Before detailing ways community activists can become involved, or more involved, at the policy level, it is useful to review some preservation techniques and legislation, de facto policy, where they currently exist. A nonprofit land trust, through which land is permanently owned and held in trust for public use, is a significant technique that is being used by Boston and Philadelphia, and more recently by Chicago. Boston has four such trusts and more than half its gardens are protected, thanks to a confluence of supportive city officials and politically astute activists in the late 1980s. Through Garden Futures, a partnership of the four trusts, community gardeners are now systematically trying to raise knowledge and support in both the public and government sectors. In Philadelphia, the Neighborhood Garden Association acquires gardens through purchases and auction bids, and assists in the transfer to the city of federal land which can be leased to the trust and in turn leased to gardeners. The trust works in cooperation with Philadelphia Green and Penn State’s Cooperative Extension Urban Gardening Program to ensure the continued use of such gardens as a community resource. In both cities sustainability of individual gardens is a carefully considered issue before acquisition. Grants, foundations and private donations primarily fund the trusts.

Seattle’s P-Patch Program, a national model for municipal community garden programs, lost 11 sites to various kinds of development in its first 20 years, spurring efforts to protect gardens. Under the aegis of the Department of Neighborhoods, the program has looked primarily to the Department of Parks and Recreation for ownership of many sites and has acquired some land with open space funds and with a one-time special-fund allocation from the city. Other sites are leased from private and institutional owners. In addition, a nonprofit volunteer and paid membership group, the Friends of P-Patch, strongly supports the program and owns three gardens which it leases to P-Patch. Transfer of land to city parks departments, where it is at least protected as open space, and long-term leases are both techniques for securing garden sites.

Portland Community Gardens, a popular program of Portland, Oregon’s Parks and Recreation Department, has a similar arrangement. The City of Seattle has gone a step further, however, and has written community garden goals, which include inter-agency and intergovernmental cooperation to expand the program, into its most recent comprehensive plan (1994). Berkeley, California, has also written community gardens, considered a community-building recreational resource, into the open space and the community services sections of its 1998 city plan. One goal is to find appropriate long-term gardening sites within the city.

Having clear language about community gardens in a city’s comprehensive plan, as in Seattle and Berkeley, legitimizes such a use of land and overcomes a major obstacle: the perception of community gardening as an interim use, for beautification, until something better emerges. In Chicago impetus for a land trust came from a formal open space plan for the city that saw the need to purchase and hold small neighborhood green spaces. NeighborSpace, set up in 1996 via an intergovernmental agreement, is funded by the City of Chicago, the Chicago Parks District and the Cook County Forest Preserve District. NeighborSpace is empowered to acquire city- and county-owned property by transfer and private property from individuals. The enterprise is a mesh of regional politicians and open space and neighborhood interests.

A conservation easement, in which an owner retains title and may obtain tax benefits while voluntarily designating the land as green space in perpetuity, is another way to protect gardens. For a more thorough discussion of preserving gardens, see “Borrowed Land, Borrowed Time” in the 1998 issue of Community Greening Review.

State and Local Ordinances

State and local legislation, such as ordinances that set up a system to inventory and lease vacant land or zoning ordinances that designate land as open space, may carry some protection, although these ordinances often are written in the context of the use of vacant land for community gardens as an interim measure and define “open space use” in many ways. Professor Jane Schukoske of the University of Baltimore School of Law has enumerated for an audience of attorneys in a recent article, “Community Development Through Gardening: State and Local Policies Transforming Urban Open Space” in the New York University Journal of Legislation and Public Policy, a number of state and local statutes that “clear the way for investment of public resources in community gardening projects.” Some state legislation specifically cites gardens in terms of food production and security, education, parks and environment, social services, budget and Community Development Block Grant allocations, and public housing. Other statutes offer gardens exemptions from waste management, pollution and water drought requirements. The Tennessee Community Gardening Act of 1977, for example, gives priority in allocating vacant land to low-income families and individuals, including the elderly, to benefit needy residents who may produce some of their own food. California, with major agricultural interests, has established an instructional school garden program.

The District of Columbia, another example, initiated the Food Production and Urban Gardens Program to reflect food security and community development concerns. Called for in its mid-1980s...
A comprehensive plan, the district’s program is authorized under the Food and Drugs Code. In other cases, “general provisions regarding parks and recreation or agriculture may serve as a basis for community garden activity,” notes Schukoske, who is the director of the Community Development Clinic, which has represented community associations involved in gardening. State legislation, where it exists, is useful because it recognizes community gardens as a valid public use of land, it gives permission to use state land, and it “may enable local governments to provide technical and material support.” Since local ordinances derive from state and constitutional law, Schukoske stresses that it is imperative for community garden policy advocates to be informed about the “local legal context” before designing and proposing legislation. Some municipalities support formal programs through their parks departments (New York City, Portland and Seattle); Austin, Texas, gives grants through its parks department to incorporated, non-profit, tax-exempt groups that meet specific requirements (Austin Community Gardens). In most instances, though, city-owned vacant lots come under the jurisdiction of other agencies, Schukoske notes, and to use such non-park land entails “authorization by law or lease agreement.” Often the leases are short-term, one or two years, or subject to quick termination, promoting instability instead of enduring goals. Without legislation, property, as in the case of New York City, can also get transferred to another agency.

In New Orleans, Parkway Partners Program Inc. receives access to adjudicated lots for its community garden project. A grant-funded, nonprofit partnership between the private and public sectors, Parkway Partners began building community gardens in 1992 and has developed 142 gardens, run by the gardeners, mainly in low-income neighborhoods. Because Louisiana law is based on Napoleonic code, unlike the rest of the states, a “morass of state and local laws” means that the city cannot at present sell or auction abandoned land, says Paula Berault, the agency’s director. When a lot has accumulated a level of liens and public debts against it, it goes through the process of adjudication and is legally adjudicated to the city. The city has control over the lot, but does not own it; ownership still resides with the title holder. “The value of the adjudication far outweighs the value of the lot,” Berault explains, “so no one will buy it. Vacant lots will sit there in perpetuity, adding to the misery of poor neighborhoods.” Efforts are being made to address the issue, but availability with “the blessings of the city” is very important for now. What began as an effort to reclaim vacant lots, she says, has grown into full-blown neighborhood redevelopment, and the program won a City Livability Award from the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 1998. “The mayor [Marc H. Morial] is a great proponent and supporter of the program. Our initial funding came from Community Development Block Grant money,” she notes. In a few instances, garden property has been bought. Says Berault: “If someone is going to make some kind of an investment in one of these neighborhoods, that’s a cause for celebration—and we have physically moved the garden, lock, stock and barrel, down the block to some other nasty lot.”

The City of Arlington, Virginia, concerned that it is deficient in open space, passed a plan in 1994 and is trying to acquire properties to augment its current open spaces. Its Neighborhood Conservation Plan allows neighborhoods to determine, and later to change, the use of such green space.

“Design of legislation [state and municipal],” Schukoske writes, “should rationally link policy to the features of its community garden ordinance in terms of permanency, technical support, and material support for the garden projects. The greater the emphasis on social aspects of gardening such as community development and fair access within communities to environmental resources, the less reasonable are provisions allowing localities to summarily close community gardens.”

One major impediment to garden ownership, by
an individual garden group, community association, or a land trust, is the prohibitive nature of clearing title to vacant urban lots. Such lots are often saddled with unpaid property taxes and other liens, and transfer of title can be impossible, depending on the real estate transfer system, the professor explains, or result in an insecure title and perhaps loss. To deal with the problem, a city can consider authorizing a separate agency that expedites the removal of delinquent taxes and liens. The Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority, for example, can forgive delinquent taxes for property in a timely manner. This “enables developers to obtain clear and marketable title to property at an affordable price,” the authority notes. The authority considers its mission an effective tool in rebuilding communities, and it puts properties “back on the tax role.” (Created in 1991, the Land Bank Authority required passage of a Georgia state law to achieve the “interlocal” agreement between city and county. The agency does not acquire land.) A recent study done by Parks & People Foundation in Baltimore looked at the management of neighborhood open spaces in several cities, including Atlanta. Anyone is a potential developer, including a group or individual who wants to green a vacant neighborhood lot, and “community enhancement projects such as community gardens, parks and neighborhood recreation centers” are specifically mentioned in the authority’s informational material. Parks & People’s study suggests that while many cities have developed legal means to forgive back taxes, “they have not yet created the necessary mechanisms or regulatory processes” for action. This is an “insurmountable barrier to neighborhood or community organizations with modest budgets and no legal advice.” Atlanta’s land bank mechanism, a nonprofit organization with a quasi-governmental role, “demonstrates in the clearest terms how reducing bureaucracy and red tape associated with the lien release process can have the net result of encouraging . . . the creation of new community-managed open spaces.”

