

2020|21



CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY
GARDENS
TODAY

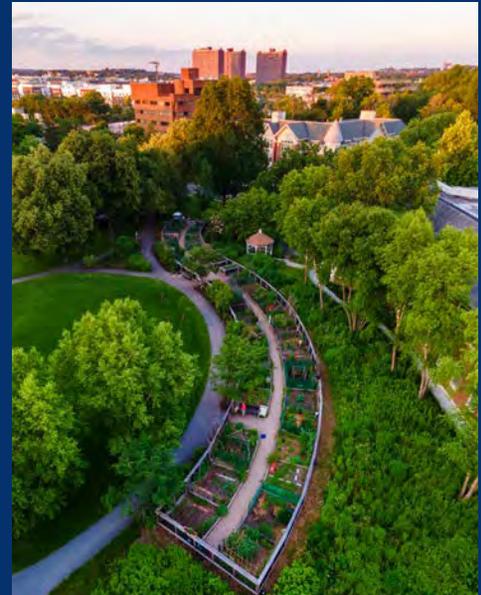


Table of Contents

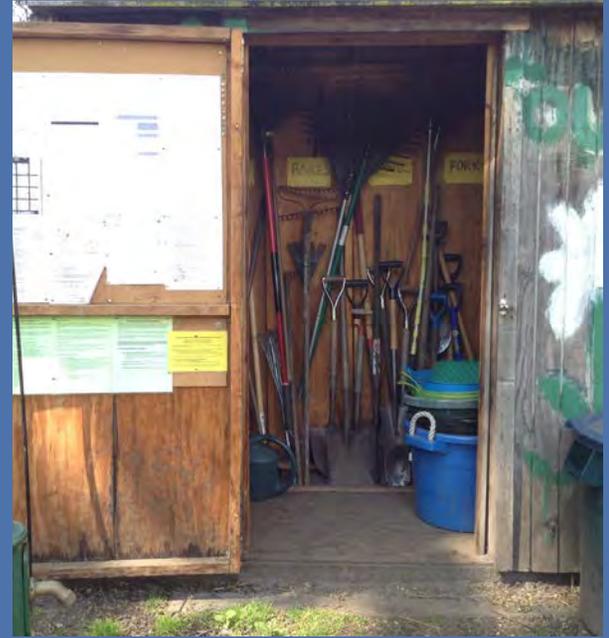
INTRODUCTION.....	3
MAP OF COMMUNITY GARDENS.....	8
1 William G. Maher Community Garden..... Fresh Pond Reservation/Cambridge Highlands, 1974 (as Neville Manor)	10
2 Fresh Pond Reservation/Parkway Garden..... Fresh Pond Reservation/West Cambridge, 1978 (as Parkway at Fresh Pond)	14
3 McMath Park Community Garden; North Cambridge, 1995.....	18
4 Corcoran Park Community Garden; West Cambridge, 1976-77.....	22
5 Sacramento Street Community Garden; Baldwin (formerly Agassiz), 1975.....	26
6 Field of Dreams Garden; Riverside, 1992.....	30
7 Green Street Neighborhood Garden; Riverside, 1978.....	34
8 Riverside Press Park Community Garden; Riverside, 2012-13.....	38
9 Peggy Hayes Memorial Garden; Cambridgeport, 1975 (as Watson Street).....	42
10 Emily Street Garden; Cambridgeport, 1974.....	46
11 Squirrel Brand Community Garden; The Port, 1977..... (as Broadway and Boardman Street)	50
12 Moore Street Community Garden; The Port, 1985.....	54
13 Hurley Street Community Garden; East Cambridge, 2015.....	58
14 Costa Lopez Taylor Park Community Garden; East Cambridge, 2008.....	62
CONCLUSION.....	66

CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY GARDENS TODAY

Written & Compiled
by
The Cambridge Plant & Garden Club

Project Committee
Marty Mauzy, co-chair
Kate Thompson, co-chair

Anne Anninger
Janet Burns
Nancy Dingman
Sandra Fairbank
Dorothy Gillerman
Dotty Gonson
Monica Hexner
Jane Knowles
Kyra Montagu
Kate Olivier
Louise Weed
Hilary Wodlinger



Introduction

“Cambridge Community Gardens Today” describes and celebrates each of the 14 Community Gardens currently operating across the City of Cambridge.

Four pages are dedicated to each garden: photographs include a drone shot showing each garden in its neighborhood location. Garden narratives include a short history, a general layout of plots and communal spaces, an overview of what is grown, and a sketch of gardeners. Based on conversations with garden coordinators, we describe garden management and how it interfaces with the Cambridge Conservation Commission, the City agency responsible for the program.

With the publication of “Cambridge Community Gardens Today” the Cambridge Plant & Garden Club shines a light on the extraordinary diversity and character of the gardens, the knowledge and gardening skills Cambridge residents bring to their small, well-loved plots, and how the gardens function as a program of the City.





GARDEN ART



CAMBRIDGE PLANT & GARDEN CLUB (CP&GC)

The history of the club starts in 1889, with a primary focus on members' own plants and gardens. The evolved mission is "to increase knowledge of and to stimulate interest in all elements of horticulture, botany, and design and to support conservation and community improvement in the urban setting of Cambridge." One civic endeavor was a leadership role in establishment of the Committee on Public Planting in 1979. The committee was based at the Conservation Commission until 1989, when a city arborist was hired, and the committee moved to the Public Works Department.

Over the years, the CP&GC has focused its efforts on protecting and improving large public open spaces such as the Cambridge Common and Fresh Pond Reservation, and on smaller nonprofit community sites, such as the Cambridge Community Center, Margaret Fuller House, Chilton House, and the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House of the Cambridge Historical Society.

GARDEN HISTORY AND DESIGN COMMITTEE

The club's Garden History and Design Committee has documented and submitted six gardens to the Smithsonian's Archives of American Gardens: five private gardens and the Morse School Garden with CitySprouts, now a vanished garden. Since gardens are ephemeral and can be short-lived, many gardens simply do vanish. The Smithsonian's Archives of American Gardens collects, preserves, and provides access to resources that document the history of gardens in America. The archives include photographs, drawings, and written documentation of over 10,000 historic and contemporary gardens.

In 2019, the committee decided to explore and learn more about the community gardens in Cambridge. That idea led to this record of the gardens as of fall 2021.

"Cambridge Community Gardens Today" is offered in both print and web versions. The hope is that this publication will be of interest to key city agencies, nonprofits, community gardeners and coordinators—past, present, and future, and other community organizations. A modified version can be found in Archives of American Gardens under "Community of Gardens," a category with less formal documentation requirements. "Community of Gardens" is a digital archive where the public can help preserve stories of everyday gardens—"from community gardens to memories of grandmother's garden roses."

PROCESS

From the start, the intention of the project was one of discovery. The purpose was to collect information on all the gardens that would factually describe what each is like. This approach consisted of dividing the city into three sections (roughly West, Central, and East). Each section was assigned a team leader to work with the individual committee member assigned to each of the gardens in her section.

The mission of each individual committee member was to observe and learn by visiting her garden frequently, speaking to the garden coordinators and gardeners, and researching any history that she could find. One committee member was primarily responsible for photographing all the gardens throughout the growing season; for two days in late June 2021, a professional photographer took the overhead pictures.

Starting in fall 2020, the committee met monthly (virtually) with Jennifer Letourneau a trained engineer and environmentalist who since 2003 has been the director of the Conservation Commission, which oversees the Community Gardens Program. At each meeting, Jennifer conveyed her knowledge of each garden, answered questions, identified the coordinators to contact, and generally provided not just information but a combination of good sense, humor, and long experience. A broad range of topics was discussed, including current problems as well as issues in the past and how they were addressed. The work of the volunteer garden coordinators is essential, and how to support their efforts is an ongoing concern.

PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND EARLY HISTORY

As a club committee focused on garden history, there was interest in possible early antecedents, both philosophical and historical. For this there was a lucky find in the archives of the Cambridge Historical Commission, a research paper from 1996 by Harvard graduate student Catherine Melina Fleming, titled “Cambridge Community Gardens: Rural Gems in an Urban Setting.”

According to Fleming, today’s community gardens were not only inspired by the Liberty and Victory Gardens of World Wars I and II as is commonly assumed. Urban gardens are as old as cities, amply evidenced by intricate drawings of medieval walled gardens. In more recent history, the British government passed the Allotment Acts in the 1890s, providing community plots to the rural poor who had fled to the cities for employment. In Germany, the small city garden is iconic to its national agrarian ideal; in post-World War II Berlin many small gardens sprung up in the rubble of bombed lots.

In the paper, Fleming traces three particular sources in the lineage of community gardens in Cambridge. The first, and earliest, is the Puritan society of early New England itself. At first, all land was under the control of the town proprietors. Eventually, individual land mixed with communal land designated for the benefit of the entire community. Multiple cow commons, ox commons, and woodlots existed early on; today, iconic village greens and town commons remain as treasured ties to the past. This tradition of common land can be seen again in the early 20th century when activist women in Boston and Cambridge advocated for playgrounds and school gardens. Anne Longfellow Thorp allowed a field – at the corner of Willard and Mt. Auburn that she had inherited from her father – to be used for a children’s garden.



“There have always been people who just love to garden: for food, for flowers, for exercise, or for the joy of being outdoors, who do not have the ground on which to do it.”

Catherine Fleming





Another thread is the power of association to counteract what Emile Durkheim termed “anomie,” the isolation and alienation of urbanites. The loss of the common life shared by the rural villager came to be replaced by the urban associations of shared enthusiasms and values. As Durkheim explains, community gardens would be part of filling these needs: “of empowerment, of neighborliness, of community.”

In the 1970s, spurred on by the common need of its diverse population and the community power movement of the 1960s, the Cambridge Community Garden Program we know today began to take shape. The 1970s were a heyday of the community gardens movement. In Cambridge, an administrative home for this movement was found within the Conservation Commission.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Cambridge is a city of immigrants. The first large influx brought the Irish due to famine in 1845. Then, around the turn of the century, immigrants from Italy, Poland, and Portugal began to arrive, but ever more dense housing from the 1880s on, such as the ubiquitous triple-deckers, left little or no open ground. Many of the immigrants were from agrarian backgrounds. Not being able to garden in their new homes was a huge loss, a loss felt by succeeding waves of African Americans, Asians, Russians, Middle Easterners, and West Indians who settled in the city. Some of the gardens in 2021 show roots stretching back to India, China, Japan, Haiti, and other home countries of the most recent immigrants.

CAMBRIDGE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

In 1955, the Massachusetts legislature passed the Conservation Commission act that allowed municipalities to establish conservation commissions “for the promotion and development of the natural resources and for protection of watershed resources.” It also allowed for the creation of Open Space Plans. In 1972, the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act was enacted, which gave local conservation commissions the responsibility to implement the act through the issuance of permits. Statewide, in 1974, a bill was passed as proposed by State Representative Mel King for the use of public lands for community gardens.

The Cambridge Conservation Commission was established in 1965. Ruth Birkhoff and Mary Kennedy, original members and also members of the CP&GC, advocated for the commission to have a role in managing a community garden program. In the early 1970s the first community garden was designated in the already existing municipal field at the Cambridge Home for the Aged and Infirm, later Neville Manor, now Neville Center. In a 1996 interview, Ruth Birkhoff estimated that at its peak over 600 city gardeners benefited from the program each year. In its 1975-76 report the Conservation Commission codified its role as a clearinghouse for the community gardens. Every garden was to have a coordinator who supervised the garden during the season; the City would provide water hookups (in most cases a long time coming), soil amendments such as compost and mulch, soil testing for lead, and help with advertising.

Much happened in the ensuing 45 years of the program which reflects an ever more complex city and conditions. Future changes and the City's responses to them will continue to shape this form of City-provided access to gardening.

The community gardens now number 14. Eleven are on city-owned land, one on land owned by Harvard, one by MIT, and one owned by a private corporation. Interest in community gardening has remained steadfast, for the most part, because, to draw from Fleming again, "there have always been people who just love to garden: for food, for flowers, for exercise, or for the joy of being outdoors, who do not have the ground on which to do it."

THE CITY AND ITS NEIGHBORHOODS

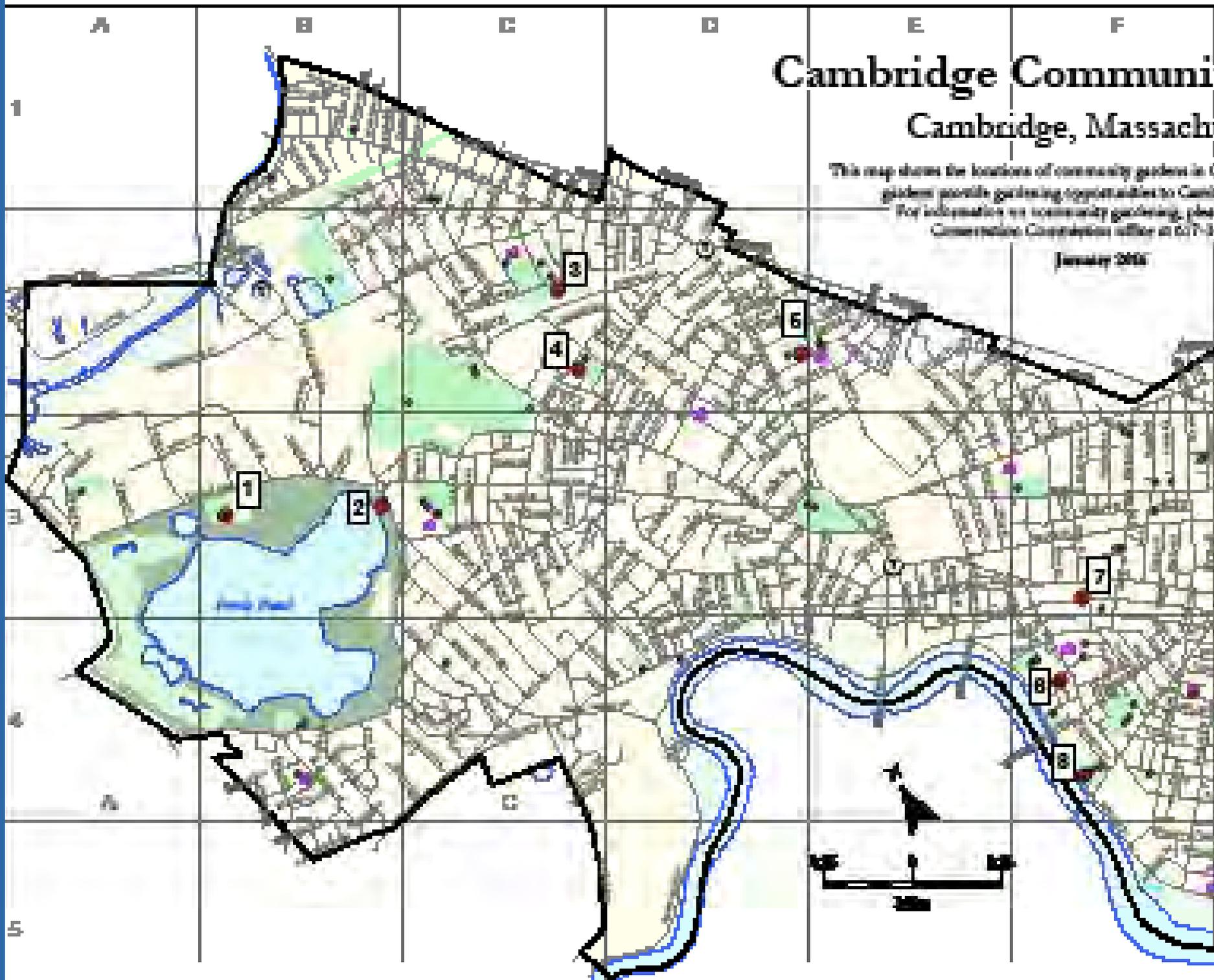
Cambridge was first settled by English colonists in 1631. Rapid growth began in the mid-19th century, and Cambridge was incorporated as a city in 1846. In 1954, the study *Thirteen Neighborhoods: One City* formally established the boundaries of 13 neighborhoods. As the centerfold map shows, community gardens can be found in most of them, including the areas of the city that are the most diverse, with the largest proportion of rental units, and with the highest population density.

