



Community Gardens Oregon Solutions Team

Meeting Notes – November 13, 2009

The meeting was hosted by Multnomah County and well-attended by over 30 of the Team partners.

Shortly after 9 am, Commissioner Nick Fish, Convener, opened the meeting, thanked everyone on the Team for their hard work, and welcomed back Leslie Pohl-Kosbau, Director of the community gardens program, from her recent surgery.

The first hour consisted of reports from the chairs of the three workgroups on results of their meetings to date. Detailed notes from all work group meetings are posted on the Oregon Solutions website

<http://www.orsolutions.org/metrohood/portlandcommunitygardens.htm>

Highlights of the workgroup reports included:

Organizational Structure: Chair Weston Miller reported on several organizational models the group has been discussing. P-Patch in Seattle is of particular interest as a model. Commissioner Fish suggested a possible field trip to see their operation. Both the Organizational Structure and Resources workgroups have been reviewing and discussing detailed information about P-Patch.

Resources: The workgroup recognizes that resources for the city's current community gardens program are inadequate. Nancy Stevens, co-chair, provided a summary comparison of resources for Portland Community Gardens, P-Patch, and Denver Urban Gardens (see attached Resources document). It was suggested that other programs can be looked at, e.g. Des Moines, Cleveland, Detroit.

The workgroup is considering the possibility of a short-term, "finger-in-the-dike" approach to shoring up the program, phasing in longer-term, sustainable resources. Discussion followed about regulations and/or incentives that might be implemented to

support community gardens. A regulatory example is the city requirement for affordable housing units (also London's law entitling all citizens to a plot of land). An incentive could be to add "providing a garden" to list of "public benefit" options that allow more height in developments if the options are provided.

The need was identified to obtain legal advice on matters such as laws governing land acquisition and how public monies can flow into a non-profit organization. Commissioner Fish will that someone from the City Attorney's office be made available to respond to legal question as they arise.

Demand: The workgroup has spent a lot of time defining "demand." Chair Jason King Handed out a potential diagram he developed of the relationship between various components of urban agriculture, growing food, gardening, etc. and a list of potential objectives developed by the workgroup (handout posted on the website). Group has begun a mapping project to include existing gardens, waiting list areas and other demographic information, focusing on Portland gardens for now with a goal of developing a model that can be used by other communities. Overarching themes such as "growing food, growing communities" were discussed by the Team, and there was general agreement that community gardens are one component of a larger system for providing opportunities to grow food.

After the workgroup reports, the rest of the meeting was spent in conversation about Commissioner Fish's "vision" (posted on the website) and in general discussion about key issues. He commended the workgroups for beginning to lay the groundwork for a "roadmap" for an expanded program. He sees the city's program ultimately as a "hub;" need to define what the city does in that role, working closely with an array of not-for-profit organizations and others. He hopes to see a program that is "uniquely Portland," more than just building additional community gardens. There could be a new entity to serve as the center for all activities around growing food.

Kat West of Multnomah County offered to meet with Commissioner Fish's office to discuss "synergies" between city and county efforts around growing food and gardening.

The Regional Arts and Culture Council was mentioned as a potential organizational model. Ron Paul provided an overview of the contractual relationship between the city and the RACC, and noted that it receives robust funding from the "2% for art tax." The Organizational Structure and Resources workgroups are taking a more in depth look at the RACC. It was noted that it took 2 years to create the RACC.

The need for a strategy to tap into the potential of the business community was mentioned, and the lack of staff in either the community gardens program or Friends of Community Gardens to pursue development opportunities was noted.

Jill Kuehler said that we should celebrate the success of the city's community gardens program. Given the lack of resources, it is amazing what has been accomplished on a budget of roughly \$250,000/year. The Team agreed.

Commissioner Fish was asked about whether the Team needed to develop a specific strategy for reducing the waiting list of 1400 requests for garden plots. He gave the Team members “homework” to read the City/County Climate Action Plan (posted on the Website). The plan has a goal of adding 1300 garden plots by 2012. Alix Eastman suggested that a separate Task Force be established with a sole purpose of addressing the waiting list. The Demand workgroup will discuss – this could be a commitment made by a group of Team members in the Oregon Solutions Declaration of Cooperation.

The Team set future meeting dates in 2010 from 9 am to noon on January 22, February 26, and March 26. Meeting locations TBA.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:30 am.