Another model envisions a land reserve agency that acquires land for future use. State and local governments would, in effect, be planning ahead, reserving land to realize policy and planning objectives later. “If implemented,” Schukoske observes, “land reserves would be another source of public land that could be made available for gardening purposes for sizeable periods of time. Once successfully established on such lands, community gardens could be factored into the overall development process.”

Collaboration in Madison

Policy making happens most often when groups with similar goals coalesce, organize and press, often vigorously and lengthily, for the outcomes they desire. Community activists in the City of Madison, Wisconsin, offer an enlightening example. The July 1999 report by the City of Madison Advisory Committee on Community Gardens, notes that Madison, which currently has 24 community gardens, lost 11 gardens to roadways, parking lots, a car dealership and other buildings between 1983-1993. Nearly 400 garden plots, 40 percent of the city’s plots, have been lost since 1991. This has been in the face of continuing demand by community members for gardens and long waiting lists for plots. After a year and a half of strenuous effort, a coalition of garden, neighborhood, housing and green-space advocates, university representatives, and nonprofit groups did successfully negotiate to keep a portion of several parcels of land, declared surplus by the state, in use as community gardens for at least 50 years. The Troy Gardens Project in Madison represents “a model for community-driven land use decision making,” the report asserts. A consortium of public owners—Northside Planning Council, Madison Area Community Land Trust, Urban Open Space Foundation, and Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin, Inc.—will eventually take title, a move that “offers a blueprint for garden acquisitions elsewhere in Madison and throughout the U.S.”

Madison’s community gardens, however, “continue to compete with other forms of development as a land use,” are often bound by only annual leases, and are subject to development pressures and the notion of interim use. While they receive “critical support” from the Parks Division and the Community Development Block Grant program, the city offers no secure funding or permanent status in planning policies. Despite a strongly-worded Common Council resolution in 1991 and recommendations in the 1991 and 1997 Parks and Open Space Plans, implementation of a more stable scenario for community gardens has not occurred. (A garden can be eligible for a site acquisition grant under the Urban Green Space

The Troy Gardens Project in Madison represents “a model for community-driven land use decision making.”

Community garden supporters in Madison, Wisconsin, rally for increased protection of gardens.
portion of the State Stewardship Program, but it must first be identified in the city’s master land-use plan indicating that an official goal will be fulfilled. Getting identified in the master plan is the key.)

Still, garden activists, and their allies, have persisted. The Madison Community Gardeners Coalition (MCGC), a volunteer-run, city-wide umbrella organization, represents community gardeners’ interests, assists with garden organization and leadership, and works to secure more space and tenure. Community Action Coalition, an 18-year-old nonprofit, manages community gardens primarily for low-income residents. Well-organized community centers run some Madison gardens. The Madison Area Community Land Trust, Growing Power, Inc., a support organization and land trust for multicultural and multigenerational garden initiatives, and the Urban Open Space Foundation, which secures conservation easements, were formed in the past few years and offer ongoing succor.

In October 1997, the Common Council directed the establishment of the Advisory Committee on Community Gardens to report on ways the city can create new gardens and sustain existing ones. That charge led to the committee’s comprehensive report, “Growing a Stronger Community with Community Gardens: An Action Plan for Madison.” In the fall of 1999, the plan was presented to the council. It enumerated five overall policies and the actions necessary to administer them. To provide greater security for tenants, for example, the plan stated that various city authorities and agencies “will extend” leases for a minimum of five years. To support gardens through planning and zoning actions, the plan specified the city “will include community gardens in the city-wide land use plan as recommended civic space.” Madison’s Common Council voted to pass the plan—but not until it changed the language throughout from “will” to “will consider.”

“They took the teeth out of the resolution,” says Anna Rabin, a Community Action Coalition VISTA worker and member of MCGC. “There was no reason not to pass it—it doesn’t obligate the city to anything, and at least on paper the city supports community gardens.” One outcome, she says, has been a good deal of media coverage, which she hopes will lead to even more public support. “We wanted specific language,” says John Bell, chair of the advisory committee and a community gardener, “and what we had to accept is more tentative. The way I see it, we have a plan and now we have to grapple with the council to get each phase implemented.”

The council did appropriate $60,000 to buy land for a community garden within the next year, and an anonymous donor has given $10,000 toward a garden. But the council dropped a proposed garden coordinator position. Bell said the advisory committee asked the mayor to continue the committee or to establish some community garden council with diverse representation, but an answer has not been forthcoming. “The 1991 resolution failed to materialize, I think, because no groups took ownership,” he says. “Community gardening is perceived here as ‘poor people,’ people without political clout, so you can pull the rug out from under them. It took us 18 months to write the report, and we’ll continue the dialogue with city government, we’ll keep pressing and be the watchdog.”

The Baltimore Model

“Neighborhood Open Space Management: A Report on Greening Strategies in Baltimore and Six Other Cities,” undertaken by the Green Communities division of Parks & People Foundation of Baltimore, offers one “road map” of how community garden and open space advocates can assess the situation in their city in order to plan actions that lead to formal city policy or municipal code. The study, which was prompted by an increasing inventory of vacant lots, looked at open space policies and procedures in
Baltimore and six cities with similar demographic and socioeconomic profiles. The objective was to focus especially on small neighborhood green spaces and develop a comprehensive strategy for the city, which does not have a formal open space policy.

Parks & People Foundation is an independent nonprofit that supports urban greening, restoration of natural resources, and a wide range of recreational and educational opportunities for youth. Founded in the mid-1980s by a group of citizen activists who understood that the city could not do everything, the foundation has evolved from its early efforts to support the Department of Recreation and Parks and has forged partnerships with a host of groups and agencies. “We act as a liaison between community groups and city government,” says Sally Loomis, then director of Green Communities. “That’s the niche we fill.”

Green Communities oversees a community forestry program that includes restoring vacant lots into community gardens and parks, planting trees and streetscaping, and developing market gardens (funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Food Security Initiative); a community grants program that funds neighborhood and community greening projects; and the urban resources initiative (URI) that focuses on conducting applied research and implementing the findings. The initiative is a partnership of Parks and People, the Recreation and Parks Department, and Yale University’s School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and attracts research interns from there and other nearby universities. The two-year open-space management project began in spring 1997 as one of the URI’s projects.

To determine how small open spaces are currently managed in Baltimore, researchers looked at city- and community-managed open spaces and vacant lots, tax and lien abatements, options for private ownership, government and nonprofit urban gardening programs, and land trusts/land banking. They also looked at these factors in six cities with similar demographics: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, New York and Philadelphia. The study found that a key ingredient for successful management of small open spaces is “a strong partnership among three primary groups: grassroots organizations, most often community gardening groups . . . technical assistance groups, usually nonprofits that provide support to the gardening groups . . . and urban land trusts that lend stability to projects by acquiring title to the properties, thus protecting them from the immediate pressures of development and in many cases preserving the sites in perpetuity.”

Other key elements the report identifies are an overall city space plan or strategy and a “strong partnership between local government and the other groups (generally nonprofits) participating in the process.”

Atlanta and Detroit, where programs receive practically no city support, are missing one of the key ingredients: a strong partnership between local government and community groups. However, alliances between community gardening/urban greening groups and anti-hunger campaigns are quite strong “. . . and are highly compelling to potential funders.”

The study notes that “Cities without comprehensive open space strategies and the benefit of working partnerships are less likely to achieve high-level results. In these cases, gardening groups frequently encounter more obstacles in getting the services they need . . . . As a result, the cities have greater difficulty
ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN A COMMUNITY GARDEN ORDINANCE

In crafting ordinances, localities must assess their context, such as the number, size and location of vacant lots, the climate, gardeners’ interests in food production and marketing, the real estate market, and the potentially interested group of gardeners. In older cities, community garden ordinances may be a part of a larger effort of city restructuring to facilitate the process of returning abandoned, tax-delinquent property to “productive use.” In other contexts where vacant public land is less of a problem, the people to be served by gardens may be the point of departure for programming and legislation. For example, the establishment of instructional gardening programs in schools may lead to youth involvement in community services.