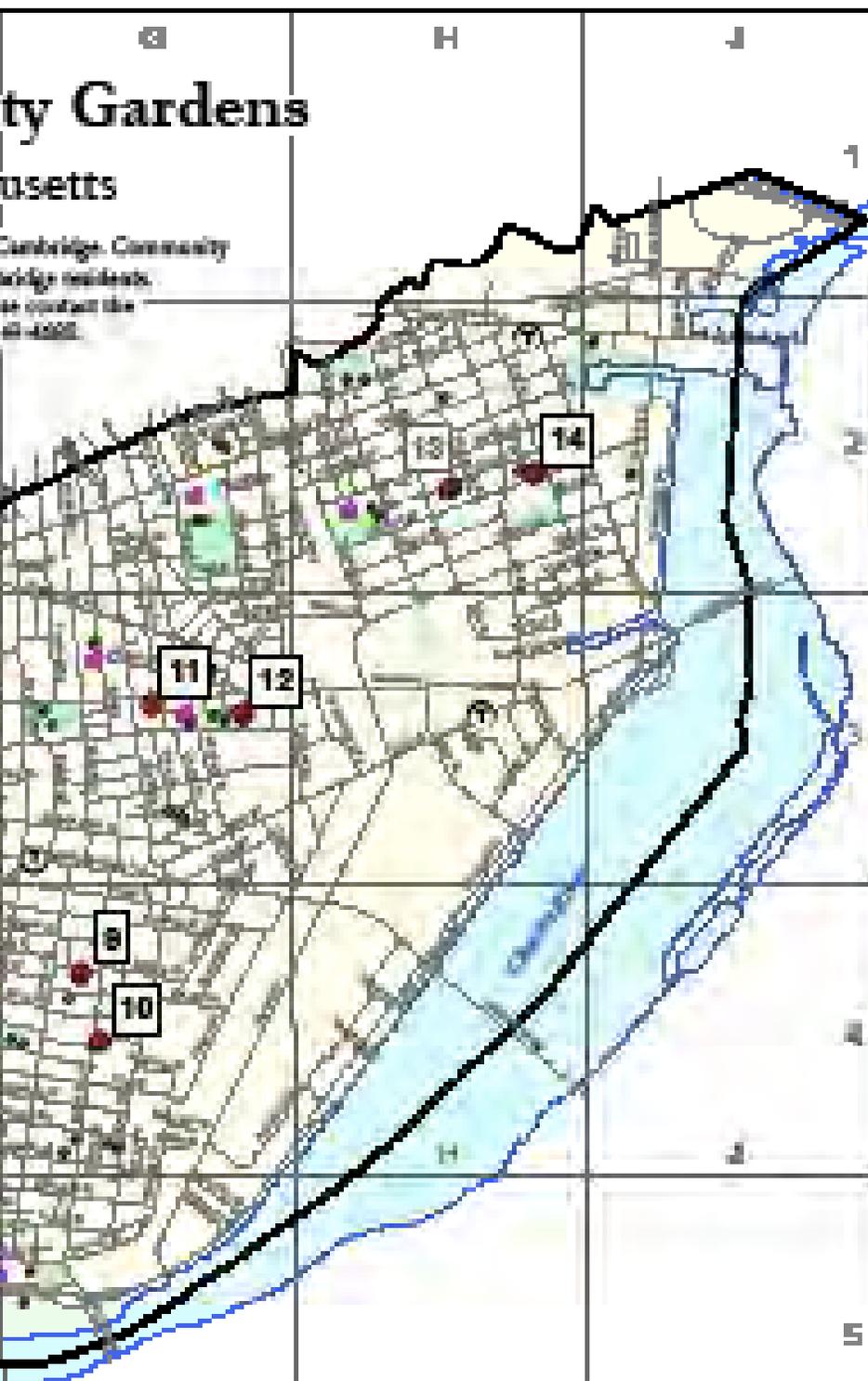
Community gardeners can and do come from all over the city. The City's application form to apply for a plot, posted on the Community Gardens webpage, requires the applicant to list three garden choices in order of preference. While many gardeners do live near their garden, it cannot be assumed that neighborhood demographics and statistics can be extrapolated to describe the gardeners at any given garden.

Demographics for the city as a whole can provide a helpful context. In 2020, the total population of the city was estimated at 118,927 with a population density of 16,469 persons per square mile. According to the 2010 US Census, Cambridge is the 10th densest incorporated city in the United States. Out of the city's residents, 58.8% of the population identify as white, 9.5% as Hispanic, 10.7% as Black, 16.8% as Asian or Pacific Islander, with the remaining from other races. The most commonly identified ancestries, in order, are Irish, German, Italian, English, West Indian, Polish, Sub-Saharan African, French, Russian, Scottish, and Portuguese (Cape Verdean).

Rental units comprise 65% of occupied units in Cambridge, while 34.5% are owner occupied (including condominiums). Buildings with over 50 units comprise the highest percentage of the city's housing stock (42%); single-family dwellings are the lowest percentage (7%). Of the 13 neighborhoods, Riverside has by far the most residents per acre at 61.2, as contrasted to West Cambridge at 12.7. West Cambridge and Cambridge Highlands have the highest proportion of single-family houses. However, rapid development of dense housing is re-characterizing the edges of both. The neighborhoods of North Cambridge and The Port are the most racially balanced among whites, including Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians.







THE GARDENS IN 2021

The 14 Cambridge Community Gardens currently in the program are numbered and presented in the order corresponding to the Cambridge Community Gardens map. Below are the full name, neighborhood, (and in some cases approximate) date of establishment.

- 1 **William G. Maher Community Garden**
Fresh Pond Reservation/Cambridge Highlands, 1974 (as Neville Manor)
- 2 **Fresh Pond Reservation/Parkway Garden**
Fresh Pond Reservation/West Cambridge, 1978 (as Parkway at Fresh Pond)
- 3 **McMath Park Community Garden**; North Cambridge, 1995
- 4 **Corcoran Park Community Garden**; West Cambridge, 1976-77
- 5 **Sacramento Street Community Garden**
Baldwin (formerly Agassiz), 1975
- 6 **Field of Dreams Garden**; Riverside, 1992
- 7 **Green Street Neighborhood Garden**; Riverside, 1978
- 8 **Riverside Press Park Community Garden**; Riverside, 2012-13
- 9 **Peggy Hayes Memorial Garden**
Cambridgeport, 1975 (as Watson Street)
- 10 **Emily Garden**; Cambridgeport, 1975
- 11 **Squirrel Brand Community Garden**
The Port, 1977 (as Broadway and Boardman Street)
- 12 **Moore Street Community Garden**; The Port, 1985
- 13 **Hurley Street Community Garden**; East Cambridge, 2015
- 14 **Costa Lopez Taylor Park Community Garden**; East Cambridge, 2008



William G. Maher Community Garden

can claim to be year-round and, on purpose or not, to be a source of food for wildlife as well as humans. Some of the wildlife is vexing and the humans inevitably have ups and downs, but the vibe is mainly friendly, mutually helpful, and sometimes culturally enlightening.

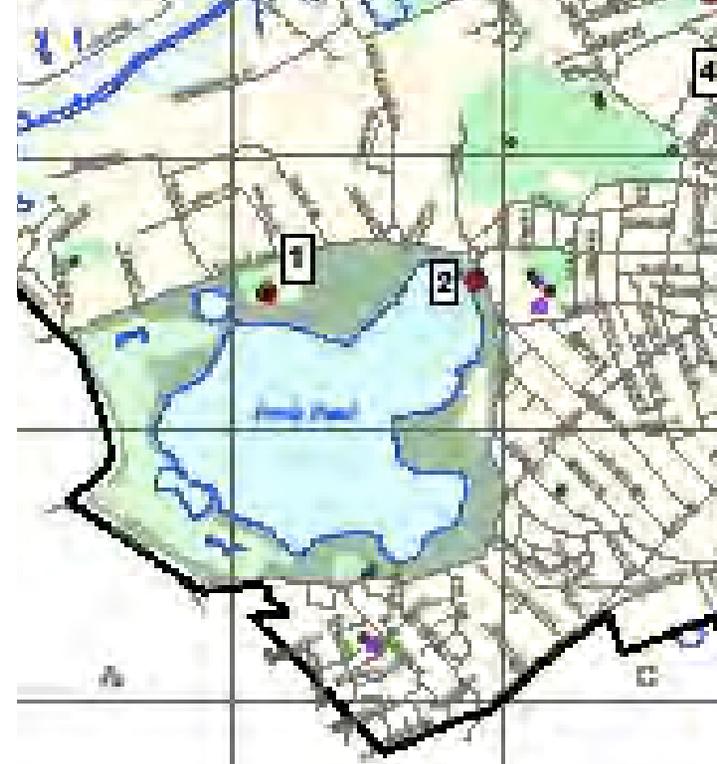


1

Maher

HISTORY The garden opened in 2007 as an element of the Fresh Pond Reservation Master Plan, adopted by the City in 2000. The garden was part of the Northeast Sector project, the first and largest project of the master plan undertaken. The Maher Community Garden replaced the earlier Neville Community Garden located east of Neville Place (previously known as Neville Manor). The original Neville Community Garden transformed into the Butterfly Garden as part of the Northeast Sector project.

Neville Community Garden was a secluded but expansive informal space with ad hoc sized plots and minimal management. This garden was the earliest designated community garden in Cambridge (1974). The Neville Community gardeners included a diversity of immigrants, notably a contingent of Russians with miniature dachas. Kitchen staff grew tomatoes for Neville Manor. This practice was a remnant of larger scale institutional gardening undertaken by the Cambridge Home for the Aged and Infirm, predecessor to Neville Manor. Other uses of the garden included bathing by the homeless, and beekeeping. A few gardeners obtained plots in the relocated garden.



LOCATION

Maher Community Garden is in a section of the Fresh Pond Reservation named William G. Maher Park, and is near the Concord Avenue entrance to Neville Center and Neville Place. The same entrance also provides access to the youth soccer field and parking for the Fresh Pond Reservation facilities. Across Concord Avenue is a fast-growing residential development in the area known as the Quadrangle.

GARDEN DESCRIPTION The garden form is linear. It is comprised of a center path between two single rows totaling 44 plots 10'X10' in size, separated by timbers. Six are planters raised to 3 ½ feet. Except for the raised beds, all the plots have been gradually fenced. There are three water sources, three gates, several benches, and a gated space for garden debris that must be disposed of in yard waste bags. A mixed blessing is the availability of a porta-potty next to the main entrance at the parking lot end, coincidentally installed seasonally by the Water Department for the nearby youth soccer field. A more attractive feature just outside the middle gate is an artful drinking fountain created for Maher Park by artist Laura Baring-Gould.

Water supply, facility maintenance, rodent control, and waste removal are services provided by the city's Water Department. Composting is not permitted and gardeners are asked to use only organic inputs. Typically, the organic inputs are commercial compost, but some compost is homemade and brought to the garden. Composted goat manure from Habitat in Belmont was used one summer. The mulch that is used is salt marsh hay, straw, pine needles, and chopped up leaves.



WHAT IS GROWN Something is growing in every season; in winter Sue's winter kale and lettuce are grown inside low tunnels; in spring, bulbs and wintered-over garlic are mixed with seedlings; in midsummer, Ahua's Japanese yard long climbing beans are magnificent; in summer and into fall, little groups of goldfinches can be seen feeding on Swiss chard while monarch and fritillary butterflies seek nectar on sunflowers and zinnia; foraging bumblebees visit marigolds and asters; and colorful tomatoes are abundant.

The top three vegetables are tomatoes, kale, and a variety of peppers. The cultural backgrounds of the gardeners influence many of the choices: Asian greens, such as bok choy, mustards, and perilla; a wide range of squash and melons, including bitter melon; and various types of eggplants.

The top flowers in the garden are annuals—zinnia, marigold, and nasturtium; cosmos and verbena are self-seeders. Perennials include various sunflowers—top butterfly magnets, tithonia, lilies, peonies, roses, and perennial sweet peas. Also present are native perennials such as fall aster, which is intended for native pollinators. Many of the flowers are important to the gardeners for cutting. Herbs include the usual herbs used as cooking ingredients, plus lavender, lemon verbena, comfrey, and rue—grown by the oldest gardener, a native of Lithuania, who turned 100 in 2020.



GARDENERS All parts of Cambridge have been represented by the gardeners, but more now live in the new residential development nearby. There is an age range but most are middle-aged or seniors. Occasionally there is a family with young children or a grandparent/child combination. The wide variety in types of vegetables is due in part to Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indian, and Bangladeshi gardeners. Neville Place residents have special access to six raised beds, at least a few of which are used every year. Also, pre-COVID-19, Neville staff led groups on walk-throughs of the garden, calling out the names of plants and sparking memories of gardening. Hopefully these excursions can return.

“Master gardeners,” and one former commercial grower have helped the people new to gardening. Sometimes plots are shared, which saves trips for people coming from more distant neighborhoods or are short on time. In one case two share two plots; “we fight the roots of the river birch on the Neville side and the shade of the viburnums on the other.” Gardeners help each other with watering, and share seedlings, mulch, and knowledge. The annual turnover is 10-15%. A time limit has not been observed.

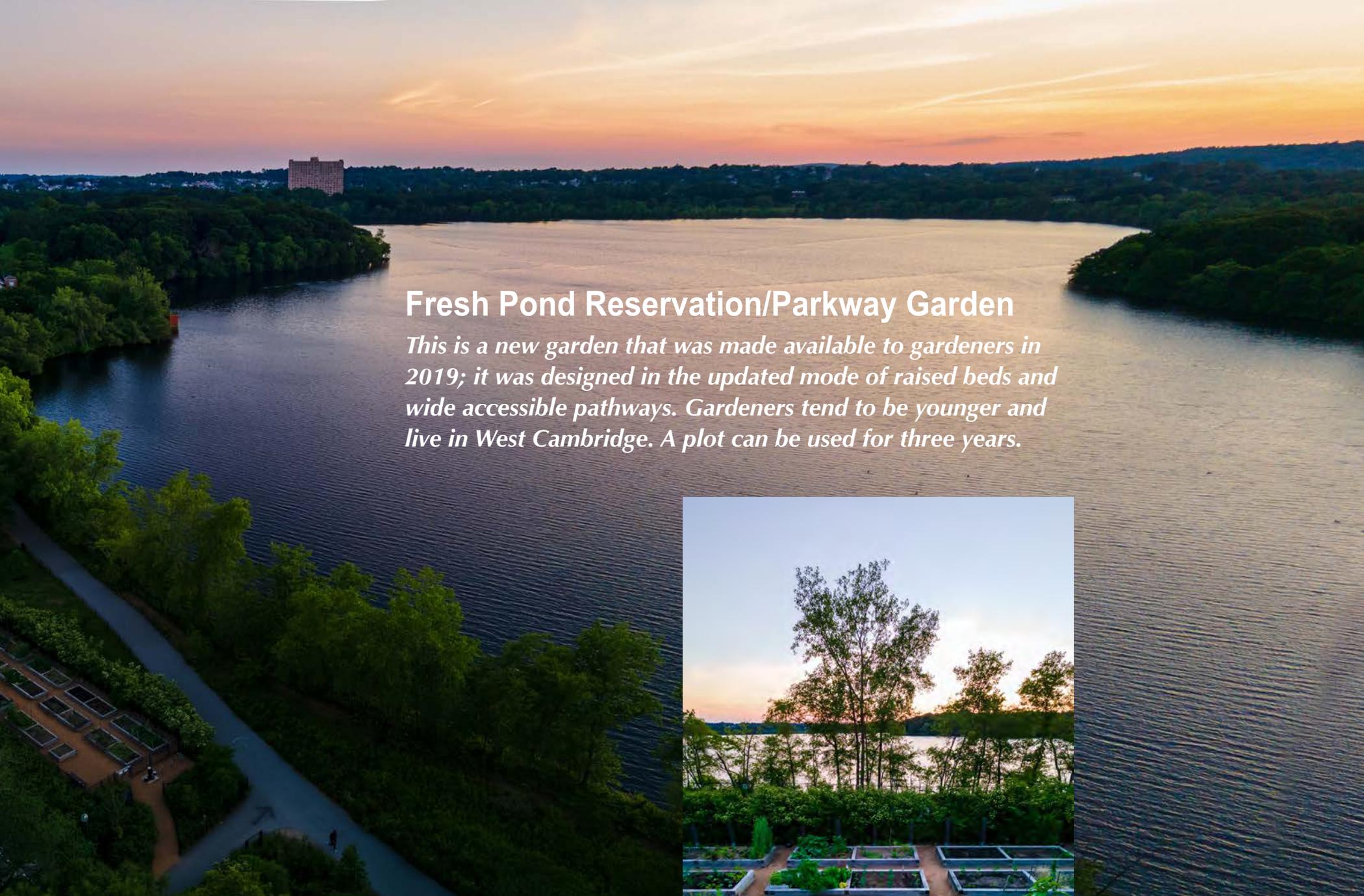
MANAGEMENT Operation of the garden has evolved. Conservation Commission director Jennifer Letourneau managed issues and plot turnover for the first few years. Eventually gardeners stepped up to be coordinators. Fresh Pond Reservation landscape supervisor Vincent Falcione deals with problems like pruning, water spigots, hoses, and broken gate latches. The garden coordinator keeps track of plots becoming available. Coordinators communicate information about rodent control, encourage proper disposal, announce water turn-on and -off dates, schedule cleanup days, and help solve complaints that often deal with shade. Some have organized social events, and others have shared photos and gardening tips. Sue Putnam, a hands-on type of coordinator, finally stopped the devastating groundhogs by repeatedly filling in their entrances with rocks. No committees, no fees.



SUMMARY Recruiting coordinators is one challenge; partnerships are encouraged to share the role. Gardeners, as reflected in their gardens, have individual interests and intentions, resources, time, cultural practices, and predilections. Tolerance is a communal aspiration.

Challenges and benefits of the garden also differ depending on attitudes towards the location itself and its multiple uses. For example, one challenge is the gardeners’ frustration with, even lack of respect for, the plants and trees adjacent to the garden. Encroaching roots and shade are issues that could have been avoided during the design phase of the garden. On the other hand, invasive plants such as mint and goutweed have escaped from the garden into the adjacent native plant meadow. Wildlife, always looking for food, is a challenge, but seeing all the birds and butterflies is a pleasure for many.

Depending on the individual, the multiple uses of the land outside the garden can also be a challenge or a benefit. Most year-round traffic is from Neville Place and Neville Center visitors and staff. Concurrent with the gardening season are reservation walkers, runners, cyclists, and soccer players. Chance encounters can be fascinating or concerning. On and off pilfering has been a problem and plots (except the raised beds) have over time been fenced against theft and rabbits. However, many people walking by, and occasionally through the garden, express appreciation and interest.

