


Spring 5-17-2016

From Empty Lot to Garden Plot: Urban Agriculture in Chula Vista

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FROM EMPTY LOT TO GARDEN PLOT

Urban Agriculture in Chula Vista

By Jennifer Gutierrez

From Empty Lot to Garden Plot: Urban Agriculture in Chula Vista

By

Jennifer Gutierrez

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the Honors in

Architecture and Community Design

in the

Department of Art + Architecture

in the

College of Arts & Sciences

of the

University of San Francisco

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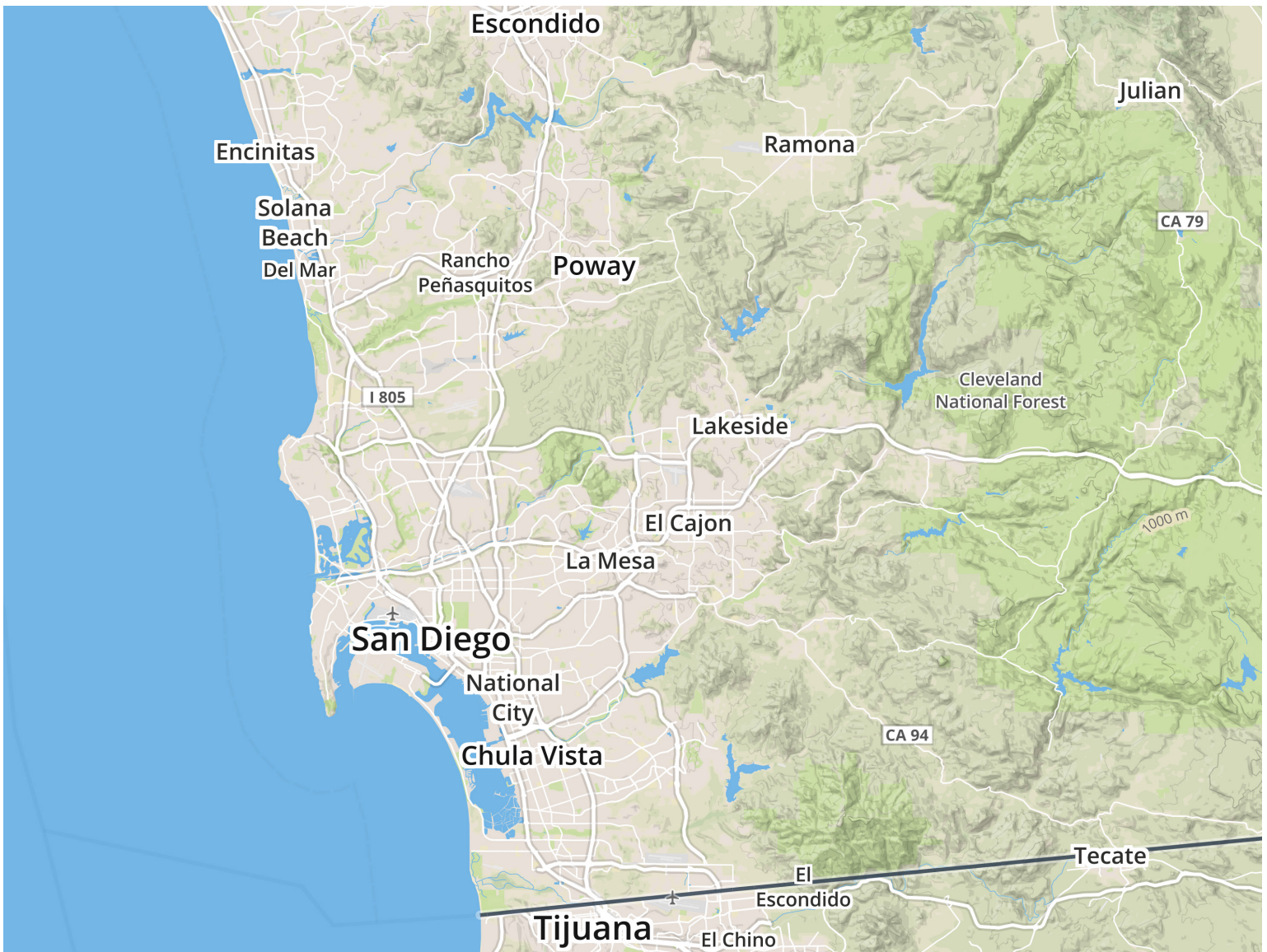
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The City of Chula Vista is the second-largest city in San Diego County. It is approximately equidistant from downtown San Diego to the north, and Tijuana, Mexico to the south. Chula Vista has a diverse landscape - starting with a bayfront to the west and rolling hills to the east - and a rich agricultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