In addition, the nonprofit and private sector entities that exist or can be created to meet local needs is another variable that must be considered. The model adopted by a locality should provide for the variables for planning actual gardens. It has been suggested that the following local strategies may be used for preserving and developing community gardens: inclusion in the local planning process; permission under zoning ordinances; budget allocations; and staff support by local government. Finally, the local legal context—specifically, whether state enabling legislation is desirable before seeking local support—must be considered in formulating an approach.

With these caveats, the following are common elements of many community garden ordinances or of “best practices” in successful local programs.

1. Assign the duty of inventorying vacant public lots and vacant private lots in low-income neighborhoods and the duty to make that information readily accessible to the public.

2. Authorize contracting with private landowners for lease of vacant lots.

3. Authorize use of municipal land for minimum terms long enough to elicit commitment by gardeners, such as five years, and provide for permanent dedication to the parks department after five years of continuous use as a community garden.

4. Provide for clearing of rubble and contamination where needed, and for regular trash collection.

5. Prepare land for gardening by tilling and building raised beds, configuring some gardens for access by disabled gardeners.

6. Provide for access to water without charge to gardeners.

7. Provide compost from the locality’s recycling programs, if available.

8. Provide tools, hoses and secure storage facilities for tools and other necessary items.

9. Tap resources for training about gardening, including organic methods or pesticide use, and consulting about particular garden problems.

10. Provide technical assistance to support programs with youth, elderly, disabled, low income, and other populations depending on neighborhood needs and interests.

11. Provide signage, if requested.

12. Network with farmers’ markets, entrepreneurship programs, vocational education, and organizational leadership programs.

13. Provide for liability insurance against personal injury.

14. Permit sale of excess produce by charitable organizations.

15. Provide trash collection service.

16. Provide maintenance for adjacent park property.

17. Provide favorable tax treatment for loan of private land.

18. Identify sources of program materials (for teachers, youth and senior counselors, etc.).

19. Provide a funding mechanism to cover the locality’s costs in establishing a computer database and mapping program, property acquisition and maintenance, and technical assistance.

Jane E. Schukoske
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Should community gardens be more visible in open space plans and municipal policy? Of course. But . . . “that requires some political work that few garden advocates have done.”
establishing a sense of permanence in their open spaces and, in turn, have difficulty sustaining them.”

The project concludes that community participation and local government support are critical, that cities with a three-part structure have the “strongest and most effective open space programs,” and that cities with “organized and proactive umbrella organizations or coalitions of greening groups” are better able to solicit the support of local governments.” In addition, well-maintained spaces show a community’s care but may attract more development, and steps should be taken to protect the spaces when development pressures are low. Recommendations for Baltimore include creating an open space council with diverse representation of the public and private groups and citizens; mounting an “awareness” campaign; revising city and state policies and procedures, making it easier to reclaim vacant land, to manage city-owned land, and to diversify management of vacant land; and instituting an independent, urban land trust to preserve established open spaces and provide insurance and guidance.

The project’s preliminary findings have been presented and the Department of Planning has incorporated many suggestions in its 1999 Plan Baltimore, a broad 20-year draft document that sets goals for future development and supports neighborhood-based planning. “The department recognizes that the city needs an open space plan,” Loomis notes. “The plan only takes open space so far.” Advocates have a relatively new, supportive mayor, and many of the recommendations are in the works, although some are going more slowly than others.

While community garden activists may not have an organization such as Parks & People to work with, they can use some of the same strategies to assess their situation. “I think that you need to identify the influential people, the people with the ear of city government,” Loomis says. “You need a broad base of citizen support, and also some politicians. That could be a state delegate or some other state politicians.” Partnerships are key, she emphasizes. “That’s how Parks and People has grown. There will be a lot of other groups [in a city] who have pieces and who need to collaborate.” Relationships with community groups and with city government people were built during a “whole period of laying groundwork,” Loomis notes. “Until 1993 we were very small.”

Loomis also suggests looking at what your city has and what it is missing: “You don’t want to duplicate what someone else is doing. We don’t provide much assistance to community groups on vegetable gardening projects, for instance. The Cooperative Extension Service helps people with that, so we work with them and send people there. But we don’t have a land trust and we need one.” She cautions also that “despite the fact people are moving out of a city, development pressures on the land still exist.” Unprotected natural areas that may be important environmentally or community gardens in so-called “good areas” may be under pressure for other uses.

Local Politics and Beyond

When law professor Jane Schukoske searched various legal codes for the term “community gardens” or “urban gardens,” she noted that they are underused terms that “have not as yet worked their way into very many local codes.” Why, one may ask, when community gardens are welcomed and vital in many communities and neighborhoods, when there is great energy locally with gardens, and when “sustainable cities” and “livability” and “smart growth” are buzzwords, should community gardens be absent from policy discussions? Should community gardens be more visible in open space plans and municipal policy? Of course. But, Schukoske thinks, “that requires some political work that few garden advocates have done.”

The Trust for Public Land’s Andrew Stone, a former ACGA board member, says unequivocally, “You must engage in the political process.”

Facilitating local advocacy by providing adaptable plans or materials that busy workers can use to assess their particular situation can be especially useful. The Community Food Security Coalition, a natural ally of community gardeners, provides advocates with a guide that clearly presents an overview of city and county government functions and policies that affect food security. “Getting Food on the Table: An Action Guide to Local Food Policy” also notes potential funding sources, offers case studies of some established organizations and guidance for organizing based on successes, and describes various local food policy resources. For example, an advocate in any city can figure out how the Department of Public Works affects community gardens and who to contact in the department to get help with water access.
pipes and spigots, and so on. Or you can look up Parks and Recreation Department and get ideas about how community gardens fit into a department, what kinds of services to ask for, and who to target for leases and land use. The guide, as the introduction notes, “is designed to support local efforts to promote community food security, by helping readers to understand the breadth of policies affecting their local food system, evaluate policy barriers and opportunities, develop innovative policy solutions, and identify useful resources.”

The coalition provides an organizer and training, says Andy Fisher, the executive director, to develop ad hoc, public-private food policy councils, similar to a city commission, in partnership with a city. In Los Angeles the Food Policy Council lobbies the city council for funds for community gardens and farmers’ markets, he notes, while in other places councils have provided a planning element, often planning for food distribution. At the federal level, the coalition, and ACGA, both continue to be involved in the development of the U.S.D.A.’s Community Food Security Initiative and with an urban agriculture committee to do a policy paper.

Networking with a host of compatible regional and national organizations within a national umbrella coalition may have important advantages, not the least of which is a full-time staff whose job is to keep you informed and advocate for you. ACGA’s leaders are volunteers with multiple responsibilities, and many community gardeners are overwhelmingly busy in their communities. “To the extent that you want community gardens to be part of city policy about neighborhood and community open space,” says Kathy Blaha, vice president for programs at the Trust for Public Land in Washington, D.C., “I think what National Neighborhood Coalition (NNC), and its partners like the Ford Foundation, are doing will begin to set an agenda for many cities as to how to think about smart growth at the neighborhood level.” Since community gardens are a fundamental part of neighborhood and community life, Blaha says, NNC’s perspective is appealing.

How can you attract growth back to cities? How do we think about open space and housing and public education as policy at the neighborhood level? NNC’s mission is to answer these questions.

NNC, a nonprofit network formed in 1979 and based in Washington, bills itself as “the voice of neighborhoods.” Under executive director Betty Weiss, it serves as a link to the capital, a source of information about programs and policy, and an advocate for low-income and minority neighborhoods and rural areas for a variety of community development issues. At a monthly forum, NNC offers presentations by senior government officials and policymakers from federal agencies, the private sector and Capitol Hill to give a neighborhood perspective either on general or on specific policy issues. Coalition members can exchange news and information.

In the increasing attention paid to “smart growth,” NNC talks about reinvestment in existing neighborhoods and “tries to bring a low-income neighborhood focus to the discussion,” Weiss says, a voice that it considers otherwise missing. “The smart growth movement poses some real challenges for low-income neighborhoods and some real dangers if they are not involved in the whole conversation. We are trying to raise their awareness of why smart growth is not just an environmental issue and that it’s about neighborhood and community.” NNC is a member of the Smart Growth Network, a coalition that encourages economic, environmental and social development that better serves the needs of communities.
“It’s not within our purview to deal with individual neighborhoods, to say what should happen in a neighborhood. That depends on each neighborhood’s values,” Weiss notes. “Our role is to help community-based organizations control what kind of development they want. What we encourage are connections among those groups, such as community gardening groups, that have a role in the [development/revitalization] conversation.”