An aerial photograph of Fresh Pond Reservation at sunset. The pond is the central focus, surrounded by dense green trees. In the distance, a tall, rectangular building is visible on the left side. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue.

Fresh Pond Reservation/Parkway Garden

This is a new garden that was made available to gardeners in 2019; it was designed in the updated mode of raised beds and wide accessible pathways. Gardeners tend to be younger and live in West Cambridge. A plot can be used for three years.



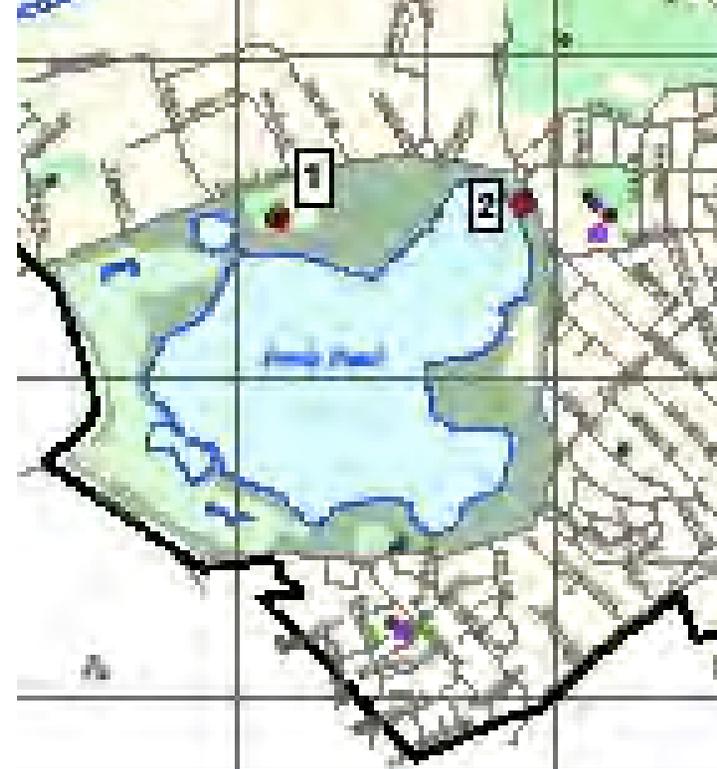
2

Fresh Pond/Parkway

EARLY HISTORY The story of the site leading up to the community garden there today includes a range of endeavors and enthusiasms. In the early 19th century, maps show that the original natural shoreline of Fresh Pond was much closer to the current garden site. The immensely successful ice industry was well established in 1847 when the Cambridge Branch railroad, from the Fitchburg main line, was built close to the original shore. The Cambridge Line was created to bring visitors to the popular Mt. Auburn Cemetery and Fresh Pond Hotel with two stops at Fresh Pond. The passenger service lasted until 1938 when it became freight until about 2000. Today's garden sits on top of the remaining rail bed.

In 1888, when the entire pond was edged with stones, the shoreline was moved further out to create more land area between the west side of the railroad and the pond. A carriage road was built next to the pond, the forerunner of today's pedestrian path around the pond.

Along the east side of the railroad was a road that originally served the ice industry. This later became the first parkway to be built by the Metropolitan Parks Commission (later the Metropolitan District Commission); Fresh Pond Parkway connecting the Charles River and Fresh Pond opened in 1900. The bike path between the parkway and the garden was built in 2002 by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).



LOCATION

The Parkway Garden is located in Fresh Pond Reservation, near the treatment plant and running alongside the pedestrian pathway around Fresh Pond, close to and parallel to Fresh Pond Parkway.



RECENT HISTORY Parkway Garden replaced an earlier one that was closer to Sozio Circle. That garden was longstanding but prone to flooding and difficult to access. It comprised 23 large ground-level plots, and was eliminated to make way for the Drainage and Community Garden Project of the Cambridge Water Department, completed in 2018. The Drainage and Community Garden Project protects Fresh Pond water quality, restores native trees, shrubs, and meadow plants to the area, and provides an accessible place to garden for Cambridge residents.

In 2013, a first step of the project was acquisition of the railroad right of way by the Water Department and the Mass DCR. First the rails and ties were removed. Then the new replacement garden was built on top of the capped rail bed, closer to a parkway crossing and to parking located at the treatment plant. Parallel to the garden on the east side are a regional bike path and the four-lane Fresh Pond Parkway. On the west side is the perimeter road around Fresh Pond. While the new location is more convenient for gardeners, it is a high pedestrian use area with some discouraging vegetable and plant theft.



GARDEN DESCRIPTION The garden form is an elongated rectangle 35 feet wide. All 26 plots are raised beds (planters); twenty-two of them are 5' X 8' and 10 to 12 inches high. They are in pairs with abutting short sides, which allows for easy access from three sides without having to step into the plot. Three plots are 3 ½ feet high. Just inside the main gate are a small square raised bed and a bench in a gathering space.

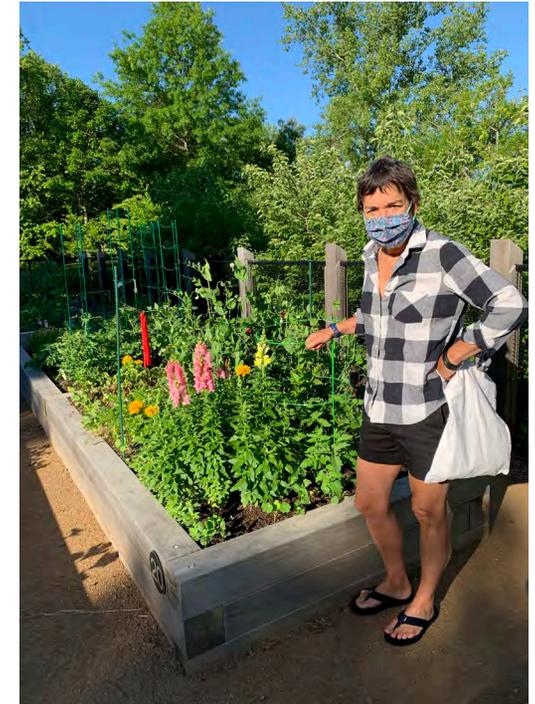
There are three gates. The main one is from the connecting pathway between the parkway crossing and the Fresh Pond perimeter path, another is from the Mass DCR bike path and the third is a wide utility gate for the debris collection space, also from the bike path. An informational sign with rules for use and city contact information is near the main gate, along with a drinking fountain and a rack to lock three bicycles. The garden has two spigots. For rat control composting is not allowed. There is no storage; tools and supplies must be brought from off-site. Maintenance services are by the Water Department.





WHAT IS GROWN Visiting the garden in its first two years, you would have seen, besides tomatoes, various eggplant and pepper types, carrots, peas, summer squash, zucchini, pumpkins, potatoes, kales, and broccoli. Common herbs included sage, dill, thyme, basil, rosemary, and parsley. Only annual flowers were allowed: sunflowers, zinnias, cosmos, and marigolds drew bees and butterflies, notably monarchs at the end of summer.

By 2020, the emotional impact of plant and vegetable theft caused a few gardeners to remove their plants and leave. One covered her plot with deer netting. Signs were posted and strategies proposed: skip growing eggplant—the vegetable most often stolen, pick early and often, plant a “help yourself” plot near the entrance. Some returning gardeners in 2021 adaptively and defensively avoided high-value plants. The site does not have the advantage of being embedded in a neighborhood. More time is needed to develop practical guidelines and expectations responsive to the problems of the location.



SUMMARY Accessibility was and is the priority of city planners in determining the garden’s location and design and how it is used. Through the built-in turnover rule, the chance to garden will be more accessible to more people over time. The new location is more safely and easily accessed. Pathways are wide and there are three accessible beds. The Parkway Garden, as with all the newer community gardens, has above-ground raised beds so the city can be assured that the soil used is clean and free of anything toxic. The expense of removing urban soils is high. Removal of the railroad bed would have been even more costly. It was capped with impermeable material and built-up to be the garden’s foundation. In summary, the Parkway Garden was built for safety, durability, and usefulness.

Going forward, gardeners will learn how best to use the garden as they better understand its environment. How to manage the rules will be a work in progress for some time. Unlike older gardens the three-year limit on use will be key, for example, in how to recruit and define the coordinator role, and for planning the timely assignment of plots to new gardeners.





McMath Park Community Garden

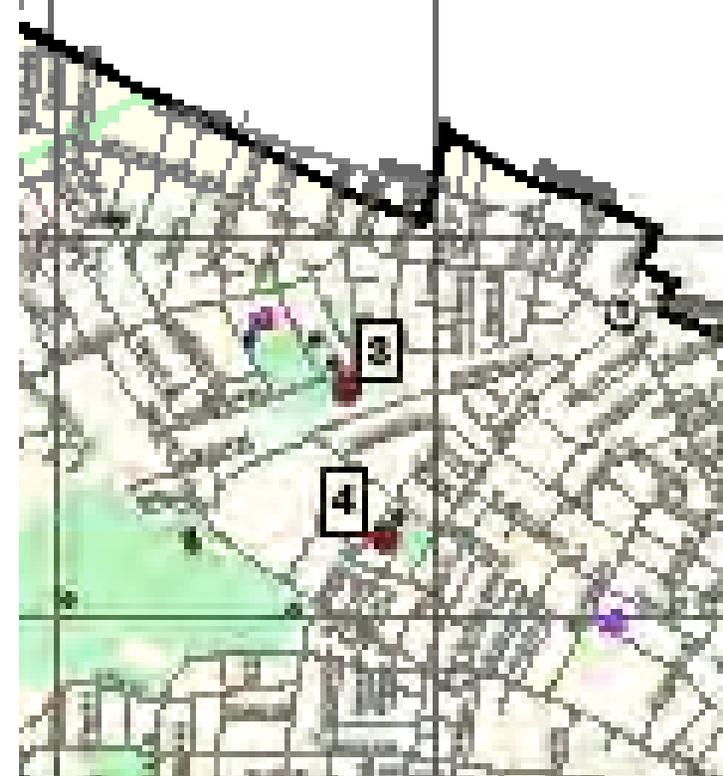
is set well back from the street, and further hidden by a tall hedge that acts as a barrier between a shady little park with benches and the long north side of the garden. There is an element of real surprise when one comes through the garden's only gate in the northwest corner to find a spacious garden, with 30 energetically and imaginatively gardened plots. It is a very urban version of a secret garden.



3

McMath Park

HISTORY Community gardens have tended to be initiated because of the interest and effort of neighborhood residents. In the case of McMath Community Garden, it was established by the Conservation Commission, in 1996, with input from the Community Development Department. At that time, the City of Cambridge was tightening up its regulations across the board because of liability concerns and fiscal constraints. The McMath garden bears the hallmarks of the more articulated 1996 Conservation Commission guidelines. These included a requirement for three garden coordinators, a raised accessible bed, plots set aside for communal gardening, and a limit of one plot per family residing in Cambridge, with the plots and borders kept neat, free of material that could attract rodents, and cleaned up for the winter. All these guidelines are still in effect, with the exception that there are now two coordinators instead of three.



LOCATION

The garden is tucked away in the back corner of McMath Park, located on Pemberton Street in residential North Cambridge between Haskell and Fairfield streets. Across Pemberton Street is Rindge Field, a large sports field adjacent to the Peabody School, and a tot lot along Haskell Street. The MBTA commuter rail parallels the south side.

GARDEN DESCRIPTION The two long sides of the garden are approximately 100' but are not parallel; the space becomes narrower toward the west end. There is a 35' X 20' notch in the corner next to the tennis practice wall area for access to the garden gate. The gate opens to a wide entrance area where the tool shed and yard waste bins are kept. The garden is to the left and can be seen once you are through the gate and by the shed. Three sides of the garden is chain link fencing; there is a tall wooden fence at the east end partially blocking the neighboring houses. Tall trees in the backyards shade that part of the garden. The entrance area and paths are paved with asphalt; segments of paths vary from 2 to 4 feet wide. The path layout and irregular shape of the garden are not conducive to a grid plot plan so divisions have been improvised and plots vary in size. There are three large wheels with hoses. There are 30 individual plots plus an accessible bed.

The overall impression is positive. This is a garden with unusual vegetables, a variety of flowers, paths, and planters, and creative structures to shelter and support plants.



WHAT IS GROWN By mid-May the garden is in full swing, with most of the plots already showing the abundance to come. Vegetables include onions, collard greens, beets, beans, garlic, kohlrabi, peppers of all kinds, eggplant, squash, lettuces, and tomatoes; there are strawberries and raspberry bushes; and herbs such as rosemary, dill, parsley, basil, and tarragon. Mint has proliferated. Flowers are mixed with the vegetables in most of the plots. These include tulips, poppies, peonies, iris, lupines, perennial sunflowers, phlox, fall anemone, and Shasta daisies. Clumps of milkweed are on offer for butterflies.

The communal bed is along the shady east boundary. Lily-of-the-valley, ginger, and Solomon seal are in the shadiest section. Herbs are where there is more light—oregano, mint, thyme, and chives. There is a large bleeding heart, spring bulbs, and some labeled wildflowers.

GARDENERS Helen Palmer, one of the coordinators, is English; her father planted vegetables during WWII, but her mother loved flowers. Helen lived in London, but was able to garden in a neighbor's garden and that got her started. When Helen and her husband moved to Cambridge, she became a member of the original Broadway & Boardman Community Garden. When that garden became the Squirrel Brand Community Garden, Helen felt those plots should go to the tenants who had moved into the Old Squirrel Brand factory building. After gardening at the Whittemore Avenue community garden in North Cambridge (now demolished), she moved to the McMath garden.



Barbara Thomas, chair of the Use It or Lose It Committee, is a wonderful source of enthusiasm and knowledge. Barbara said there are currently two families—Italian and Chinese—who bring their children and are teaching them how to garden. There are a few Pakistani and Indian gardeners. Barbara’s parents are originally from Guyana, in South America near the equator. Barbara grew up in the Bronx, where her family grew many vegetables and flowers, mostly from seeds, in containers on their back porch. Barbara continues this tradition of growing her vegetables from seeds, and focuses on unusual ones like purple string bean, and Paul Roberson tomatoes that she can’t easily get at the grocery store.

MANAGEMENT The garden functions reliably in part because it has a comprehensive handbook that is updated annually, with important dates (when to start planting, when to clean up, mandatory spring and fall work days, the fall potluck); contact information for the committees; and a “use it or lose it” system. Many of the gardeners have been members for a long time; however, turnover does occur and plots do become available. Annual dues are \$20. The dues fund communal tools and new hoses as necessary. Gardeners were able to acquire a tool shed to store the shared tools and garden supplies.



SUMMARY Since COVID-19, rats have seemed more numerous. In response, gardeners are being asked to be diligent about keeping ripe vegetables off the ground—they are expected to pick once a week. No composting is done on site and mulches are discouraged. About half the plots are fenced to fend off rabbits, and the garden has added chicken wire to the perimeter chain link fencing.

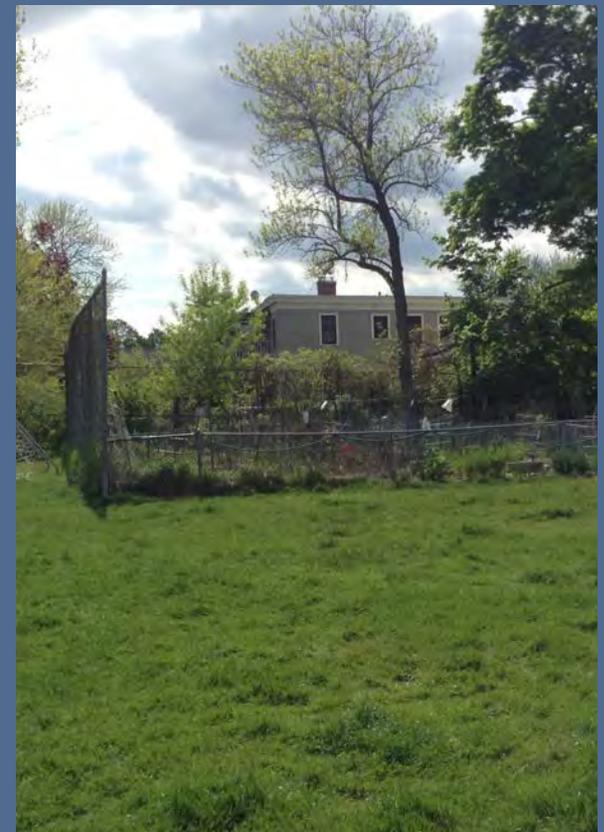
There is a neighborly ethic to the McMath Park Community Garden, eloquently stated in the handbook: “The overall beauty and health of the garden is dependent on the investment of all members of the community in their plot and the garden.” Members of McMath are expected to be exactly that—members of a community, involved not just in the care and tending of their own plots, but in the wellbeing of the garden, and respectful of their neighbors.





Corcoran Park Community Garden

is well sited on a slight plateau at the north/west corner of Corcoran Park. With its slightly elevated position, and neat chain link fencing, the garden seems to crown the green expanse of the park stretching out below it. The Corcoran Park Community Garden is a quintessential city garden, in a quintessential neighborhood park. Corcoran Park (Raymond Street Park) is one of the few parks designed with a community garden. In keeping with its more public aspect it is less a neighborhood garden than most.

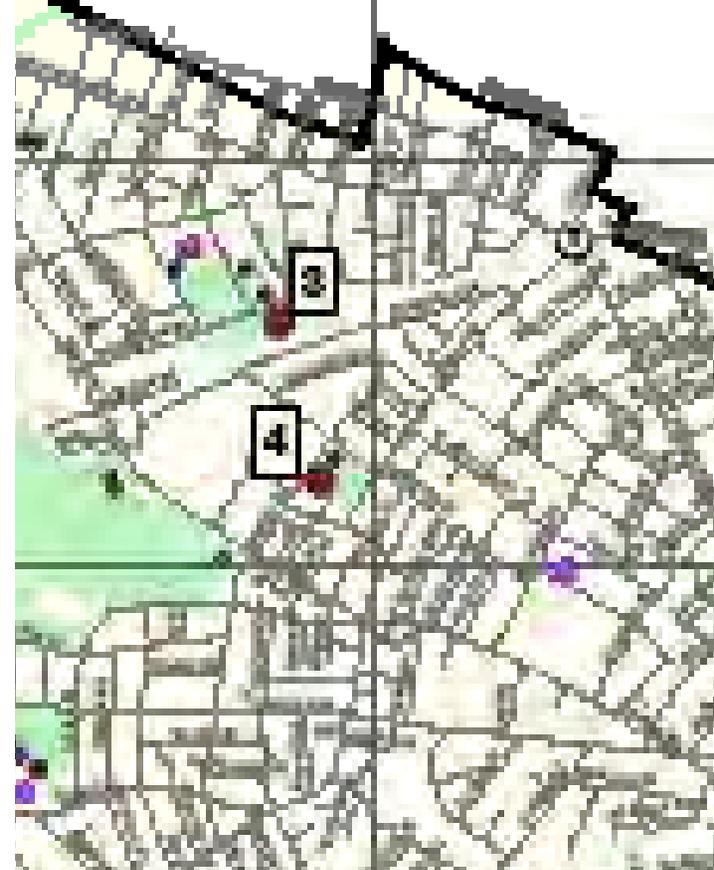


4

Corcoran Park (Raymond Street)

HISTORY The City constructed the 2.7-acre park in 1914-1915. In 1931, the City Council named the park the Timothy F. Corcoran Field in memory of a World War I veteran born and raised in the neighborhood. Apart from the ball field, the city renovated the park completely in 1987, replacing play equipment and benches, resurfacing the basketball court and pathways, and planting additional trees. The City recently turned the baseball field into a soccer field.

The Corcoran Park Community Garden was established in the early 1980s. The community garden was designed from the start to be part of the park, which over the years has evolved into a multi-use neighborhood treasure. There is an active Friends of Raymond Park volunteer steering committee that organizes summer movie nights, holiday events, and block parties. There is a large open space used for soccer games and early morning gatherings of dogs and their owners. The basketball court, playground, and tot lot are in constant use, with a lovely landscaped sitting area in the south/east corner, a gift to the neighborhood by Louise Weed in memory of her parents.



LOCATION

Corcoran Park runs between Walden Street (north) and Upland Road (south) with Raymond Street forming its east border and a stiff pitch down to a small group of houses set back from Newell Street to the west.



The founding coordinator of the garden was Lorna Gilmore, a member of the Cambridge Conservation Commission and a Harvard-educated Ph.D research scientist at MGH. She and her husband Marvin Gilmore were an interracial couple well known throughout Cambridge for their activism and community spirit. Lorna passed away in 2007 but according to her husband Marvin (still alive and well at 96), the garden was her life. She would walk over from Appleton Street every day, taking her little toy poodle with her.

Glenn Heinmiller is a long-time gardener (1988) who remembers Lorna well. It was Lorna who persuaded the City to replace the original thin wood slat snow fence with a sturdier short chain link fence. Eventually part of this fence had to be replaced with a higher one to protect the plots from flying baseballs—now soccer balls—that routinely sailed into their midst.

GARDEN DESCRIPTION The double rows of plots are divided by a middle path with a path running on each side of the long north/south borders. The entrance gate divides the chain fence to the west; large bushes block the neighboring houses lying below. The retaining wall that holds up the west bank is said to be a remnant from one of the original clay pits scattered throughout the area in the 1850s. To the left of the gate the path widens—room for two benches and four compost bins under the large old trees along the Walden Street side. The garden originally had 28 plots but since the front two plots were determined too shady to garden, the City allowed the compost bins instead. Dick and Marge Pratt have been gardeners since 1986; Dick helped install the current compost bins, designed and built by a former gardener. Glenn currently maintains the compost system. Glenn's mother was an expert vegetable gardener and he grew up understanding compost—his abundant, healthy tomatoes are the envy of all.

Glen also organized the elaborate system that gives each aisle of garden plots easy access to a hose. Glenn explained the history of the water supply: originally the City supplied three 55-gallon drums where the compost bins are now. In exchange for free city water, one of the neighbors in a house below the garden allowed the gardeners to hook up a hose to his outside faucet, drag the hose up the high bank, snake it through the fence, and fill the drums for the gardeners to use. Gardeners used 2-gallon milk containers with the tops cut off to water their individual plots—quite a production. Eventually the City did supply one water faucet by the middle of the long path running along the Walden Street side.

WHAT IS GROWN The garden itself is a large one, 40 feet wide by 64 feet long, with 26 roughly equal sized plots of 10 feet by 12 feet, laid out symmetrically in two long double rows. Its orderly rectangles are planted by competent gardeners who fill their plots with tomatoes, lettuces, peppers, squash, and herbs mixed with peonies, roses, and sturdy brightly colored annuals—zinnias, dahlias, marigolds, and cosmos. Iris, tulips, and narcissi bloom in the spring.



GARDENERS In addition to Glenn, Anastacia Salcedo, the current garden coordinator, and two long-term gardeners, Elizabeth Wylde and Anna Nathanson, talked about their plots and interests. Anastacia calls herself the basil lady and has even consulted with Rutgers University on mildew resistant varieties! Elizabeth has been gardening here since 1983; she was one of the original gardeners. Elizabeth concentrates on vegetable varieties she can't get in the supermarket—sugar snap peas (which her husband loves), certain kinds of leafy lettuces, and green and yellow bush beans. She grows almost everything from seed—she has grow lights at home where she starts her plants. Anna Nathanson joined the garden in 1998. Anna uses her plot to plant asparagus and early spring vegetables. Anna grew up in Italy. Her father was a great gardener; Anna helped water her family's large garden. Anna still remembers the plums—nothing has ever tasted so sweet.

MANAGEMENT Three years ago, Anastacia Salcedo volunteered to set up and maintain a Google Group of current gardeners, to reach out every spring to see who was planning to continue gardening, and to keep Conservation Commission director Jennifer Letourneau apprised of any openings. In spring 2021, passersby showed an increased post-COVID interest in obtaining a plot. Anastacia valiantly took on the task, combining her informal waiting lists with Jennifer Letourneau's records. Current gardeners were asked for a firm commitment by mid-June if they expected to continue gardening. This resulted in a number of freed up plots, and happy new gardeners from off the waiting list.



SUMMARY Increasing shade from growing trees is a chronic problem for the garden. The gardeners hope the City will do some overdue tree pruning soon. Some Corcoran gardeners would like to go back to a shared spring clean-up day, and to expecting gardeners to weed the paths bordering their plots. For all its mild anarchy, the Corcoran Park Community Garden runs well—the gardeners are committed and skilled, growing primarily vegetables with a display of flowers in almost all the plots. People are friendly and get to know the neighbors of their plots. There is a good range of ages, with more young people signing up, and parents often bringing their children.



Sacramento Street Community Garden

has been a lively and important feature of the neighborhood since 1975. Many gardeners and plant lovers, young and old, have found friends and refuge from city bustle along with a place to pursue a variety of gardening endeavors.

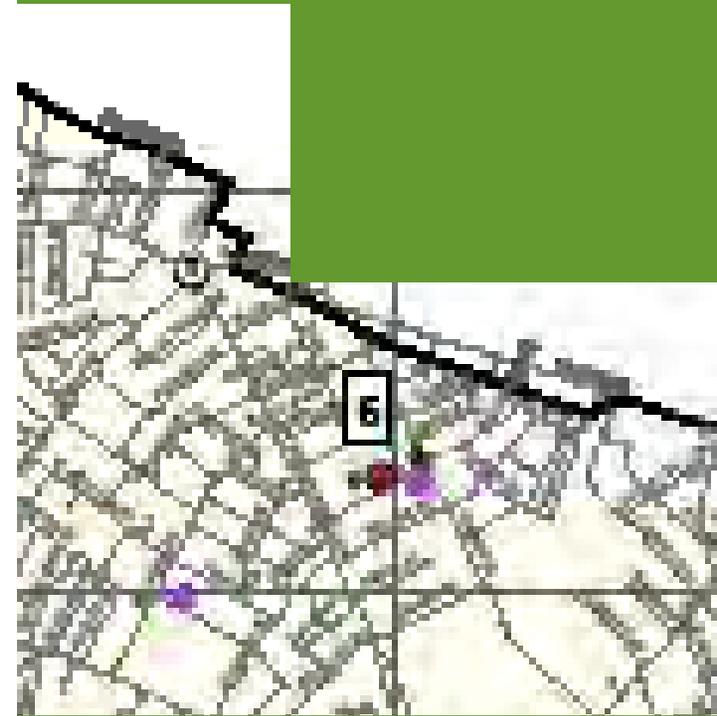


5

Sacramento Street

HISTORY On the north side of the garden is Sacramento Field. In the 1850s a dye and bleaching company used a portion of this once-swampy land to build a reservoir to take advantage of the springs, and pumped water to its operation on Somerville Avenue. The company closed during the Great Depression and the reservoir was eventually filled in. Harvard bought the site intending to build student housing. This plan was thwarted by neighborhood protests and in 1974 Harvard leased the field to the YMCA, so it was known as the “Y Field” until it became a City property in 1980. South of the field at 21 Sacramento Street was a large old house that was also owned and demolished by Harvard. The City took ownership of the site and in 1975 the community garden was established by the Agassiz Neighborhood Council, an entity of the Cambridge Community Schools Program. After about ten years the oversight of the garden changed to joint management by the gardeners and the Conservation Commission.

A renovation of Sacramento Field was undertaken in 2017; while very difficult for the garden members to accept because part of the garden was taken over, it enabled improved access to the field for the public and the Baldwin School. The garden lost a corridor of land along the high-sun east border. In compensation, the City shifted the garden’s back fence to add land, and replaced the garden’s dilapidated fencing on three sides.



LOCATION

The garden is located in the Baldwin neighborhood between Harvard Square and Porter Square in close proximity to the Agassiz Baldwin Community, Maud Morgan Arts, the Baldwin School, and Sacramento Field.

GARDEN DESCRIPTION In form the garden is a grid divided four paths by five paths; most plots are ground level and 10' X 10.' There are 66 beds, plus narrow ad hoc raised beds next to the east fence, and five raised planters for seniors. Other versions of raised beds have been devised within plots. They are of different heights and shapes, and made of wood, recycled containers, and grow bags. The garden paths are grassy dirt paths monitored by a committee. A sign provides a brief history and instructions on how to apply for a plot. A variety of implements are stored in a walk-in shed, along with sign-up sheets for tasks. Composting in plastic bins is located along the shady west fence and is carefully managed by Helen Snively. Next to the compost is a low storage shed. There are four benches. Trash and garden debris barrels are located next to the double gate.



WHAT IS GROWN Common garden vegetables, herbs, and annual flowers are always present; trends and new favorites emerge over time, such as arugula, kale, and cherry tomatoes. Tracking just the profusion of tomatoes that have become available over the years, starting from mainly beefsteak slicers and plum tomatoes to the current range of heirlooms, new sizes, colors, and types from patio to vines, would be a book in itself. The scope of what people grow has become ever wider to include perennials blooming throughout the season; roses; raspberries; currants; strawberries; wildflowers; rhubarb; and one gooseberry. Seeds shared by Sheila Hoffman create a poppy show every year. One project of the pandemic summer was a homemade self-watering system in one plot.

Styles range from single crop—the ever-bearing yellow raspberry plot and the sun gold cherry tomato plot; mini landscapes with rocks, paths, and dwarf evergreens; transplanted family heirloom perennials; and a native plant collection. Artistic elements include metal sculpture, mosaics, bottles, and stonework. Members voted to not allow birdbaths due to West Nile virus and Eastern equine encephalitis. Garden etiquette rules ask for strict maintenance of rose and raspberry canes. Horseradish, Jerusalem artichoke, and bamboo plants are not welcome.

Across the front of the garden, inside the fence, is a lovely mixed border with a variety of perennials, annuals, roses, azaleas, hibiscus, pieris, forsythia, and spring bulbs. Two climbing hydrangeas frame the front gate. The effect of the border, gate, and vine-covered arbor is a charming view from the street that contrasts with the no-two-alike individualism within the main garden.



GARDENERS Gardeners have come from all over Cambridge but most are from the Baldwin neighborhood. There is somewhat more diversity as the neighborhood has gotten more diverse. The coordinator said that recently there has been an uptick in families with young children interested in learning about where food comes from. Due to the proximity of Lesley and Harvard, there have always been university academics and administrators in the mix of engineers, teachers, social workers, and artists, some with histories of community activism going back to the 60's and 70's. A few have been members of the garden since the beginning. When the coordinator noticed that many long-term gardeners were aging and had had to leave the garden due to back and knee issues, she proposed that the City provide additional raised plots. Five raised and somewhat smaller plots are now in place next to the tool shed and another is in the right front section of the garden near an existing American Disabilities Act-compliant raised bed.

The ABC After School Program and summer Outback Program have shared a children's plot at the community garden since 2010. It was originally in the front next to the double gate and was moved to a back corner for more space.



MANAGEMENT The earliest concept for the garden borrowed from the wartime Victory Gardens encouraging people to grow their own food. The plots would be rototilled annually and a lottery would determine who got a plot each year. But after the first few years, it was clear that what gardeners were looking for now was more flexible use and longer time frames.

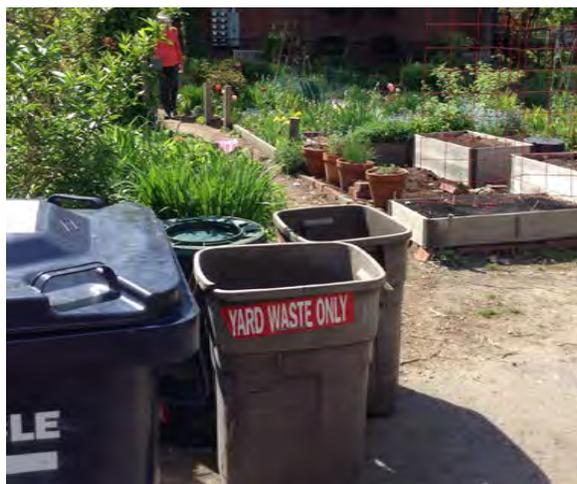
A two-stage lottery was devised. In the first stage, existing members can vie for vacated, more desirable plots, then, in waitlist order, new gardeners can pick from the available plots. This practice is grandfathered for now. There is a "Use It or Lose It" committee, but an automatic turnover is not observed; gardeners in good standing can remain in the garden.

The annual meeting is held across the street at the ABC Center in March to catch up, introduce people, review garden rules, go over last year's business and upcoming plans, and conduct the plot lottery. Turnover has been around ten plots per year. Dues of \$15 go to the treasurer who manages the garden's bank account; this fee is not mandatory.

Since the earliest days the coordinators have maintained an archive that is passed on. Drawing from the archives, current coordinator Anne Marie Reardon created a history album for the 40th anniversary party that was posted to the garden's Facebook page.

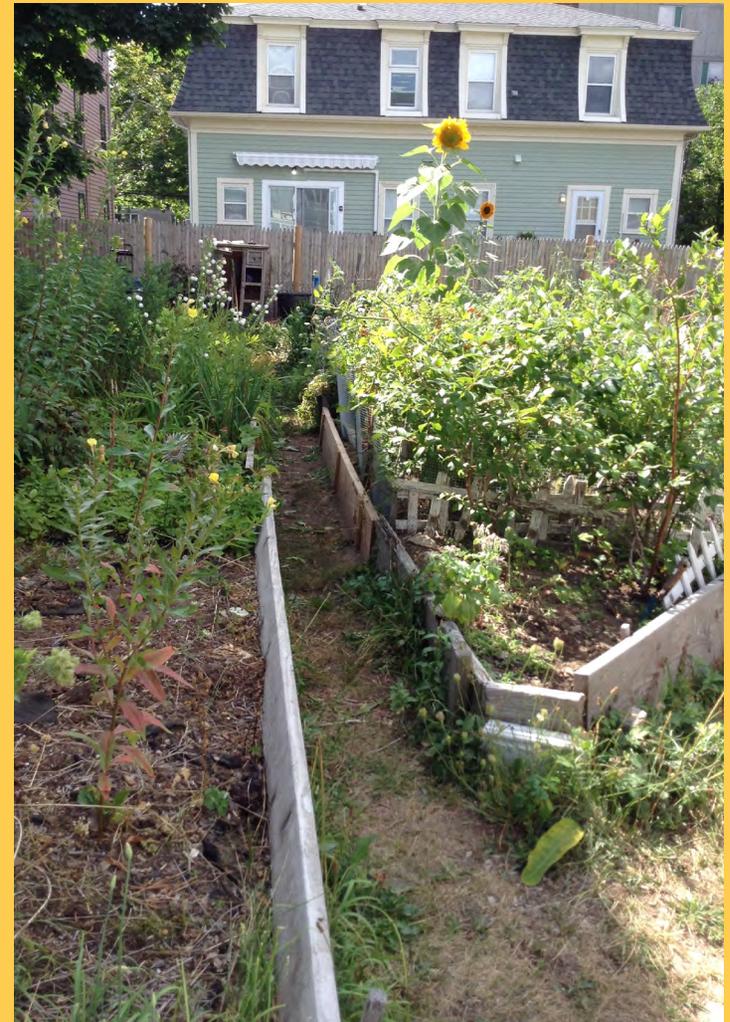
SUMMARY For a new gardener, becoming part of this garden community with its deep history, well-established culture, and stimulating range of horticultural endeavors, can prove both challenging and beneficial.