She and research assistant Leah Kalinowsky suggest that community garden groups look at how they work with other groups both in their neighborhood and across neighborhoods to the larger metro region. “There needs to be an awareness at the regional level, but focused on what’s good for individual neighborhoods,” Kalinowsky says. Through this kind of networking, gardeners may have a better chance to affect policy, and it can be part of educating and building a constituency for community gardens—of vital importance. Says Weiss: “To the extent that there’s a strong constituency for gardens, there’s a better chance of surviving development and growth pressures as part of a network.

“We’ve been around long enough to have a lot of credibility, and the reason for that is our large base of membership, all kinds of groups concerned about neighborhoods.”

The daily grind of establishing community gardens, of securing land and supplies, getting the water turned on and the seeds distributed, developing garden leaders, and attending to myriad details can leave activists wondering how they can possibly cope with influencing city and regional, much less national, policy. But consider the alternative: a garden neighbors have come to regard as a good and sustaining feature in their lives that disappears. Before they plant a garden that may be paved over for parking or bulldozed by developers, it may be time, for some community gardeners at least, to consider sowing next season’s crop in a different field.
REPORT

Millennium Gardens: Q and A with the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman

Editor’s Note:
Recently, ACGA had the opportunity to present some questions about the Millennium Gardens Initiative, a major component of the Millennium Green undertaking of the White House Millennium Council, to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman.

Glickman has served in the Cabinet since March 1995. Previously, he represented the 4th Congressional District of Kansas for 18 years in the U.S. House of Representatives, was the chief architect of the past four farm bills, and was the original author of House legislation to streamline and reorganize the USDA. He served for two years in the early 1990s as Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Before his election to Congress in 1976, Glickman was a partner in the law firm of Sargent, Klenda, and Glickman and a trial attorney for the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Here are the secretary’s answers.

Q. What form will USDA support take, financially especially?

A. The USDA Millennium Gardens Initiative will build public and private partnerships that significantly increase the number and size of community and school gardens, as well as help home gardeners donate excess food to organizations that help feed low-income Americans.

President Clinton has requested $5.25 million in new funding for nonprofit groups and faith-based organizations to expand community-based efforts to fight hunger, improve nutrition, strengthen local food systems, and help low-income families move from poverty to self-sufficiency.

USDA and its partners in the Cooperative Extension System will provide technical assistance, national attention, and, when possible, limited seed money to finance such efforts. Every step of the way, we will work closely with nonprofit groups with expertise in this area, like the ACGA. President Clinton has requested $5.25 million in new funding for nonprofit groups and faith-based organizations to expand community-based efforts to fight hunger, improve nutrition, strengthen...
local food systems, and help low-income families move from poverty to self-sufficiency. If these funds are approved by Congress, community gardens stand to benefit.

Let me thank the ACGA and its members for their guidance in shaping the USDA Millennium Gardens Initiative. I appreciate the efforts of your president, Tom Tyler, and other board members and staff, in helping us shape this important initiative.

Q. Will state offices hire or assign someone as a garden coordinator to give technical help?

A. Each state will soon have a USDA Community Gardening Coordinator, who will be an employee of USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service or that state’s Cooperative Extension System. Each coordinator will help USDA agencies, nonprofit groups, Indian Tribes, school districts, state and local government agencies, private businesses, other Federal agencies, and individuals in working together to craft and implement state-wide gardening action plans. The ACGA membership will be critical partners in developing these action plans.

Q. How will USDA start more gardens? And how will it target specific areas?

A. There are thousands of community gardening efforts already underway which USDA wants to support by helping them to grow. We will identify groups that have already been successful in gardening, and work closely with them to help expand their efforts and will especially target low-income areas with high levels of food insecurity.

Q. How do you see community gardening fitting into the overall food security scheme and into sustainable community development?

A. Community gardening is a vital component of community food production and marketing, dovetailing well with USDA efforts to promote farmers markets, bolster community supported agriculture projects, and help small farmers sell products directly to school districts. What greatly impresses me is the amazing transformation in communities that these gardens make where they are established. Community gardens provide residents with food, exercise, and fresh air. Perhaps most importantly, these gardens bring communities together.

USDA actively promotes community livability through, among other programs and initiatives, the Urban Resources Partnership, an initiative of USDA, DOI, EPA and HUD. In addition, the Urban and Community Forestry Program provides funding to community organizations for tree planting and environmental education activities. The ACGA membership works with these sorts of programs every day. We want to help highlight that work and inspire a whole generation of community gardening activists.

Q. What further initiatives might USDA take to secure garden land and to support community gardens as relevant, permanent land use? Do you recognize the problem of gardening on often impermanent land? Will USDA perhaps make recommendations to mayors and cities?

A. In most instances, land-use issues can only be decided by state and local authorities. I, however, will continue to do my part to raise awareness about the importance of preserving open space for gardening and farming. In addition, I’ll work with other members of the President’s Cabinet, including Secretaries Babbitt (Department of the Interior) and Cuomo (Department of Housing and Urban Development) to determine whether there are parts of the country in which Federal lands can be set-aside for community gardens. Last month, for example, I announced a Memorandum of Understanding with HUD that will bring environmental concerns into their HOPE VI program for affordable housing.
HOW TO LOBBY SUCCESSFULLY

Whether you’re looking for money, trying to gain government approval for a new garden, or staving off developers hoping to cash in on your gardens, you probably have discovered that government officials can have real impacts—positive and negative—on your community gardens. This is why lobbying, and the time and energy you devote to developing and maintaining good relations with government officials, can more than pay for itself (notice we resisted using “any reap/sow” metaphors).

As you consider bringing your message to government officials, remember one thing: these officials should want to help you as much as you want or need their assistance. Why? Because you are helping them do their jobs by improving the lives and neighborhoods of their constituents. Your gardens provide green space and improve the environment in urban communities, they provide food support for those in need and reconnect people to the earth. And perhaps most importantly, your gardens bring communities together. These accomplishments are by no means insignificant and elected officials should want to help make sure you thrive and survive, if for no other reason than because it can make them look good in the process.

Outreach

Before discussing lobbying, we would like to say a few words about outreach. If possible, we encourage you to initiate outreach—letting elected officials know who you are and what you do—with elected officials before you need something from them. The importance of outreach cannot be overstated. It is much easier to approach a member of congress or a city council member for help if they already know about your garden and the positive impact you are having in the community. So make it a point to invite elected officials to everything from ribbon cuttings to harvest festivals. And if you have a newsletter or other regular communications, remember to put them on the distribution list.

Lobbying

There really is no trick to lobbying. Like most things, good organization and message development is the key. The first step is to identify your objectives. What is it that you need? Money from the federal government? Donation of city land? Use of school property for educational programs? Be specific. Although this sounds like common sense (and it is), you’d be surprised how many companies and organizations lobby without knowing exactly what it is that they want. As such, they are not able to articulate a clear, concise message.

After you know what it is that you need, develop a white paper. In this document, lay out what it is that you are looking to accomplish and how the government (local, state, and/or federal) can assist you in meeting these goals. Include information that demonstrates the need for your request. For example, let a member of Congress know that there are 200 more community members who wish to participate in community gardens but that funding is not available. Without more money, these folks will be turned away. Remember all politics is local, so be sure to include what benefits will accrue to the community.

Finally, try to anticipate questions that these officials may have. For example, whenever you go to the federal government for money, you are likely to be asked questions such as: Why should the federal government fund this local initiative? Have foundations and the private sector been approached? Is there precedent for the federal government funding such programs? Anticipating these questions, and having good answers for them in your white paper, is one of the most important exercises in which you will engage.

Next, assess elected officials’ roles and identify a small target list to lobby. In other words, know who the real decision-makers are. If you want money from the federal government, you need to make sure that members of the appropriations committees are approached. Of course, these members may not represent your gardens, so you will also have to enlist the help of your local members as well. If there is certain property you wish to obtain, your targets may be local, county, or state officials. Again, this may sound like common sense, but it is vitally important that you work efficiently. Make sure that the people you approach have the power, as well as the incentive, to help you.