Like all Cambridge community gardens, the Sacramento Street Community Gardens is a vulnerable and valued public space where people express themselves, experiment, and take chances. Looking ahead, a gradual need to conform to more City requirements may be disruptive of this culture for some gardeners. Loyalty and commitment have been a hallmark. Future gardeners may be less inclined to sustain this model of complex organization and connection.



Field of Dreams Garden

This unprepossessing rectangle, with a path running diagonally through it, is aptly named “Field of Dreams.” It is the inspiration for a rich, beloved garden to many. Privately managed by a resident neighborhood group on property technically belonging to Harvard University, Field of Dreams is one of the three Cambridge Community Gardens on land not owned by the City.

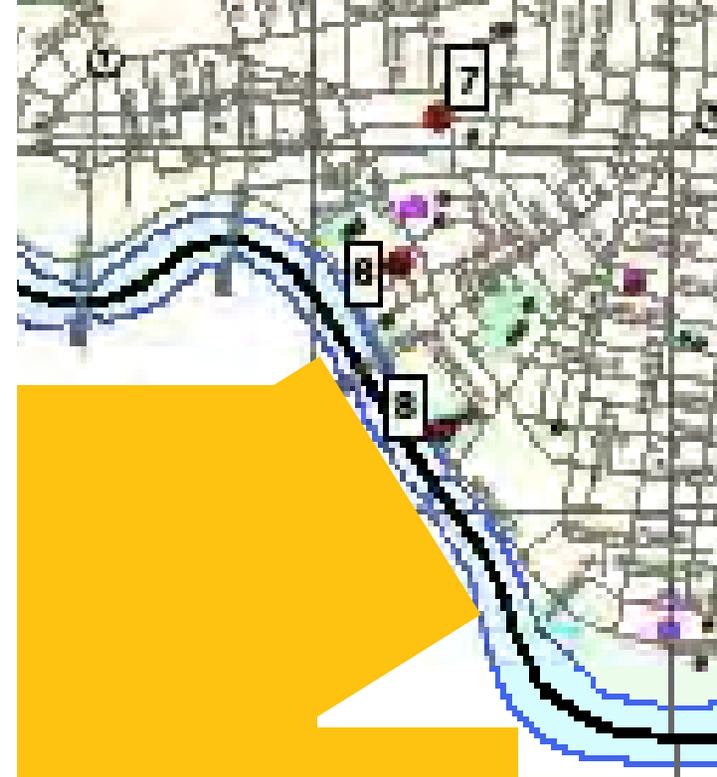


6

Field of Dreams

HISTORY In 1991, Field of Dreams was developed by a group of Harvard graduate students who were also members of the Riverside Neighborhood Study Committee. The students noticed a vacant lot, a postage stamp, near the Peabody Terrace Apartments for Graduate Students. The plot had no future for development; it seemed only used by short-cutters.

This group of graduate students, including future members of the Cambridge Plant & Garden Club, had wanted a place to garden, so they contacted Harvard Real Estate, Inc. After a year of negotiations, Harvard renounced all claims to the land in return for no responsibility, and the lot was licensed to this group who continue to use it. The University's last act was to drop 92 cubic yards of soil in the street for the gardeners to use. Since then, Field of Dreams has obtained a water connection from the City, organized soil deliveries, and secured city support for tree pruning and removal.



LOCATION

Field of Dreams is off of Putnam Avenue near the King/Amigos School at the intersection of Elmer Street and Peabody Terrace, across from the Peabody Terrace Garage.



GARDEN DESCRIPTION The group at Field of Dreams has never wanted to fence the garden—instead some gardeners install their own fences, which makes the garden look very personal, varied, and welcoming. Field of Dream gardeners have retained the diagonal shortcut of the original rectangle. Charmingly, they have installed their information board on that crosswalk with only one rule: “If you see someone in the garden, say hello.” Their magnanimity is also seen in their sharing of many plots of berries and flowers with both members and neighbors. There are officially 29 plots, including accommodation for people who need disability access. The general plot size is approximately 10’ X 10’ but there are also two triangular plots because of the shortcut. There is a common area containing a bench, a tool shed, and trash receptacles.

WHAT IS GROWN Eight of the plots are common plots for general use and enjoyment. The common plots include one with strawberries and milkweed; garlic, chives, roses, and perennials flourish in another; there is a plot for blueberries; and another for mixed black and red raspberries. Herbs are also grown in a common plot; with poppies and annual flowers in another; a plot in the shade incorporates native wildflowers. Various flowering plants and mint for pollinators are planted around the perimeter of the garden. Some of these were planted by a Girl Scout troop working on a pollinator project. In addition, the Peabody Terrace Preschool occupies two combined plots. The presence of the Girl Scouts and preschoolers testifies to the genuine outreach of this garden to its neighbors and their children. In return some neighbors responded by removing a stand of Japanese Knotweed that was encroaching on the garden.



GARDENERS The membership of the past few years includes young people in their 20s and 30s, gay couples, middle-aged families, multiracial families, (some with children who join in), and older folks in their 60s and 70s. The oldest longtime member was in her 80s when she left the area a few years ago. Almost all the members live in the surrounding neighborhood, and those who have moved elsewhere still garden at Field of Dreams. Some live in nearby Putnam Gardens and a few members live in private limited equity housing cooperatives. The variety in the membership is mirrored in the plantings: an Indian family grows chilies, turmeric, and other spices; the preschool fills its plot with simple vegetables and flowers; and butterflies crowd the Girl Scouts’ mix of plants for pollinators.

While there are many longstanding members, some plots are recently under new management. One is freshly planted by sisters who live in the building next door. The rows are trim and the way they are experimenting with their crops is creative and bodes well for a future of understanding how to utilize their small patch of soil. Another plot is being planted by a group of three women, who have artfully put in many plants with a standout jungle of marigolds as the summer progresses.

MANAGEMENT Currently there are two coordinators managing the garden: Nita Sembovich and Aimee Bonana. They manage the waitlist, turnover, garden rules, fees, cleanup, and troubleshooting. Although the garden is welcoming, aside from cleanup days there are few planned social events. There are the usual problems of fine gardeners who over time become lax or unable to manage their plots, but who don't want to leave. Some gardens crowd into the space of other plots. Some gardeners give away their plots without consulting the coordinators. One Japanese woman in the past was a renegade who planted the outside edges of the garden, scrupulously and very successfully, growing all sorts of unknown beans and Asian vegetables. Members were so impressed they found a way to move her into the garden and give her space. Fred Crastas and Apoline Rodriguez from India are the incredible growers of the Indian vegetables. Often, with the number of foreign-born residents in Cambridge, there is a language barrier, but speaking English is not necessary for good gardening talent.



SUMMARY As most of the community gardens are owned and managed by the City through the Conservation Commission, Field of Dreams gardeners wonder how they fit in. While they do not want to be controlled by the City, they do need some city services. For example, Cambridge has a rat problem that is very evident at Field of Dreams. While the City has a rat control program, it is unclear if Field of Dreams can take advantage of it. On the other hand, there does not seem to be much pilfering, theft, vagrancy, or vandalism in the garden despite the lack of fencing or security. The members work uniquely together and derive great satisfaction from their successes in the garden.

Green Street Neighborhood Garden

is the only Cambridge Community Garden that is owned and maintained privately with no input or support from the City of Cambridge. The advantages and disadvantages of this privately-owned community garden depend on the commitment and resources of the owner, and the leadership ability of the garden coordinator.



7

Green Street

HISTORY The Green Street Neighborhood Garden was originally part of a large site on Massachusetts Avenue. In the early 1980s, a developer proposed building a large eight-story commercial building (now 1000 Massachusetts Avenue). If built as planned, it would have occupied the entire site down to Green Street, and it would have dwarfed and shaded the two- to three-story residences on Green Street.

In opposition to this plan, residents formed the Green Street Neighborhood Association and successfully negotiated with the developer to provide a continuous green open space buffer between this large, tall building and the residential neighborhood along Green Street. The developer, Arthur Klipfel, agreed that a portion of this green space would become a park, and a smaller part would be a community garden, and that both would be maintained by the owner in perpetuity.

As a result, in 1983, the Green Street Neighborhood Park and Community Garden were established. Since then, the building has been sold twice, once to Cambridge College, and recently to a management company, Intercontinental Real Estate Corporation.

The space was originally open to the public; however, since 1994, the gate has been locked and use is restricted to neighborhood residents only, due to security problems with homeless people and drug use.



LOCATION

The total site for the Green Street Neighborhood Garden is approximately 1/5th of an acre, 170 feet by 50 feet, located between Massachusetts Avenue and Green Street between Harvard and Central squares. To the east is Bay Street, south is Green Street, to the west are eight two-story attached condominiums, and to the north is the back of the six-story building at 1000 Massachusetts Avenue.



GARDEN DESCRIPTION The community garden is a small area in the southeast corner of the site, about one-quarter of the total space. It fronts on Green Street next to the main gate. The park that takes up the rest of the property is in need of renovation. It has several stone paths and sitting areas with old benches surrounded by lawn, shrubs, and trees. There is an old play area with sand surfacing surrounded by retaining walls with murals and an old wooden fountain and bench. A pergola near the entrance is a feature of the park. A black metal fence surrounds three sides of the site with a main gate on Green Street.

There are eight garden plots varying in size but they are all roughly 9' X 12'. A few plots have recently been divided and shared. Occasional vacant plots are used communally. All the garden plots are arranged in two long rows parallel to and near the sidewalk fence. Gardeners are fully responsible for taking care of everything in their plot. There is one hose connection for water, but no tool shed as the gardeners feel they live so close by that this is not necessary.

WHAT IS GROWN Two long-term gardeners, Mary Dill and John Vyhnanek, testified that vegetables grown in the Green Street Neighborhood Garden plots are particularly delicious when picked fresh and they are grateful for the amount of sun the garden gets that makes this possible. Examples are arugula, Swiss chard, beets, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, purple potatoes, and broccoli. Some flowers are grown as companion plants.



GARDENERS The gardeners are mostly from the Green Street area of the Riverside neighborhood. There is only one gardener not living in the immediate neighborhood, Mary Dill, who resides in Harvard Square. The garden coordinator, John Vyhnanek, has purposely tried to limit the gardeners and park users to those living within the neighborhood area.

Mary Dill is also the only one left from the original group of gardeners. Wendy Stone explained that this area of Cambridge has experienced increasing gentrification since the 1980s, as more housing has been built and more transient, younger residents have moved in.

However, there is a sense of community in the garden and the gardeners seem to know each other and get together for one or two potlucks and one or two workdays per year. Most of the gardeners are middle-aged or older but occasionally a family with children can be seen. In general the gardeners are happy working in their plots. While they help each other out when needed, gardeners do not join up for regular socializing. Mary Dill plainly stated that gardening is what they like to do.

MANAGEMENT The current owner, Intercontinental Real Estate Corporation, now maintains the park and garden. This maintenance includes providing water for the hose hook up and, when needed, replacing garden elements such as wooden edging for plots. The owner pays a landscape maintenance company to mow lawns in the park and do some seasonal cleanup, but no tree pruning or other similar major work.

The park and garden coordinator is a longtime neighborhood resident, John Vyhnanek, who was part of the founding committee of residents, the Green Street Neighborhood Association. In 1994, Cambridge College asked John to take over active management of both park and garden users, a role he has continued to fill since then.

John's management of the garden for the new owner involves handling everything related to operating the garden. One of the gardeners, Wendy Stone, referred to John as the "Garden Angel." He selects the gardeners when plots become available; interviews all garden applicants; handles all communications with owner and gardeners; and installs and fixes most items when the need arises. Queries to the City's Community Garden Program about Green Street are referred directly to John. Jennifer Letoureau provides contact information only.

SUMMARY The gardeners feel that the quality of maintenance of the garden and park has varied over time depending on who the owner is and their level of interest. Cambridge College was an attentive owner for many years and did a good job maintaining the landscape and garden. The new owner is a real estate management company that does only what is required.

The present garden coordinator believes there are parts of the park area, in addition to the garden, that need to be renovated, particularly where safety is an issue. The play areas are out of date, the benches are old, and there are tree limbs that may need to be removed. However, work in both park and community garden is entirely under the control of the owner.

There seems to be consensus among the gardeners that this is a nice small neighborhood garden to be part of. The only real complaint is that the rabbits and squirrels eat the produce. Fortunately, rats do not seem to have found this garden yet.





Riverside Press Park Community Garden

is in transition from the traditional form of community gardening with individual plots assigned to individual gardeners to becoming a pilot program offering a communal form of gardening. This new program is an informal partnership between the nonprofit Green Cambridge and the City of Cambridge Community Gardens Program.



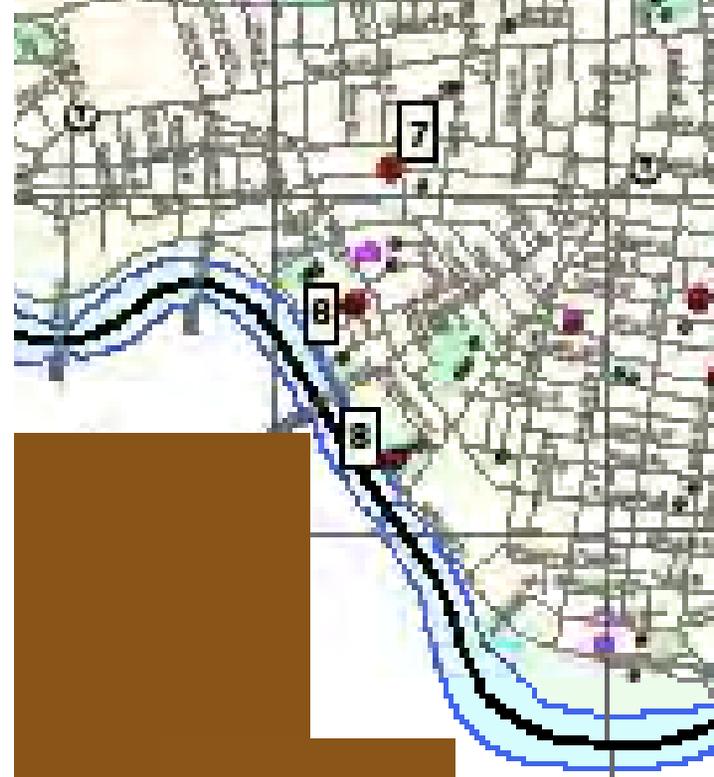
8

Riverside Press

HISTORY Riverside Press was a book printing plant in an old Cambridge building along the banks of the Charles River. The plant, which Henry Houghton started in 1852, closed in 1971.

In 2012-13 the Riverside Press Park Community Garden was established on the site of the former printing plant. Henrietta Davis, at that time a Cambridge city councilor living near the park, was instrumental in helping designate part of the park for a community garden. At a neighborhood meeting in an adjacent housing tower (808 Memorial Drive), residents voiced enthusiasm for a community garden in Riverside Park. However, there were only a few alternative locations within the park for the garden, and in the end the only feasible location appeared to be immediately adjacent to Memorial Drive.

Paul Poisson, former president of the Tenants Association in the adjacent 808 Memorial Drive, has remained involved in this garden. According to Paul, the garden worked well for several years. The plots were assigned to gardeners who lived mostly in the 808 Tower but also to some from the neighborhood. The gardeners came from many countries and spoke many different languages, which made communication somewhat challenging but worked well enough.



LOCATION

The garden is located within the Riverside Press Park adjacent to Memorial Drive along the Cambridge side of the Charles River between River Street and Western Avenue. This area is a mixed-use neighborhood with single-family and multi-family residences, rental apartments, offices, commercial facilities, and stores. There appear to be many students living in proximity to the park.



While the garden may have suffered from a poor location adjacent to Memorial Drive and from a lack of a neighborhood feeling perhaps due to the presence of so many students, Paul felt the garden's biggest problems were theft and misuse. People stole produce and then planted their own, taking over plots. People also didn't feel physically safe in the garden primarily because they were not able to see beyond the back fence into the park, due to tall shrubs. Paul felt the City needed to address these issues, as well as insufficient garden maintenance. They remained unresolved, and two to three years ago, most gardeners did not return.

Recently, Jennifer Letourneau said she thought the solution was to reprogram the garden. Letourneau agreed that a local nonprofit organization, Green Cambridge, should take over management of Riverside Press Community Garden as a pilot program, using its Hurley Farm in East Cambridge as a model for an alternative communal gardening approach. This started in the spring of 2021 and so the transition to this program is still in its infancy.