You should also identify and work with other groups that will benefit from your proposal. If you are asking for money for a garden associated with a school, perhaps school administrators, teachers, or students can write letters. Conservation groups, public housing administrators, advocates for the elderly are all groups that potentially might help you in your efforts. Just be sure they know what message you are delivering so that the elected officials will hear a consistent voice.

Now you are ready to approach elected officials. Below, we listed some lobbying tips that will assist you in this phase. One point not included in that list, however, is an important one. Be persistent. As former staffers, we can tell you that it is very unlikely if you have one lobbying visit that you will get what you want without reinforcing your message with follow-up phone calls, meetings, and letters. In politics, the old adage is certainly true—the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

**Tips For Successful Lobbying**

As you approach elected officials, bear in mind the following tips. Although we developed these tips based on our lobbying of federal officials, we believe they hold true when dealing with elected officials at all levels of government.

1. **Staff do the bulk of the work.** We don’t just say this because we used to work for members of Congress. View meetings with staff not as a disappointment that you will not be meeting with the elected official. Rather, realize that this can be golden opportunity to establish and nurture a relationship, to spend a little extra time with the staffer ensuring that they understand the importance of your garden and what it is that you need. This is the person that is going to do most of the leg work on your behalf, so make sure they are in your corner.

2. **Short and sweet please.** Whether you meet with an elected official or a staff member, remember that their time is limited. You should be prepared to introduce yourself, your garden, and your needs in about twenty minutes. This way, you can leave several minutes for questions and be in and out in half an hour.

3. **You won’t get what you don’t ask for.** There is no need to beat around the bush when asking for help from an elected official. That’s why most people come to see them. Be direct and make sure there is no room for misinterpretation or ambiguity with respect to your needs.

4. **All politics are local.** As we said earlier, elected officials should want to help you, if only in looking out for their own interests. Remind them of this by reinforcing how your garden positively affects the neighborhoods represented by the official. Be specific if possible (e.g., number of community members involved in the garden, number of individuals who use the garden’s produce as a source of food).

5. **What you say and how you say it counts.** From the interaction we have had with ACGA and its members, we know you are a hardworking and pleasant group of folks. However, it doesn’t hurt to be reminded that people, including elected officials and their staffs, respond more positively to courteous and friendly requests. While we still encourage you to be direct in asking for assistance, remember the “golden rule” about treating others the way you would like to be treated.

Don’t be intimidated. Helping your garden and its volunteers is part of your elected officials’ job. They should want to help. If we can leave you with one thing, it’s to take the first step in this process. Involve government officials in your garden. We think you’ll be glad you did.
CITYSCAPE

Atlanta: Old City, Hip Sensibility

Gone are the old images: a city burning while Clark Gable tries to save it, a slow, drawling place of peaches and plantations. Atlanta, hub of the New South, calls up Olympic crowds, Buckhead mansions, miles of criss-crossed highways, “can do” hustle, and a beguiling climate. East Coast young people who want the big city, but not New York, head to Georgia and add to the hip mixture of big business, eclectic shops, fabulous old neighborhoods, and innate charm.

Still, even with its famous growth, witness Tom Wolfe’s rapacious developers and the highest net immigration in the country, Atlanta is a “very green city,” says Lee May, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s garden columnist. “Atlanta is a great gardening town. It has a tradition of being green, and historically it’s been known as the city of trees. Psychologically, gardening is very, very important to the residents in general.” One reason is a climate that allows Atlantans to grow some semi-tropica—jasmine and gardenias, for instance—and also a number of plants that thrive in the North. “We are right on the line of climate zones,” May notes, “and we don’t get such cold weather and hard frosts.” Northern newcomers, who are often attracted to southern traditions, are intrigued by Atlanta’s long growing season. “Southerners historically are avid gardeners, and there are still lots of people around who remember a time when people had to garden for food, who didn’t want to buy vegetables. That attitude persists,” says May, who thinks it “ought to be illegal to serve storebought tomatoes.” A grower himself primarily of ornamentals, he nevertheless wouldn’t be caught without tomato plants.

Community gardening in Atlanta fulfills an important need, he says, and “like all other kinds of gardening, connects people to the earth and educates them about the importance of keeping the earth green. Community gardens especially show children how important it is to be connected to the earth.” Community gardeners from around the nation will have a chance to check out some of those gardens, and other city landmarks, during the American Community Garden Conference this October.
Gardening Association’s 21st annual conference September 7–11 in Atlanta. It is the first time the Atlanta gardeners, who hosted the 1997 southeast regional conference, are organizing the national meeting. (See page 19 for more information.)

**Leading the Way**

Developing leaders now and for the future is an integral feature of the Atlanta Urban Gardening Program (AUGP), begun in 1978 as part of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Program. “Our primary focus is underserved communities,” explains Bobby L. Wilson, area extension agent and the program’s chief, “but we also work with a lot of schools in Fulton and DeKalb counties. We’ve expanded our program now to upper middle class as well as inner city schools.” AUGP oversees more than 200 school and community gardens and provides ongoing help each year based on their needs, including tilling, seeds, and technical assistance. Gardens are at public housing sites, senior centers, facilities for troubled youth, residential and day mental health centers, churches, public and private schools, preschool centers, and summer camps. The program emphasizes organic methods, composting, and the “3 R’s” (reduce, reuse, recycle), including a “circular gardening technique” that uses 55-, 25- and 5-gallon drums.

Wilson is well known for his adult leadership training and community development program, a monthly gathering that includes a gardening lesson, a discussion of leadership issues, and potluck-lunch fellowship with other city gardeners. Called the Atlanta Leadership Gardening Association, the forum unites gardeners from 14 or 15 neighborhoods in a common cause. Wilson and his team travel around the city to pick up the gardeners, many from public housing communities, and bring them to a central location, where they can chat about how to cope with various neighborhood concerns as well as how to problem-solve in their gardens.

The leadership program evolved when Atlanta, part of the 23-city United States Department of Agriculture Urban Gardening Program, lost funds and staff when the program was cut. “We used to go out to the communities,” he explains, “but with less staff we had to devise a mechanism to continue to provide technical assistance to the community. So now we bring the folks to us.” The program pays off. “There are a lot of little successes that spring from the leadership association,” says Wilson, a veteran professional who began in the late ’70s with a horticultural program in St. Paul, Minn., then moved to Atlanta in the mid-1980s. One association member served on the board of MARTA, the multimillion dollar mass transit program, and eventually become chair; others have gone on to head a PTA and to be more active in organizing their local gardening programs. “Lots of little stories,” he says, “but they’re big stories for us.”

AUGP, mindful of future leaders, works with about 4,000 students, mainly in elementary but also in a few middle and high schools. “In our program with schools we talk more about an appreciation of where food comes from,” Wilson notes. “Students learn to care for something that’s actually growing, and they see a plant start from seed and mature. We go way beyond the science aspect of it—we try to incorporate the gardening program into the whole curriculum.” Gardening is the starting point, a tool, for geography and math, for writing and entrepreneurial skills. Students now have a letter-exchange to share gardening experiences with students outside Atlanta. In 1999 AUGP expanded its program to the northern part of Fulton County with the intent to work with 100 students, but ended up with more than 400. Says Wilson: “It’s the best-kept secret in Atlanta. But once school people find out about it, they practically knock the door down. They want to be a part of it, to be involved. We don’t hide, but also we don’t advertise the program. We wouldn’t be able to keep up with the requests.”
Organizing for Food

The Atlanta Community Food Bank, as part of its mission to fight hunger and convinced that community gardening is one solution to food insecurity and urban blight, launched the Community Gardening Initiative in 1996. Led by energetic organizer Fred Conrad, the project now includes 35 gardens, distributes seedlings and some 3,000 seed packets annually, assists new groups with siting and planning, and serves as an information and materials clearinghouse. “I’m very connected with people in the neighborhoods and also plugged in with the nonprofits,” says Conrad, who finds volunteers, writes grants, solicits donations from local farms and seed houses, and generally “puts things together.” His support network includes volunteers from Hands On Atlanta and the Atlanta Community Tool Bank. A nonprofit service group founded in 1989, Hands On Atlanta matches its more than 20,000 volunteers with service projects and manages a 135-member AmeriCorps contingent. The tool bank—“it’s huge”—lends tools of all types to other nonprofits and neighborhood groups as one facet of its programs.