Green Cambridge is a nonprofit organization that focuses on developing urban agriculture food and nutrition programs in Cambridge. The Green Cambridge mission is to spread urban agriculture across the city, partnering with other organizations like City Sprouts and local schools.

As the model for what Green Cambridge hopes to do at Riverside Press, Hurley Farm offers gardening for the community with no individual plots, so group learning about gardening happens. There is a manager who receives a stipend. Produce goes to gardeners but also to the East End House which has a market every Tuesday.



GARDEN DESCRIPTION The garden is set on the far western side of Riverside Press Park. The park is quite large and well maintained, boasting tennis courts, a playground, and lawn areas with various well-used paths crisscrossing the park.

The garden is approximately 100' X 50', and is surrounded by a black metal fence on all sides with two gates. The entire garden is paved in asphalt which is in fair condition with weeds growing in the cracks. There are approximately 20 raised planter beds 4 by 8 feet. with wood edges about one foot in height. The planters generally follow a diagonal pattern and are well spaced apart for circulation. There is one metal bench along the edge of the garden, one water closet with a hose, and one wooden kiosk near the main gate which is reminiscent of older park furniture. There is no tool shed.



WHAT IS GROWN A three-foot-wide pollinator bed thrives along the entire length of the border closest to the Charles River. It is informal in layout and provides colorful visual relief from the cars on Memorial Drive. Planted here are poppies, asters, and other perennials. In 2021, a colorful row of tall sunflowers also faced Memorial Drive. There is a hedge of five-foot-high deciduous shrubs along the outside of the fence abutting the adjacent Riverside Press Park that screens most views into or out of the garden.

Approximately half the wooden planters are painted with a green stripe to identify those that Green Cambridge has recently taken over and replanted under their management. These planters look very well maintained with plant-identifying signage. What is growing here includes lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, cabbage, peppers, eggplant, peas, various herbs such as chamomile and mint, and companion flowers. These beds are available to anyone to maintain and harvest as they choose. The kiosk displays a large sign that welcomes people to pick from Green Cambridge beds for themselves. The produce from these beds will also be distributed to shelters.

The other half of the wooden planters have no green paint markings, which appears to indicate they are to be, or have been, assigned by the city to individual gardeners for their own use and harvest.

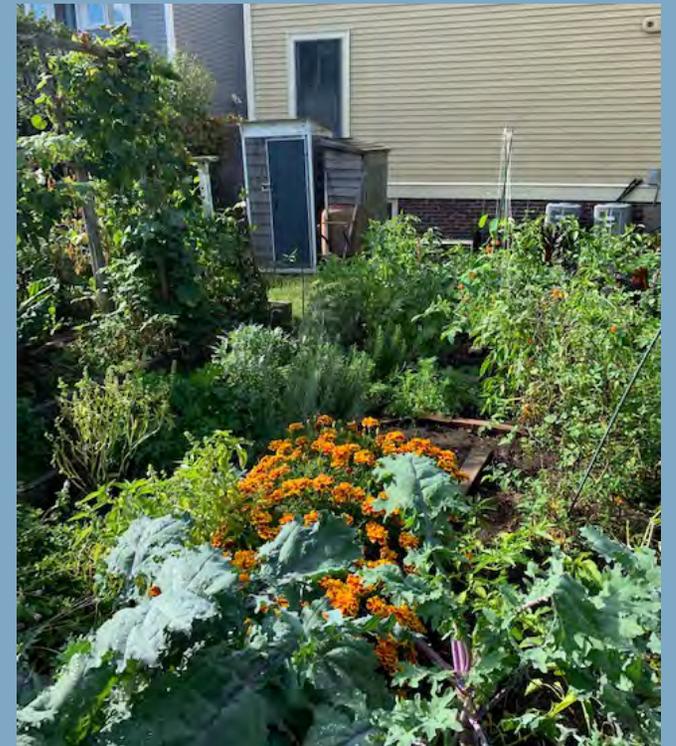
(NEW) MANAGEMENT The specific goals of Green Cambridge for Riverside Press are to have classes about gardening on-site. There will be no “members” of the garden, but three days a week the community—including schools and corporate groups—can participate. The intent is to break down the separateness of the different neighborhoods. The plan is for 200-plus different people to be at the garden throughout the year; of these, 10-15 will be there each week as regulars.

Green Cambridge will conduct online scheduling for when the community can come to the garden, and when classes will be held. Classes are seen as an outreach vehicle to make a place for the community to get together in the garden.

Julia Mintz has been hired as the farm coordinator at Riverside Press and Hurley Farm. Various resources for recruiting gardeners and program participants are being looked at, such as Google Groups, Green Cambridge outreach programs, and students from Boston University. To date, there is no planned outreach to neighborhood residents, although a woman living at the 808 Tower has been asked to help coordinate and recruit potential gardeners from the building.

SUMMARY It will take time to see how the Riverside Press pilot program evolves. Steven Nutter, director of Green Cambridge, has a “wish list” for this garden which sounds promising, but will require financial support. Also, the City will need to decide about addressing the issues that were not attended to in the original garden—security, safety, maintenance of the garden facilities, and pruning of plants. It will be important to see how Green Cambridge can develop a “community” around this garden, which did not happen before. Also to be seen is how well the meshing of individual plots with a communal farming model will work.





Peggy Hayes Memorial Garden

is well established and deeply embedded in its immediate community. All the gardeners can walk from their residences to the site: this is a garden whose members see each other on the street and share garden tasks.

9

Peggy Hayes

HISTORY In 1973, the City took ownership of the lot that is now the site of the garden. Due to a fire the lot was already vacant, although the basement of one house remained. After the two houses burned down the owner abandoned the site. It was then cleared by the City and put up for sale. An umbrella coalition of seven member organizations, called the Cambridgeport Alliance, acquired the site with one grant for the property and another for the taxes. This was the same time the Emily Street community garden was being created, and it inspired the possibility for one on this site. In 1977, the site was named the Peggy Hayes Memorial Garden in remembrance of Mrs. Hayes who had lived nearby and used to sit there, under her umbrella, before its formal organization as a community garden. A memorial plaque is located on a stone in the southwest corner.

In the intervening years, a nearby cooperative preschool made some use of the lot. Eventually the Alliance offered to sell it back to the City. Utilizing funds available through the Community Preservation Act, then recently enabled through state legislation, the City was able to buy the property in 2006-2007.

Improvements by the City included bringing in clean soil and installing black chain link fencing with two gates on Watson Street. Water is provided from a two- faucet spigot located in the front.



LOCATION

The garden is located at 14 Watson Street, a short street between Brookline Street and Pearl Street in the Cambridgeport neighborhood.



DESCRIPTION The garden is 70' X 60' and has 17 plots. From the corner entrance, one path forms a square, with single plots between the path and fence on the two long sides and a patchwork of plots in the middle. Across the front are the gates (one is a double and rarely used), the waste barrels, raspberry bushes, and grasses. A venerable yew and a lilac remain perhaps from the pre-fire homes. A communal space in one corner contains a round perennial bed, two donated apple trees, and the Peggy Hayes memorial plaque. The garden is open across the shady back area, with chairs, tables, and the tool shed.

The individual gardens are separated by wooden edging boards. Some plots have become raised beds and some are divided in various ways. There is very little fencing of plots except for netting against rabbits. The path is grassy and on the weedy side by September. By good fortune, surrounding buildings are mostly low and residential so that the garden gets good sunlight with the exception of the back.



WHAT IS GROWN A wide variety of vegetables, herbs, flowers, and fruit is grown: annuals—cosmos, marigolds, zinnia; herbs—sage, basil, thyme, parsley; vegetables—tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, carrots, beans; perennials—hosta, amsonia, obedient plant, iris, phlox; fruit—blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, red currants, plus two apple trees and one peach. One gardener has dedicated much of his plot to growing cut flowers for his wife's desk. Even in late fall there are still tomatoes, kales of various varieties, squash, late lettuce, and a low growing spinach bursting with energy and shared with all wishing to help themselves. Another interesting plant is a kind of sweet potato that its Asian plot owner has grown mostly for its elegant leaves. He has planted his plot in the manner traditional to his culture in mounds. By mid-June harvesting of lettuces and peas is underway, with gardeners starting to hover over their tomato plants. A stand of fava beans was particularly magnificent in 2020.



GARDENERS The garden has a membership of twenty families in 17 plots. The stability of longterm participation has made additions from the waiting list very slow. Sharing of plots has enabled greater participation and also solved the problem of the members who might need help with maintenance. A few families now have some space to garden with their young children.

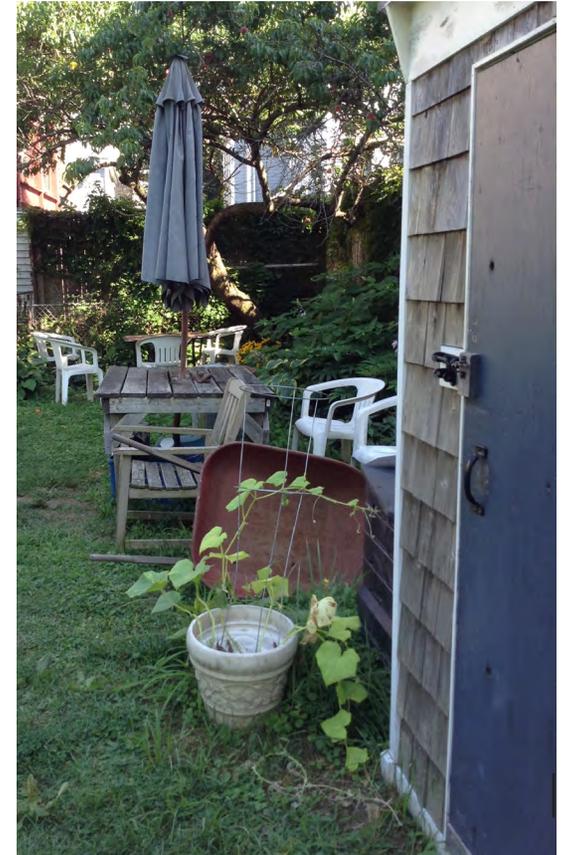
In this garden it is easy to recognize the deep satisfaction felt by individual gardeners. As a group, some are outgoing socializers while others are more interested in being quiet and alone. This respectful attitude allows diversity without pressure. Cleanups are a shared activity and members water each other's plants when someone is sick or away. Everyone is expected to keep the tool shed tidy.



MANAGEMENT At present three coordinators share management of the garden, with Kathy Gardner doing most of the administration as she has for the past 10 years. Meetings are called, finances are reviewed, and decisions are made with the participants or in some cases by the coordinators alone. Gardeners who seem not to care for their plots very seriously find themselves being tactfully advised. Members are responsible for the care and good health of their plots, which can be reassigned if not deemed adequately used.

Rules established for administration and maintenance of the garden are distributed and signed each year. In addition, a \$30 fee is requested to cover items such as hoses, barrels, and tools. Composting is not allowed onsite but some gardeners bring compost they have made at home to their plots.

SUMMARY Although plagued by the burgeoning rabbit population of Cambridge, the Hayes garden is relatively untroubled by animal pests or casual poaching of garden produce. In the case of rodents, keeping the gardens clean and clear of food scraps from the compost brought in seems to offer the best solution. The inevitable temptation to help oneself to a good-looking vegetable or fruit is probably best deterred by the garden's appearance of care, the presence of busy people, and by a certain amount of goodwill toward outsiders.





Emily Street Garden

This community garden has always been unique because it is comprised of one shared communal garden plot, as opposed to one plot for each gardener. Planting, maintenance, harvesting, and all other responsibilities are shared by the gardeners. It is a small garden with an almost 50-year history and the person who started this garden is still helping to run it.



10

Emily Street Garden

HISTORY In 1974, the Cambridge Conservation Commission publicized that it would support new community gardens in Cambridgeport, provided citizens could find the lots. A Cambridgeport resident and activist, Bill Cavellini, told the City that he had a site on Emily Street. What ensued was a prolonged time of negotiations between the City and MIT (who owned the plot). In the end, each potential gardener involved in the negotiations signed a document releasing MIT from any liability on the site and restricting use to gardening only.

Presently MIT is in the process of transferring ownership of the garden to the City of Cambridge. The city manager has recently signed a letter that commits the City to maintain the existing role of the gardeners to manage the garden in essentially the same way it has been managed for the last 46 years.



LOCATION

Emily Street Garden is located in the Cambridgeport neighborhood on a corner lot bounded by Brookline Street to the north and Emily Street to the east, and by a two-story house on the west. The area is primarily a residential neighborhood, with some small commercial establishments mixed in.



GARDEN DESCRIPTION The garden is a single garden plot with 24 beds for 24 crops for 14 households. If you are driving on Brookline Street and pass Emily Street, you could easily miss seeing this garden, since it is only 30 feet wide on Brookline by 100 feet long on Emily, and obscured by 3-foot-high fencing and a raspberry hedge. There is a shade tree which anchors the garden at the corner of Brookline and Emily streets. Entering the garden through the gate on Brookline Avenue, the space appears to be bigger than expected as the garden is so neatly laid out in tight rows fully planted. There is one access path down the middle of the garden, with a tool shed and compost area located next to the abutting house.

WHAT IS GROWN The main goal of the garden is to plant and harvest vegetables. Every year the vegetables include tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, spinach, carrots, beets, arugula, radishes, peas, beans, peppers, and eggplants. Other vegetables are also often added such as okra, kale, Swiss chard, collard greens, and broccoli rabe. Fruits such as raspberries (grown along the fence) and rhubarb have been in the garden since its inception. Various annual and perennial herbs are grown, along with companion flowers such as marigolds, zinnias, and sunflowers.

Vegetables are planted in numerous sequences, starting early and going late in the season. They are grown mostly from seeds, except tomato, pepper, and eggplant, which are purchased as seedlings.

GARDENERS The gardeners are largely from the Cambridgeport neighborhood surrounding Emily Street. Many have participated in the garden for a long time and are from families who were previously involved and are generally active in Cambridgeport in various ways. Two gardeners, Peter Rhodes and Matt Wilson, describe this garden as providing a strong family and community base for the neighborhood.

MANAGEMENT According to Peter Rhodes this garden has a clear management structure, and everyone takes their garden responsibilities seriously. There is one overall garden coordinator—Bill Cavellini. He was instrumental in getting this garden started in 1974, and is still involved in a major way up to this day. The long-term leadership and mentoring that one coordinator has provided over these many years is an important factor in keeping this garden running continuously and successfully.

There are additional garden coordinators assigned for each month during the growing season. These coordinators manage what, when, and who will be planting, watering, weeding, or harvesting.



There are only two meetings per year for the members. One of the meetings is a potluck in winter to evaluate what will be planted for the coming year. The other is a potluck in the fall where food that was harvested during the growing season is cooked and served by and to the gardeners. One gardener said these potlucks were very joyful meals in which gardeners shared dishes made with Emily Garden produce.

Matt Wilson talked about how communal gardening has the benefits of fostering friendships, high-yield production due to crop rotations, and conservation of water, land, and soil. He said their garden was like a farm. There are several workdays in the spring for all gardeners to help clean up, layout planting areas, plant seeds and seedlings, and then again in the fall when the garden is put to bed for winter.

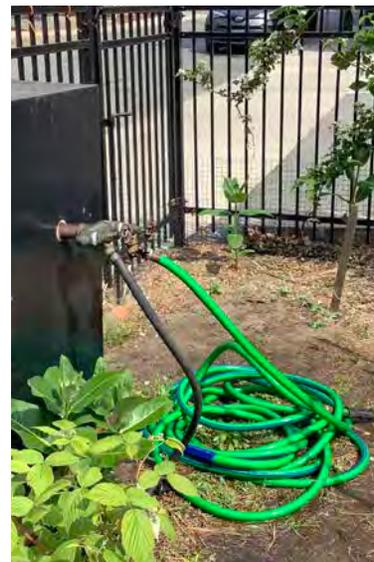
Several members commented on the garden as a community environment for people who want to learn about gardening from others more experienced. The group workdays and evening potlucks promote a sharing of knowledge among members. The garden donates its extra food to shelters in the area, another beneficial experience for the members.

Gardeners pay \$20 per year for their membership and use of the garden, which covers purchase of seeds, seedlings, and miscellaneous equipment. Gardeners make compost on-site and salt marsh hay is brought in for mulch.

The City replaced 18 inches of contaminated soil when the garden was first established in 1974. Recently, due to unacceptable amounts of lead, MIT paid for 4 feet of soil to be removed and replaced. The City provides water for the garden that is distributed by hoses at present, but may be replaced soon by an in-ground watering system. The City is considering installing a few raised beds for accessibility as part of City policy.

SUMMARY Gardeners interviewed did not mention any specific problems. They did, however, say that rats have invaded the garden over the last eight years, and spring traps have been installed.

Bill Cavellini, Peter and Matt, and other gardeners talked to, are proud of this garden and feel it could serve as an inspiration to other community gardens that have only small individual plots. They feel their garden model has strong benefits—with its sense of community and with the amount and diversity of plants that can be grown. Most of all they feel the learning environment and camaraderie generated by the shared garden is a real asset to their life in the neighborhood.





Squirrel Brand Community Garden

(originally known as the Broadway & Boardman Community Garden) has seen many changes since its inception in 1977. Although it is now less than half its original size it still retains much of its grass-roots-based character and is a vibrant part of this diverse neighborhood.