The gardens are often on abandoned lots in urban neighborhoods and at senior centers, residential facilities for the mentally and developmentally challenged, parks, recreation and daycare centers, and such. They are initiated and maintained by neighborhood groups, with most of the work done by the gardeners. “We don’t have many very large gardens,” Conrad notes. “Usually a garden has four or five to 15 gardeners. It’s a very long growing season here, really a year-round proposition, so people don’t get a break. We get really busy about Valentine’s Day and keep going.” Gardens often have partners, such as local businesses, parks departments, environmental groups, churches, PTAs, city agencies, and of course the extension service, who assist and are committed to community building. Conrad oversees a demonstration garden at the food bank, gardens in five different community gardens, and actually heads one of them.

The food bank is the local coordinator for the “Plant a Row for the Hungry,” a national campaign begun by the Garden Writers Association of America to encourage gardeners to grow extra vegetables and fruit for the hungry. “Some of the larger neighborhood gardens have setasides for the food bank,” Conrad says, “and the Oakhurst Community Garden Project plants half its space for philanthropy and half for the gardeners.”

Recycling for Compost

Where would good gardens be without compost and mulch? Thanks to the DeKalb County Landfill and the City of Atlanta, lucky Atlanta residents can count on the city’s yard trimmings composting program to enrich their gardens. The project began in 1997, with its first compost available the following year. The city contracts with a vendor to collect and compost yard trimmings as part of its recycling program, and distributes it, minus a percentage kept by the city for its own use, during an annual giveaway. “Hundreds and hundreds of people come,” says Recycling Coordinator Linda Disney cheerfully. “It’s quite an event. If you are a city resident, you’re eligible for one cubic yard. That’s about a small pickup truck load.” The giveaway is usually scheduled around Earth Day, right before planting. The city also offers wood chips and mulch recycled from its trees program. Sixty volunteers help give away home composting bins and seeds and provide technical advice. Says Disney: “We provide shovels, but we don’t load!”

Her program donates and delivers truckloads of 14 cubic yards to urban gardens and she hears from Cathy Walker, an AUPG garden adviser and Wilson’s colleague, and Fred Conrad often. “In one year we can support 20 or more gardens,” she says, “Some get six or eight deliveries and that can include mulch and wood chips, which people often use for paths.” 1999, however, was a tough year: rainfall was down 12 inches and reduced the program’s yield considerably. “We had terrific heat and no rain—the gardens were deci-
mated,” Disney relates. “It went beyond amending with watering. There’s a certain point when things get so dehydrated that there’s nothing you can do except cry, that’s it.”

The gardens have access to city water, without which they would not be viable. “Fred used to carry a portable meter around,” Disney recalls, “and hook it into fire hydrants and measure that way, which of course was helpful in start-ups before a garden got its own meter.

Enabling Children

When Sally Wylde finished a midlife “recharging” and theology school, she found her mission: developing a children’s gardening program “to promote cooperation among diverse members of our neighborhood.” She began the Oakhurst Community Garden Project in the City of Decatur, where she lives. A very diverse four-square mile town of 17,400 residents, Decatur is the second oldest municipality in metro Atlanta and is now encompassed by it. “We have fancy Victorian houses up one side of the street,” says Wylde, “and more simple bungalows up the other. We have a housing mix, racial mix, ethnic mix, with elderly people, gay people, quite an extraordinary little town. And it’s small-scale enough so that you can make a difference.” The project, in its fourth year, teaches children during after-school and summer programs how to propagate vegetables and flowers from seed and to care for their own garden. The garden has a beehive and a beekeeper who shares knowledge about the pollinators with the kids. A varying number of ducks and chicks live in a pen built by neighbors of all ages. Emory University students have helped design and install a small pond near the garden’s butterfly beds; another intern created a bed to teach about the medicinal benefits of herbs. High school students are involved, with the help of an environmental group, in monitoring a stream that flows through the garden, and a mentoring program with middle school students attracted four who grew and harvested organic produce that they marketed to a Decatur restaurant. A collaboration with the Decatur Recreation Department gives kids an after-school opportunity to learn about nutrition, exercise, and basic gardening. And some students have helped beautify locations in the business district and at their schools.

Wylde, the executive director, writes grants and says she’s found “some terrific supporters,” including the Turner Foundation in the beginning, but of course the money hunt is ongoing. Now she’s trying to initiate a fundraiser to buy three additional lots that are on the market. “We think it’s essential,” Wylde explains, “to secure that land to expand our green space within a very busy neighborhood. One of the primary reasons is to incorporate accessibility for the handicapped throughout the garden.” She would like to accommodate handicapped kids at a school a few blocks away, and folks from the Shepherd Center, a nearby residence for disabled folks under construction. Says Wylde: “I’m also learning how to make environmental concerns relevant in a city neighborhood. How are we going to expect any of these kids to respect and take care of the earth if they have no contact or exposure or see the mystery of it?” Lots of Outward Bound-type programs exist that immerse people in outdoors experiences. That is different from “seeing the evolution of a garden growing in cycles right here in our own backyard,” she notes.

Some Atlantans are taking notice of their backyard. “Atlanta is growing so rapidly that environ-
mentally it’s just a disaster,” Wylde says, “and we know we’ve got to take action to secure the kind of community we want rather than watching the developers go their own merry way.” Environmental groups are learning they have to fight, to get better organized, and to focus on specific issues, and citizens have come together in round-table discussions to think about addressing the metropolitan area’s changes. Says Wylde, one of the earth’s stewards: “In coalition is our hope. Even though the almighty dollar is usually most important in this town, people are realizing there won’t be a town worth living in if we don’t get ourselves together.”

**Keeping Atlanta Green**

“We are losing trees to development, some quite old and large trees, but there’s a good deal of replanting going on,” notes garden columnist Lee May, who lauds the work of TreesAtlanta and others. An independent, nonprofit citizens group, TreesAtlanta began 15 years ago, founded by Central Atlanta Progress, the downtown business leaders association; the city Parks Department; and the Junior League. Although Atlanta is a heavily forested city, the downtown business district had few trees. Now more than 800 people volunteer their planting and professional skills. Each Saturday from November through March, some 40 volunteers are out planting.

“We plant about 3,000 trees a year,” says TreesAtlanta director Marcia Bansley, “along the streets and around parking lots, mostly in the oldest part of the city—downtown and in midtown.” The organization also plants in neighborhoods “that are trying to redevelop themselves,” she says. Some 470 of the trees are quite large, 16-20 feet tall with a 3 1/2 inch caliper diameter. With advice from the University of Georgia’s horticulture experts, the group plants various maples, elms, oaks and hollies, “upland species that can stand having their feet wet and live in compacted, low-oxygen soil,” Bansley explains.

In 1992, she notes, the city passed a law requiring parking lots to have perimeter trees, but does not enforce it. Instead the greening is often done by TreesAtlanta, which also lobbies for tree protection laws and educates people about how to protect and preserve trees on and near construction and development sites. In fall and spring weekend tree walks—“35 or 40 people attend each time”—during which experts identify and discuss the attributes of different species are popular.

Since 1986 Park Pride Atlanta has been helping to preserve and promote parks and green spaces in the city as well. A nonprofit volunteer organization, Park Pride encourages the acquisition and development of new parks and open spaces, facilitates public-private partnerships to maintain and enhance existing spaces, and if needed, assists in or promotes the development of a master plan for community parks and spaces. Volunteers plant, prune, weed, and paint playground equipment and park furniture. Through a Donate-A-Tree program, people can honor someone they love or celebrate a special occasion by donating a tree, available at various prices, to replace one of the thousands lost in the city parks each year. Companies and co-workers can sponsor a local park under the company name.

Park Pride sponsors the “Big Tree Search” contest for the largest growing native tree in different
categories, and coordinates a week-long Arbor Day Partners event that includes tree plantings and educational programs—for $1 you can wear an “I believe in trees” sticker on Arbor Day. An annual golf tournament, with 25 teams, funds Park Pride’s activities.