11

Squirrel Brand

HISTORY Squirrel Brand Community Garden acquired its name from the Squirrel Brand Nut Company, which was located at the junction of Boardman Street and Broadway in The Port district of Cambridge. In 1975, the owners of the company (which had been in Cambridge since 1899) donated the land in front of the factory to its employees and neighbors, for use as a community garden. It was named the Broadway & Boardman Community Garden and there were eventually 50 plots in this space. At first there was no water supply so people in neighboring houses let gardeners run hoses from their outlets to a barrel in the garden, but in 1984 the Cambridge Water Department installed a faucet, and more barrels were added. The garden thrived—with compost demonstrations from Robert Winters (the Cambridge authority on composting); Open Garden events; a citation for long-term community involvement from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society; and fully occupied plots.

In 1998, following the death of the owner of the Squirrel Brand Company, the future of the garden was uncertain. In March of that year eight gardeners spoke at a City Council meeting and gave an impassioned plea to save the garden. Later—in 1999—a group of gardeners went door to door in the neighborhood gathering signatures with a petition to save the garden. One of these was Shannon Temple, who was in the garden three or four days a week. The pale pink climbing rose she tended, where Boardman and Broadway streets meet, grew to a great height and stretched halfway down the fence on Broadway Street, becoming a neighborhood attraction. In that heyday the garden was described as a “lush urban oasis.”



LOCATION

The garden is located in The Port between the old Squirrel Brand Factory and Broadway Street.

A small municipal park is on the east adjacent side and a parking lot on the west.



In 1999, the City bought the property and two years later Just-A-Start turned the factory building into affordable housing. The community garden space was redesigned as part park, part garden. The twenty or so gardeners who lost plots when the land was divided were very discouraged, and few—if any—applied for plots in the new garden that opened in 2005.

GARDEN DESCRIPTION The size of the present garden is about 100' X 50'. It has 34 plots that are approximately 10 by 10 feet, with a larger, rectangular, raised plot near the gate. It is surrounded on three sides by chain link fencing with an ornamental metal fence facing Broadway. There is one gate. When the City acquired the land it removed several feet of lead-contaminated soil and replaced it with new topsoil, but according to two present gardeners the soil is still quite poor. The plots have many different configurations and some owners have subdivided them into two, three, or four sections. There are two benches next to the raised bed and four hoses. The only really shady spot is directly under the crab apple trees on the south side of the garden. The three main pathways (made from concrete pavers) are partly obscured with soil and weeds. There is a broken-down wooden container for shared tools and a large locked plastic chest. The plot that once was used for compost is now abandoned as the City has disallowed composting because of the risk of attracting rats.

WHAT IS GROWN Most plots are given over entirely to vegetables. Tomatoes and greens are most conspicuous but other vegetables include pickling cucumbers, summer squash, basil, and kohlrabi.

GARDENERS A large percentage of the gardeners still come from two or three blocks away. It is a racially diverse neighborhood with a high percentage of student rentals. As well as individual gardeners there are plots taken by CitySprouts (for Maynard School), Violeta Day Care, Cambridge Community Arts Center and Cambridge City Growers. The latter are a group that started in 2020 during COVID-19, with the aim of growing and sharing food communally. When combined, these community endeavors may eventually occupy about 25% of the garden.

Toni Bee lived in the Squirrel Brand building for 18 years but did not become a gardener at Squirrel Brand until 2020, the year she moved into nearby housing. She is a founding member of Cambridge Black Lives Matter and also a poet who has brought other poets to the garden for regular poetry readings. The first plot she was allocated was under the crab apple trees but she rejected this because it was hard to grow anything in the shade, and the crab apples were constantly falling on the plot. The plot assignment did however lend its name to the Crabapple Gardeners, a group that formed at Squirrel Brand and to which Toni belongs. It is similar in aim to Cambridge City Growers—a collection of neighbors whose intent is to acquire land, grow food, and strengthen the community.



MANAGEMENT Patricia McGrath was the coordinator of the garden from 2014-2021. During that time she found herself dealing with many problems. There was no effective waiting list when she started, and frequently people signed up for plots and then gave up halfway through the summer. The year 2020 was particularly difficult with thefts of tools, plant, and fertilizer, intimidation, accusations of racism, and even one gardener filing a police report when his garden—which appeared abandoned but was actually planted with seeds—was dug up.

When Patricia left in the spring of 2021 three gardeners—Santos Carrasquillo, Liz Layton, and Esther Hanig—responded to a request from the Conservation Commission director for volunteers to share the coordinating. Liz had gardened in the original Broadway & Boardman Community Garden from 1990-1999 and only recently returned to the “new” garden. Esther was at the Moore Street Community Garden for several years but found the soil there to be very poor and felt threatened by one of the families who gardened there. She has been at Squirrel Brand for several years and is a keen vegetable grower. Liz is one of the few gardeners who plants flowers as well as vegetables. This year she is planning to grow greens and tomatoes in a small raised bed and surround them with pollinators such as milkweed.

SUMMARY There is general agreement that a tool shed is needed to replace the broken wooden container, and that new borders for raised beds (possibly made from galvanized metal) should replace the wooden ones that have rotted. Both these items are at present on the City’s Participatory Budgeting website. Also being discussed is moving the benches from next to the raised bed to underneath the crab apple trees—so that gardeners and guests can sit in the shade—and replacing them with a raised bed for wheelchair gardeners.

The volunteer coordinator role has been challenging, but with garden events planned, and meetings to discuss outreach (especially to affordable housing neighborhoods), the coordinators hope to create a welcoming atmosphere for a diverse community of gardeners, and oversee a successful mixture of individual and group gardening.





Moore Street Community Garden

occupies a truncated L-shaped space bounded by a tennis court, a parking garage, some residential housing, and a park. A large portion of the gardeners come from many corners of the earth. The garden is unusual, not just in what is cultivated, but also in the creative structures built in and around the plots.

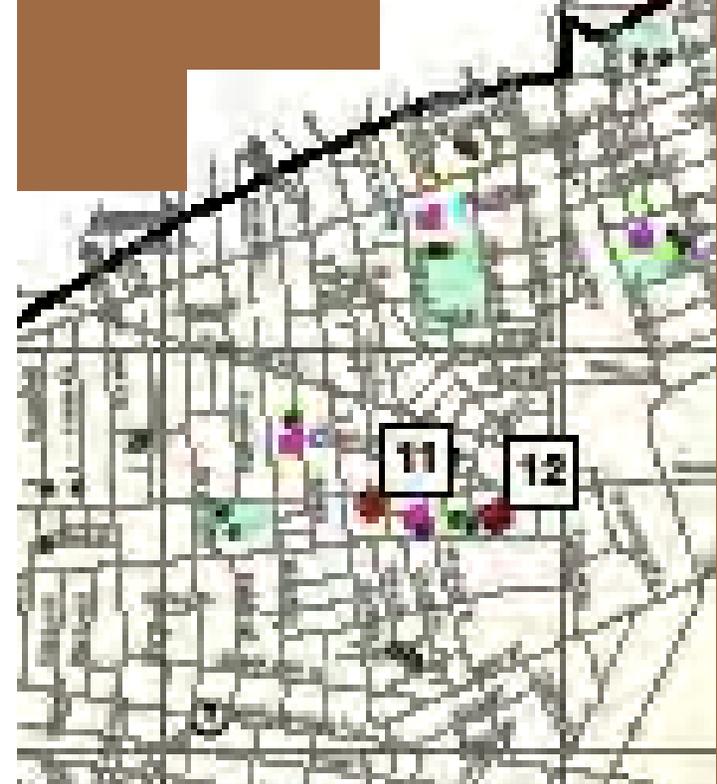


12

Moore Street

HISTORY On September 16th, 1911 The Cambridge Chronicle had an article about a community garden at the corner of Moore Street and Harvard Street. It was called “an interesting experiment” and “a brilliant success.” Miss Jean Cross (garden director of the Boston Social Union) had persuaded Mr. Hicks (owner of the property) to donate the land for a children’s garden. She raised the money; supervised the clearing of the land (which was done by the children themselves); and oversaw the laying of 22 plots, each 8 by10 feet.

The present Moore Street community garden was created in 1985, after a building on the site next to where the children’s garden had been, burned down. In 2001, the City acquired land behind the garden. For several years the land was used for temporary city office space. When this was demolished, construction of the Green-Rose Heritage Park began. The community garden was temporarily shut down and heavy equipment occupied the space where the garden had been, causing the soil to become very compacted. When it reopened in 2008 the City replaced the topsoil (approximately 1½ ft.) with “poor quality backfill” according to one gardener, and “marine mud” according to another. Soil tests found no lead but there was very little organic matter. The gardeners who had been tending and adding to the soil for years were very upset. Also not helpful was a new row of oak trees planted next to the garden, which the gardeners managed to replace with two plum trees. Further post-construction adjustment was removal of some of the arborvitae at the back of the garden in order to make more garden space.



LOCATION

Moore Street is a short street in The Port that runs perpendicularly between Broadway Street to the north and Harvard Street to the south. The garden itself is situated at the corner of Moore Street and Dickinson Street close to Newtowne Court and Washington Elms—two of the oldest federal public housing projects in the nation (1938 and 1942).



GARDEN DESCRIPTION The garden is an irregular shape with unevenly sized plots. Most of them are 10' X 10' but several are 6' X 13' and two are 6' X 20'. There are 29 plots in all including a raised bed next to the gates. On the west side—next to the clapboard house and a small section of the park—there is a chain link fence and a row of arborvitae. The other three sides have the metal fencing of the park. There are two gates close together—one on the Moore Street side (which is locked) and the other next to the tennis court. The raised bed is surrounded by pavers and has two benches overlooking it. There is no tool shed. Waste barrels are near the entrance and four hose outlets are available. The mulch paths are becoming smaller and smaller as gardeners encroach on them in order to extend their plots. In one corner the path is completely overgrown with milkweed. Rats are a problem as in most community gardens and several rabbits appear to be living in the garden.

WHAT IS GROWN As well as the more typical vegetables to be found in the Cambridge Community Gardens, there are many vegetables grown that mirror the different cultures of the gardeners. These include mustard greens, tomatillo, amaranth, bitter melons, and salsify. Not many flowers are grown although several plots have a variety that includes lavender, Shasta daisies, and daylilies. There are also remnants of persistent self-seeding morning glories and poppies, and herbs that have spread everywhere, such as wild fennel, mint, and epazote (also known as Mexican tea).

GARDENERS Many of the gardeners are recent immigrants with the largest group—probably comprising a third of the total—coming from Bangladesh. Some gardeners only speak a few words of English. Most walk or bicycle and many rely on the plots for all their fresh vegetables. Extremely elaborate permanent structures have been built by many of the gardeners to establish the boundaries of their plots and to protect and support their plants. These are made from a huge and creative amount of materials which include boards, wooden lattice, metal poles, rope, twigs, wire netting, broom handles, plastic edging, bricks, and metal grids.

Pandeli Kule lives nearby and has had a plot for 4 years. He comes from Albania and has been in the USA for 10 years. His son also has a plot. They grow beans, tomatoes, potatoes, and lettuce. Sufi Begun is from Bangladesh. She speaks very little English but pointed out her plot which was mostly given over to mustard greens. She also pointed out other plots that she said belonged to her daughter, uncle, cousin, and nephew. Leon Paguandas has been in the garden for about 5 years. He came to the USA from Trinidad & Tobago but his ancestors, he says, were slaves in India. He grows cilantro, thyme, and coriander, which he dries. He never buys any herbs from the store. This year he is also growing cucumbers, peppers, and eggplant. Christine Merch has been in the garden for over 12 years. She has a thriving plot with flowers as well as vegetables, but she says that 1 foot down the ground feels like cement. She is growing salsify, peas, garlic, chives, tarragon, lemon balm, dianthus, and heliotrope. Another long-time gardener is David Lyon who has one of the two plots that is 4 X 16 ft. He is growing Defiant tomatoes, tomatillos, potatoes, chives, tarragon, and also flowers.





MANAGEMENT The coordinators since the garden reopened have had a difficult time with plot allocation and theft. Minka vonBeuzekom started gardening at Moore Street in 1991 and returned to the garden when it reopened in 2008. When she was coordinator, plots mostly changed hands by word of mouth. It was (and still is) hard to determine who had been assigned plots and how many had been taken over by a single household. Theft became such a problem that the City put locks on both the gates. They were soon cut however, and the City concluded that, in any case, as a policy, people must have access to public spaces.

Laetitia Henry replaced Minka as coordinator. Like Minka she had been at Moore Street for a long time and started gardening there again after the garden reopened and after the soil was tested. However, she had to wait for four years to be assigned a plot again, and then had to move once because of an aggressive neighbor. She found the position of coordinator to be more and more of a chore because of the ongoing problem of theft and the proliferation of rabbits. The current coordinator Carolyn Mathews took over in the Spring of 2021.

SUMMARY There is only one posting on the notice board “Moore Garden LESS Street,” put there by Minka vonBeuzekom. The lack of rules or even guidelines is apparent but at present, in spite of a few instances of intimidation and conflict in the past, two types of gardeners are able to coexist—those that are motivated to grow food in quantity and a core of long-time gardeners with more varied interests.





Hurley Street Community Garden

The community garden and playground of Hurley Street Park, amid the tightly knit neighborhood of East Cambridge, is truly a haven. The curved, rounded lines of its beautiful design by Gary Chan of the City's Community Development Department provide relief from the block-by-block urban grid; the lush hedges and the vegetables and flowers in season offer color to the surrounding asphalt and wood structures; and the garden and play areas welcome the elderly, young couples, and a host of children.



HURLEY PARK CONCEPT PLAN
CITY OF CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT 2014

BASED ON INTERGENERATIONAL PLAY MODEL
Children Benefit from Interaction with Adults & Adults Benefit from Interaction with Children

▲ SEE SAW / ROUND-A-BOUT

▲ ARBOR WITH 4 SETS OF SWING BEATS

▲ WATER PLAY SPLASH PAD

▲ GROUP SWING

▲ ROCKERS

▲ WATER/SAND PLAY TABLE

▲ RAISED LANDING / STAGE

▲ GARDEN STORAGE SHED

▲ GARDEN GATE

▲ COMMUNITY GARDENS

▲ ART FENCE

A MORE OPEN & USABLE SPACE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

Hurley Park
Concept Plan

13

Hurley Park

HISTORY East Cambridge, also known as Area 1, is bounded by Somerville to the north, the Charles River to the east, the Boston & Albany Railroad tracks to the west, and Kendall Square to the south. It grew in the mid-19th century with a large immigrant population serving local manufacturing and industrial businesses. Most of the houses in East Cambridge were built between 1820 to 1875 along streets that form a tight grid. Hurley Street belongs to the Northern part of the grid bordering Somerville. The population of East Cambridge was originally predominantly of Irish and Portuguese origin, with a mix of Polish and Italians. Since the 1990s the development of Kendall Square and the proximity to Boston businesses have brought in a number of young professionals and their families.

The land occupied by Hurley Street Park, approximately 0.3 acres, was acquired in 1942 in foreclosure for non-payment of taxes in arrears since 1938. It was still vacant in 1946 when the city erected two barracks-style structures for housing of veterans. They were removed in 1951 or 52 when the land was appropriated for a tot lot, completed in December 1954.

In the fall of 2014, guided by the goals of the Healthy Parks and Playgrounds Initiative and with input from the community, the city moved forward with the renovation of Hurley Street Park under the direction of Gary Chan, then associate neighborhood planner for the city. The work, completed in October 2015 includes, besides the refurbished playground, an entirely new community garden on the east side: the Hurley Street Community Garden.



LOCATION

The James J. Hurley Street Park is named after a WWI Sargeant in the United States Army killed in action in Lamont, France, in 1918. It is a small playground and community garden located on Hurley Street in East Cambridge. It sits on the south side of a roughly six-by-eight block residential area with a unique and cohesive character.



GARDEN DESCRIPTION Hurley Street Park was conceived and designed as a tightly knit ensemble, including a playground and a community garden. The park is bounded on three sides by a hedge of Hornbeams and on the street side by a sidewalk imprinted with a poem by Rose Breslin Blake, one of the winners of the 2015 Sidewalk Poetry Contest.

The playground area occupies the central and west part of the lot, shaded partly by a large Dawn Redwood. It includes a water and sand play section for younger children, a water play plaza, and a climbing structure with a toboggan and swings. Passive seating areas and swinging chairs welcome parents and visitors, who are shaded by parasols and a pergola.

The community garden proper is enclosed within a low curved fence with two unlocked gates, one off the street and one facing the park plaza; the latter allows children to come in from the playground and explore the garden. Eighteen rectangular raised beds, approximately 10' X10', face north south, spaced loosely to allow circulation around them. In their midst stands a single watering source—a spigot, and a long hose. The ground is covered with a sandy mix of small pebbles. A wooden storage shed stands in the southeast corner of the garden. Two chairs allow gardeners or visitors to rest on the southwest side.



WHAT IS GROWN Grown vegetables include beans, broccoli, brussels sprouts, carrots, eggplants, garlic, kale, lettuce, onions, peas, peppers, squash, strawberry, and tomato plants of all varieties. Fruit includes strawberries, melon, and watermelon; herbs include basil, chives, lavender, lemon verbena, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, and thyme; and flowers, mostly cosmos, marigold, milkweed, and zinnia.

GARDENERS Many members live close by and garden in their own time. The Crawford and Seif families are representative of the younger group who garden with their children. Gardening parents keep an eye on their children as they climb, swing, or roller skate in the playground.

Older adults, such as Terrence Rothman, take part as well. Terrence walks to the garden from his Third Street apartment. Terrence lived a good part of his life in Germany until he returned to his native US, eventually moving to Cambridge a decade ago. He did not have a garden in Germany but was always interested in “plant things” and became very good at mushrooming. He joined Hurley Street Park three years ago. A younger friend assists him with demanding tasks. Terrence very much enjoys gardening at Hurley Park, appreciates the beauty of the environment, the proximity to the play space, and the opportunity to talk to children and parents. Terrence would welcome more companionship and sharing with fellow gardeners.

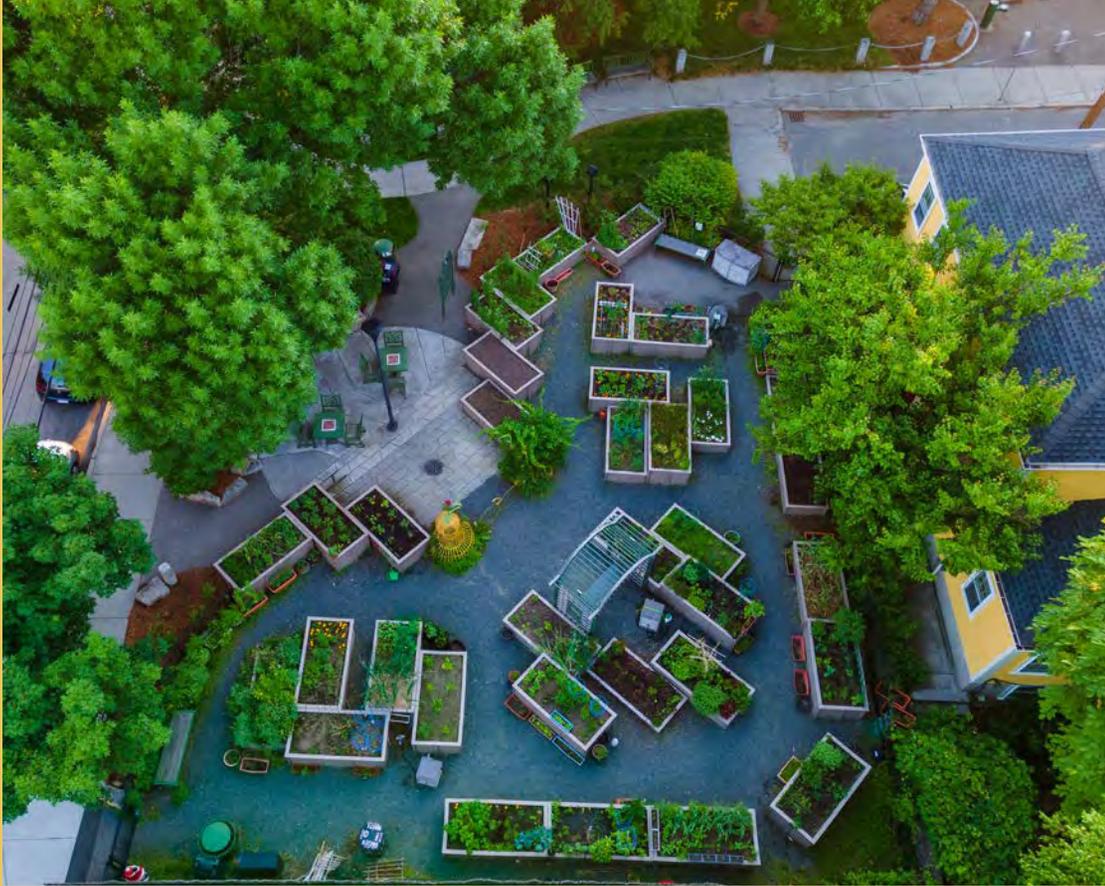


MANAGEMENT Conrad Crawford and his wife Kari coordinate the garden. Conrad assumed the position in 2017 after serving as executive director of Groundwork Somerville. Conrad describes the coordinating as “minimal.” There are no summer get-togethers or “crop parties.” Kari will email gardeners occasionally to alert them of her presence on a given day. Conrad receives requests from new members or is notified by the city about aspiring candidates. There seems to be little turnover in membership and there is room for new members.

Justin Seif, who started gardening at Hurley Street Park some eight years ago, is actively involved in the management of the garden as well. Justin maintains a spreadsheet of the gardeners, secures their contact information, and keeps an eye on inactive beds.

SUMMARY There seem to be few problems at Hurley Park Garden. Conrad recently replaced a combination lock which had given trouble on the shed last year. Justin added a reel-cart to facilitate the management of the hose. Rats do not seem to be an issue. There is little or no vandalism. Children will occasionally play with the hose; teenagers sometimes play on top of the shed and the roof needs to be redone. Pilfering occurs as in any garden—tomatoes seem to disappear—but there are no major issues. The garden could use more members and possibly more of a sense of community. All in all, Hurley Street Park is a beautiful and well-maintained community garden.





Costa Lopez Taylor Park Community Garden

was designed and developed by City landscape architect Rob Steck. Its distinctive pumpkin and squash gate was created by sculptor Roberley Bell. From its beginning the City encouraged the notion of the neighborhood taking ownership of the garden. The garden is also very inclusive, where one can tend something as small as a planter and still be a member of the garden.



14

Costa Lopez

HISTORY The garden originated as part of a city redevelopment plan for the area between MIT and Cambridge Street and Lechmere. The neighborhood was comprised of a predominance of Italian, Portuguese, and Black families living in single and duplex houses. Nearby were a large number of run-down brick factory buildings. In concert with the MIT expansion and other development, the City Planning Department blocked off and truncated Lopez Avenue, created a park, and proposed a community garden in one corner surrounded with abutting houses. Through a series of neighborhood meetings in 2003, support for a community garden grew, and the City's conservation director, Jennifer Letourneau, began gathering names of families who were interested in obtaining a plot in the proposed garden. Twenty-five potential gardeners soon came forward. Three interested abutters assisted with the garden's development and took over its maintenance.



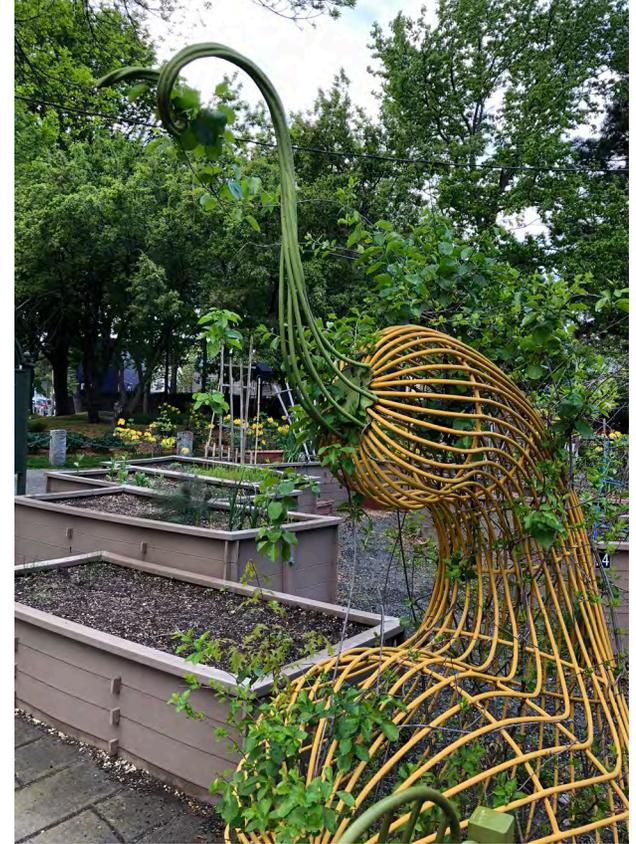
LOCATION

The garden is situated in East Cambridge near the Cambridge Court House on the edge of shady Costa Lopez Taylor multi-use park, between Hurley Street and Charles Street. The area is a mix of residential, factory, and newly renovated office buildings.

GARDEN DESCRIPTION The most outstanding feature of the garden is a large sculptural entrance gate with the shapes of a squash and pumpkin in yellow metal by artist Roberley Bell. This ebullient work of art signals vegetables and joy. Because the site was originally home to a gas station, the soil was not suitable for growing vegetables and so the garden consists of raised wooden beds. There are 37 of them of different heights, and there are many tubs and pails on the ground around them, functioning as adjunct gardens for some. The original intricately designed water spigots proved too delicate to handle the amount of use, and water pressure was a problem.

Three new water spigots and hoses have recently been added. They have been placed close to clusters of raised beds, making watering easier. Several tables with chairs encourage lingering and socializing, and can also be used to play checkers or chess. A large double swing seat framed by a trellis inside the gate offers a soft, shady place to enjoy the garden.

WHAT IS GROWN Several gardeners are content to grow flowers and herbs in their raised plots. Others are packed with vegetables including green beans and tomatoes, grown with elegantly fashioned trellises and supports; peppers and squash burst over the confines of the bed. Onions, parsley, interesting greens, and many herbs abound. One gardener is experimenting with odd or unknown seeds and plants. There are two communal plots, one for flowers to attract hummingbirds, and one for milkweed to attract Monarch butterflies. By mid-summer the garden is brimming with promises.



GARDENERS The gardeners living in the surrounding neighborhood come from many parts of the world. Lata Ramanathan is from India. She grows seeds and plants hydroponically in her apartment prior to planting them in the garden, and she concentrates on herbs for her famous vegetarian stews. Her neighbor and friend Krista Johansen moved from North Carolina to be near her mother. She is an MD cellular biologist and she takes a scientific and artistic approach to plants. This year she is growing some Egyptian onions whose wonderful curling twisting shapes rival the sculptural squash and pumpkin on the gate. Zhong Wu has built an elegant bamboo trellis for his beans and other vegetables. He has gardened at Costa Lopez for 5-6 years and is happy with the experience. Two Japanese sisters share a plot. Dina Moakley (a present coordinator), still enjoys sharing her plot with her son even though he is now grown up. She grows carrots, green beans, hot peppers, broccoli, and tomatoes.

MANAGEMENT Starting in 2005 and ending in 2020, abutters Tamar Granovsky and her husband Steve Behrens were the garden’s dedicated coordinators. They managed communication with the neighborhood and were able to recruit an interesting variety of gardeners. They also were adept at obtaining maintenance help from the City as needed. According to Jennifer Letourneau, the couple were “amazing stewards and champions for the garden. They shared their knowledge. They were community builders.”

This strong community base, there from the start, assures the garden continues to be well managed. There are set times in the spring for gardeners to start planting, and in the fall to clean up their plots. Gardeners are linked through a Google Group so they can arrange to share tools and ask for watering help if they are going to be away. Signs are posted in multiple languages to explain the garden’s rules and who to contact to apply for a plot.

Dina Moakley, who has recently taken over from Tamar and Steve, is an academic living in the area. She first joined the community in 2005 and took a plot to teach her then toddler son.

SUMMARY As is usual in many of the Community Gardens, there is some theft of plants and vegetables. Some people stopped growing tomatoes as a result, but there seems to be a philosophical acceptance of the occasional pilfering, and many, undaunted, are still growing tomatoes as their primary product. The overall impression of this garden is a very positive one. As Steve Behrens put it—“there are people who are just growing vegetables; there are people who are growing flowers; there are people over the years who have decorated or landscaped their plots—there’s just a lot of individual expression.”





Conclusion

Our Community Gardens Project Team set out with the objective to discover, document, and celebrate the diversity of the 14 Community Gardens in Cambridge. In this process, we were not evaluating the gardens, but describing them. We looked at where they are located; their history; what they look like; who the gardeners are; what is being grown; how they are owned and managed; and if there are identified problems or any changes that could improve the functioning of the gardens. We spent two years, 2020 and 2021, delving into the gardens, and getting to know the gardeners and their stories.

FINDINGS

What became obvious to us was that these gardens make a significant contribution to the well-being and enjoyment of the residents of Cambridge. This program essentially provides a place where residents can enjoy growing their own vegetables and flowers. Other bonuses include forming friendships and discovering a community. There is also the opportunity to learn more about gardening from fellow gardeners and by experimenting with new plants.

What surprised us was that we found each of the 14 gardens to be unique. There is no one model for these Community Gardens.

The City owns the land for all but three gardens which are held by different entities (a private corporation, MIT, and Harvard). The City also provides basic services: water; mulch and compost if requested; rodent control in limited cases; and occasional tree and bush pruning and removal. The director of the Cambridge Conservation Commission, which oversees the program, also acts as the part-time staff member who serves as the coordinator for the Community Gardens Program.

But the gardens differ a great deal in many ways. They were created at different times, in different circumstances, and in different neighborhoods. They may be said to reflect the variety typical of Cambridge.

Some gardens are very small, no more than 30 x 100 feet in size, while others are larger. Some have long histories up to 50 years old with well-established practices, while others were created within the last few years and are still trying to find their way.

Gardens in West and North Cambridge tend to be larger and more homogeneous while those in East and Central Cambridge tend to be smaller with more diverse populations.

As devoted gardeners ourselves, the members of the CP&GC Community Gardens Committee were inspired and heartened by the skill, commitment, and imagination of the individual gardeners. Each individual plot is a miniature garden in itself, with many gardeners adding trellises and ornaments. Gardeners grow plants from seed and cultivate hard-to-find vegetables native to their cultures. We were also heartened by the comfort the gardens provided during COVID-19.

Some of the gardens have one or more garden plots to grow vegetables, herbs, and flowers that are shared with all the garden members. One garden is one large plot where everything that is grown is planted and harvested collectively by all its members. Another garden is now being managed as a pilot program by Green Cambridge, a local nonprofit organization.

Established gardens have no set limit of time a gardener can have the same plot, while City guidelines for more recently established gardens ask for a three-year turnover. Some gardens have raised plots, often to address a pre-existing poor soil condition and American Disabilities Act requirements.

Management within each garden varies greatly. Some are well organized with clear leadership. Others are more loosely organized with fewer rules or leaders. Gardens typically have one coordinator, but a few have two or three, and there is one garden that has no coordinator at all. Thus, the 14 Cambridge Community Gardens are managed and maintained in significantly different ways—some very well and others not so well. However, in general, garden members are satisfied and hope that the city will not encroach on their management style.

IMPROVEMENTS TO CONSIDER

Gardeners have identified problems and expressed a wish for improvements.

How the City should manage these very different gardens is a key question. To date, the amount of involvement and the role of the city has varied considerably. With the limited staffing of one part-time Coordinator and almost no funding, what the City has been able to provide has been more in the line of crisis management than a steady guiding hand and consistent support.

In general, it appears that the Community Gardens Program's greatest need is for a full-time coordinator and funding to support this program.

Requests for more and better maintenance from the City vary greatly depending on how each garden is managed. These requests typically include pruning or removal of trees, saplings, and dead branches. In addition to increasing the amount of sun, better visibility around the perimeters of the garden would improve security and help with general good appearance. A regular maintenance schedule would be very helpful. Most requests for specific maintenance must be routed through the Community Gardens' program coordinator. Adequate funding and regular maintenance would also ensure benches, gates, fences, tool sheds, and wooden plot borders are kept in good repair or provided where none currently exist. Rodent control would greatly benefit by routine monitoring of each garden.





Guidelines for managing the gardens that are currently posted on the City's Community Gardens Program website seem more honored in the breach than in the observance. While for many long-term gardeners the absence of across the board, top-down management is welcome, it seems everyone would benefit from a transparent, sensitive clarification of the City's role in supporting these very different gardens. The City's Community Gardens Program website should have clear, general information about the program, namely its purposes and rules for good citizenship.

There is also a great need for an overall database system to provide clarity and transparency for coordinators and applicants.

Currently, Jennifer Letourneau, director of the Conservation Commission and part-time coordinator of Community Gardens, maintains the lists for plot assignments and waiting lists. However, there have been problems with managing this information in a clear, up-to-date, and uniform way. Letourneau is currently overseeing the construction of a database that will have the names of the garden coordinators, names and contact information for each gardener assigned to a plot, and the names and contact information of the people on the waiting list. Each year, the garden coordinators will be responsible for communicating which plots are becoming available, and these plots will be offered to the individuals who have been on the waiting list the longest.

Ideally, there would also be an interactive communication hub created by the City where coordinators and garden members can communicate, report problems, problem solve, and share news and meeting announcements.

The City could also provide graphically consistent signage in the gardens that would include information on how to apply for a plot and the garden's basic rules. Consistent, attractive signage, perhaps accompanied by City-provided plantings, could all speak to the commitment and pride the City has in these gardens.

What are the options for the future of the Community Gardens Program in Cambridge? Can models represented by Green Cambridge and City Growers which focus on communal food production and education be accommodated within the well-established small plots of the existing Community Gardens? Or should the City consider identifying additional spaces that could be used for producing food for the community at large?

In conclusion, members of our project team wish to thank the Cambridge Community Gardens program coordinator, Jennifer Letourneau, for her invaluable support of and enthusiasm for this project. We are most grateful to the garden coordinators and garden members who, over the last few years, generously opened their gardens and shared with us the difficulties, pleasures, and beauty of their Cambridge Community Gardens.



CREDITS

PRINTER

HFGROUP: ACME Binding

DRONE PHOTOGRAPHER

©2021 Barry A. Hyman

HURLEY PARK CONCEPT PLAN

(page 58)

Rob Steck

City Supervising Landscape Architect
Community Development Department,
City of Cambridge