Conserving and Educating

The Atlanta Botanical Garden, with 30 acres adjacent to Piedmont Park in the city’s midtown section, has since 1976 developed and maintained plant collections and offered a variety of educational programs. A visitor’s center, Gardenhouse, has an exhibition hall, classrooms, a library and a museum shop. The $5.5 million Dorothy Chapman Fuqua Conservatory was completed in 1989 and houses rare and endangered tropical and desert plants. In 1999, the botanical garden opened the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Children’s Garden, an interactive area devoted to teaching kids how plants help us live, laugh and learn. The botanical garden sponsors a summer day camp on the environment for children and a “Plantmobile” outreach program. Fifteen acres of demonstration gardens highlight plants—herbs, perennials, roses, vegetables, conifers and others—of interest to homeowners. A recently renovated Japanese tea garden has a 400-year-old lantern, a moon gate, bamboo, and fruit trees. A certified backyard wildlife habitat, set up in cooperation with the Georgia Wildlife Federation, displays native plants that attract wildlife. The 15-acre Storza Woods preserves one of the few mature hardwood forests left in Atlanta, affords study of the Piedmont region, and offers a one-and-a-quarter mile nature trail. Other interesting displays include camellias, southern conifers, and palms and succulents hardy in Atlanta.

A nonprofit, self-described “year-round greenery haven,” Wonderland Gardens Inc. offers individual and group gardening, nature walks, and fresh vegetables to observe as they grow and to purchase. The brainchild of Sheldon Fleming, Wonderland is on 10 acres of a former dairy farm that he has turned into a community gardening and educational resource. The programs, for school children, youths, seniors and people with disabilities, are available for teachers to bring their classes, after school, and during the summer. Storyland is for pre-kindergardeners through seven-year-olds, who can come and plant vegetables and hear a story. Children eight to 14 years old team with seniors in community garden plots and grow their own veggies. They also can take a life skills workshop and others beyond basic gardening skills. “We use gardening as a tool,” Fleming says. Some 500-600 children a year come to Wonderland, which has a staff of four and a number of volunteers.

Fleming, whose background is in horticulture and landscaping, began Wonderland after his sister was murdered and he “did what therapeutic gardening is all about.” Later, he says, “I got some friends together to tell them I had an idea I needed help with. We put together a 16-page document that spelled out Wonderland Gardens.” He broke ground in 1996, and has built all the raised beds from recycled lumber and more than a million plastic milk jugs. The walkways use recycled tires. Recently, Wonderland received funds to develop an outdoor classroom and a curriculum using the garden to grow vegetables from around the globe. “We’ll be celebrating the different cultures,” he explains, “and also talking about the rich history of vegetables.”

Fruits and vegetables grown on the site are donated to the Atlanta Community Food Bank and to various shelters, and Fleming has received the Super 17 Award from Turner Broadcasting System, Channel 17, for addressing poverty through these donations. Wonderland has been featured by CNN and the Public Broadcasting System as well.

Three schools, Cascade Elementary, West Manor Elementary, and Carver High, will benefit from plant donations from the Southern Nursery Association and
from funds being raised by Country Living Gardener magazine. The nursery association donates plants each year after its August trade show to Greener Atlanta, a community organization that works with community gardens. Greener Atlanta then distributes the plants, says Mary Anne McConnel, who is co-chair of the organization with Danny Summers, director of Southern Nursery Association. Twelve to 21 gardens receive plants each year, and the school gardens will be included. “The Food Bank usually finds community gardens that need plants,” McConnel says, “and also coordinates volunteers.”

The magazine hopes to raise $6000 for the school gardens, selected by Bobby Wilson’s Urban Gardening Program, through an ongoing people-plant connection effort. “The intent,” says Wilson, “is to showcase these gardens.” Individuals can become members of G.R.O.W.—Gardeners Restore Our World—with a minimum dues of $15. The Hearst magazine Web site has teamed with ACGA “to help communities start, build, and maintain community gardens.”

McConnel noted also that each year a community group benefits from plant donations from the Southeastern Flower Show. “In order to have an impact on inner-city Atlanta,” she says, “we have created a legacy garden that is planted by volunteers and the landscape exhibitors.” The group that benefits then maintains the garden.

Skyland Trail, a mental health center, affords those in treatment an opportunity to engage in healing horticultural activities as therapy and rehabilitation. The center’s facilities include a multitude of garden areas and a greenhouse where residents can participate in vegetable, flower and herb gardening and start plants from seed. They also do flower arranging, use herbs for cooking and crafts, and help the community by donating vegetables from the gardens to a local food bank.

The gardens “help restore physical and mental health to those who work the soil and watch seeds grow.” Community volunteers share their gardening expertise and materials with horticultural therapy groups. Residents can mark a special milestone in their recovery with a planting in the Serenity Garden.

Clearly, Atlanta is a city on the move. Community and school gardens are flourishing and Atlantans’ commitment to providing fresh, home-grown food through food bank and garden donations for those less fortunate, as well as for themselves, is impressive. In a climate lovely for gardening and greening, the city and its residents respond happily, setting out vegetables, planting trees, celebrating flowers, and passing on the accumulated skills and pleasures of growing “green.”
Growing Communities grew out of the American Community Gardening Association’s experience of working with a great variety of community gardens over the past 20 years. In 1995, From the Roots Up (FTRU) was created by ACGA to meet the increasing need for training in how to build sustainable organizations and develop community gardening programs that cultivate local leadership. Over the past four years, FTRU has provided mentors to fledgling organizations and coalitions in 16 cities across the United States and Canada. Each year the program has included one to three day training workshops in which all of the groups and mentors come together for training in community organizing and leadership development. Through feedback from participants, it became apparent that the workshops have played a critical role in helping organizations and coalitions become stronger and have given them tools to be more effective in using gardens to develop new community leaders. The goal of the Growing Communities Manual is to make the knowledge we’ve gained available to all those who want to use community gardens as a tool for community building.

With all their different situations and diverse populations, new garden initiatives still face similar challenges. Starting community gardens requires a broad range of skills from community organizing to fiscal management, from ecological expertise to coalition building, and includes administration, fund raising and program development (for example, children’s programs and entrepreneurial programs).

While a vacant lot can be cleaned up and turned into a beautiful green space in a day, the potential for community development in its deepest sense lies in the processes leading up to and following the physical improvements. Gardens will not succeed if individuals and families do not embrace the project as their own. Organizers can play a crucial role in offering guidance, support, training and technical assistance which help neighbors to reach their goals. However, for gardens to be effective tools for connecting people with local networks and services, they must be community-driven at every phase.

In their zeal to get the garden in the ground, well-intentioned individuals or groups often bypass the careful process essential for encouraging community participation and developing local leadership. By building gardens for people and deciding what is best for them, they disempower the very people who can best revitalize neighborhoods. Time and again we see gardens and garden programs destroy the potential to develop strong leaders and committed participants by occupying people’s time without developing their individual and collective strengths.

The overall objective of the Growing Communities Curriculum is to train organizations and individuals who will continue to function as catalysts for environmental advocacy and community development long after the training sessions. The workshops and manual are grounded in ACGA’s experience that the best way to ensure the sustainability of organizations, gardens and communities is to foster a commitment to “bottom-up” development and a knowledge of how to implement that philosophy.

The Growing Communities Curriculum will bring together the best practices, expertise, and models for using community gardens to cultivate local leadership. These approaches will be tested and evaluated in a series of pilot workshops over the next two years.

In order to build community capacity to address critical social and environmental issues, the workshops and manual will offer guidance in the following areas:

- generating a “philosophy of leadership” which embraces a community’s assets and encourages individuals to assume leadership roles within their communities;
- providing organizing and community-building skills training which fosters community-driven programs;
- developing, respecting and utilizing diversity;
- building and sustaining effective coalitions;

At the training workshop on participatory evaluation in Oakland, Ca., in March, FTRU program coordinator Marian Farrior (l-r) of Madison, Wis., Lubbock Green participant Roy Riddle, and FTRU mentor Nancy Allen of Seattle outline program goals and set criteria for measuring outcomes.
A young man distills his thoughts at the first national forum for youth in community gardening and urban agriculture. ACGA co-sponsored the leadership training with The Food Project.

Kids map connections at the youth leadership training in Boston, August 1999.

- working with local government and other civic entities; and
- improving organizational management, board development and fund raising.

The pilot workshops will be available to adults and youth from a wide variety of racial and cultural backgrounds who wish to learn skills that enable them to take leadership on issues facing their communities. The workshops will also teach these skills to coalitions of businesses, religious groups, city government, mental health organizations, housing and hunger agencies, law enforcement, and other service groups that come together to address environmental/social problems and build local capacity through community gardening. The resulting manual will be widely disseminated in a form that meets the needs of community gardening groups and other community development coalitions.

The Growing Communities Curriculum will make the community gardening movement’s collective experience and wisdom accessible to the hundreds of organizations and grassroots groups throughout the country who are looking for guidance in maximizing the potential of urban gardens to develop people’s effectiveness in dealing with social, environmental and economic problems.

1999 WORKSHOPS

Spring Leadership Training

The From the Roots Up Spring Leadership Training was held March 26–29, 1999 at the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) in Oakland, California. The workshops focused on how to develop and implement skills for working with grass-roots groups in ways that empower neighbors to use gardens as a tool for community development. Topics included community asset mapping; understanding and promoting sustainable grass-roots programs; theory and practice of community organizing (the difference between a “service” model which helps people and an “organizing” model which empowers people to help themselves); designing an application process; cultivating diverse leadership; and grassroots fund raising. A 90-minute film, “The Color of Fear,” was used as part of a diversity workshop, followed by a facilitated discussion on the issues raised in the film.

Each workshop session consisted of a combination of exercises, scenarios, and discussions. The trainers gave a brief overview to set the context for each topic, and the majority of the session consisted of facilitated exercises. Participants contributed their own experiences and worked together on ways to adapt and implement the skills within their own communities. Experienced mentors, together with the workshop leaders, worked with small groups to facilitate discussions and encourage participation.

The weekend also included site visits to the Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley and a tour of the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG) office and gardens.

Rooted in Community: Developing a Youth Movement on Food and the Environment

This youth leadership training took place August 6–8, 1999 in Boston, Mass. ACGA was proud to co-sponsor with The Food Project the first national forum for youth involved in community gardening and urban agriculture. As a result of the gathering, many organizations learned about each other’s work and began to develop ways of working together and a youth newsletter was launched. Rooted in Community 2000 will take place July 28–30 in San Francisco.

Autumn Leadership Training

The Autumn Leadership Training was part of the ACGA Annual Conference in Philadelphia. The pre-conference training day was entitled “Working in Coalition: Opportunities, Challenges, Heartbreaks and Empowerment.” The workshop offered a range of tools and skills to enable people to successfully negotiate the pitfalls and disappointments that can cause coalitions to stagnate, feud or fail.

The Leadership Development Track during the conference included workshops in community organizing, fund raising, and diversity training.

Future workshops and trainings will be announced on the ACGA website as well as through the ACGA newsletter (Multilogue) and on the community garden listserv.

ACGA would like to thank the following funders for their generous support of From the Roots Up and the Growing Communities curriculum: Environmental Support Center, Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, Ittleson Foundation, Merck Family Fund, Peace Development Fund, Threshold Foundation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and individual donors.
Partnering With Millennium Green

Millennium Green, a national project of the White House Millennium Council, is encouraging and promoting the greening of America by recognizing and spotlighting the nation’s many and varied enterprises that help create more livable communities. Led by the Agriculture Department in partnership with the Energy, Transportation, Interior and Education Departments, the project seeks to involve individuals, private and nonprofit groups, and companies, and has signed on a number of partners, including ACGA.

“Our focus is on the greening and conservation of America, on tree planting, and on what gardens mean to community building,” says Pat Garamendi, director of Millennium Green for the USDA. “And on what gardens mean to schools, where they can teach children science and art and wonderful skills through gardening.” The project, she says, looks beyond beautification. It is, as first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton noted in her speech kicking off the project in December 1999, a call to action that hopes to engage “every business, every school, and every citizen to give a gift to the future by planting a tree or cultivating a garden.”

Garamendi, a Californian and former Peace Corps volunteer, served as an administrator at the Peace Corps for the first six years of the Clinton administration, and then as a deputy administrator at USDA overseeing conservation reserve programs before being tapped by Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman to head this project. Although she is coordinating Millennium Green with seven federal agencies, she notes that the work is “really going to be done by nonprofit groups and by individual citizens’ participation, and, we hope, by businesses being inspired to support community gardens and to support and adopt school gardens.”

Millennium Green is the overall umbrella for two distinct efforts: to plant a million gardens, and to plant a tree for every citizen—more than 250 million—by the year 2001. “We have several major nonprofits that are full partners, approved through the White House Millennium Council, that are really integral to the project,” Garamendi explains, “and we have millennium growers in every state.” Major partners include the American Forestry Association, the National Arbor Day Foundation, the American Community Gardening Association, and the National Gardening Association among others.

“I see the ACGA as a real grass-roots, hands-on group with members in many communities,” she says, “and we’re looking to it to be a catalyst in all these communities and to be one of our strongest partners in the gardening side of this.” ACGA, she hopes, will also work with the Department of Education to get a garden in every school.

The project plans to have a gardening coordinator in each state. Garamendi hopes each will attend ACGA’s annual conference in Atlanta to receive some training and knowledge about ongoing community gardening programs and then “tie in very closely with all of the projects you are doing.” While the White House project is part of a millennium celebration, ACGA’s work, she remarks, has been in progress for two decades and will continue. Millennium Green is the White House’s effort to raise awareness, shower praise, encourage participation, and showcase the importance of community and school gardens, urban forestry, and conservation and preservation of those resources that make communities healthy and livable.

Some corporations and businesses have programs to support school gardens, for example, but with the White House revving up the recognition, the hope is to encourage others to sign on in their communities. In one respect, Millennium Green is serving as a vast network to pull together and support many organizations involved in greening and community building.

To date, Glickman has announced a gift of 100 trees to each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia to create Millennial Groves in capital cities across America.

The USDA’s Urban and Community Forestry and Community Food programs have small budgets that provide grants to community groups and nonprofits to assist with urban forestry projects and urban food security programs, many of which have substantial community gardening components.

Garamendi thinks Millennium Green will lead to more preservation of community gardens and more conservation of heritage resources and green space. “If people look beyond beautification to the very important quality of life issues, I believe funding will follow,” she says. “I hope so!”

At the end of 2000 she hopes to culminate the project with a planting at the White House of organic vegetable seeds, contributed by Alice Waters of culinary and Edible Schoolyard renown. A vegetable garden is growing in front of the USDA already.

“At the end of the year,” she says, “we might be able to put together leaders who would continue to stay in touch with each other and talk about the issues and continue the momentum.”
A SUBSCRIPTION TO THE COMMUNITY GREENING REVIEW
Each issue offers profiles of successful programs and people from around the country, legislative developments related to community gardening, land acquisition and funding techniques, horticultural topics, activities for youth, seniors and the handicapped and other issues relevant to community gardening.

MULTILOGUE NEWSLETTER & PUBLICATIONS
Every other month you will receive ACGA’s newsletter, the Multilogue, containing job notices, organizational information, member news, notices of conferences and events, resource referrals and requests, and other timely information. Other publications are available by request, including back issues of the Review, our Start-Up Packet, monographs, and educational handouts on a variety of topics. Every ACGA member will also receive a copy of our most recent ACGA Membership Directory and Annual Report.

DISCOUNTED REGISTRATION AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Meet with other community gardening and open space advocates, volunteers and professional staff, and share information, experiences and fun through workshops, seminars, special interest group sessions, tours and informal discussions. The 2000 Conference is scheduled for xxxx in xxxxxx, xxxxxx.

NETWORKING & MENTORING
Gain access to an informal network providing a wide variety of contacts throughout North America and the world! Mentors are available to identify potential resources and address specific technical matters.

COMMUNITY GARDENING SLIDE SHOW AND VIDEO
The 125-slide show highlights people and programs from across the country, accompanied by a printed script (and is also available to non-members for a fee). ACGA’s video Growing Community From the Roots Up is also available.

FROM THE ROOTS UP TRAINING PROGRAM
ACGA members are eligible to apply to From the Roots Up, ACGA’s initiative to lend intensive technical assistance to five emerging citywide greening organizations per year. Those organizations selected to participate will receive a variety of services from ACGA and its professional mentors, ranging from on-site visits and phone consultations to participation in special From the Roots Up training workshops.

DUES
$25 Individual* & Library
$50 Organizational
$10 Affiliate of Organizational Member
$100 Supporting
$250 Sustaining Sponsorship
$500 Corporate Sponsorship

*Note: Individual memberships are intended for those without organizational affiliation or who are with a member organization and wish to further support ACGA. Memberships are renewable September 1 each year.

HOW
Mail to: ACGA, c/o The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 100 N. 20th Street, 5th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19103-1495 or call us with your name and address at (215) 988-8785 and we will send you a membership packet. Web site: http://communitygarden.org

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