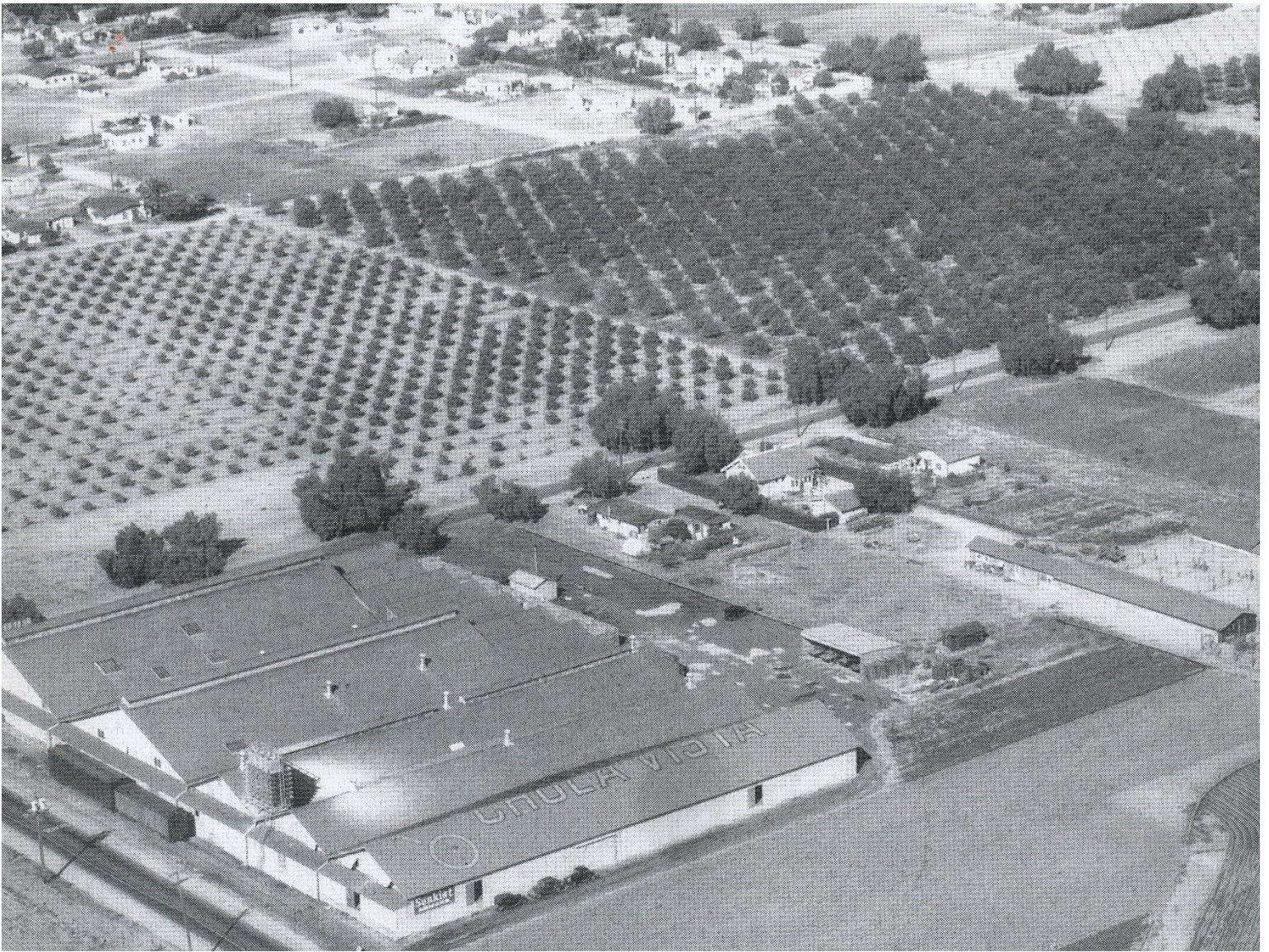
Urban agriculture is an expanding movement in the United States. Community gardening provides an opportunity for social interaction and a way to engage with the environment. Despite the many benefits of community gardening, it can be challenging for city residents to get access to suitable space. Zoning laws can be a barrier to land accessibility, and although they can sometimes be altered, the process can be intimidating to the everyday urban gardener. Chula Vista has an existing policy in place allowing for the development of community gardens on vacant city-owned lots. Although this policy has been in effect for over five years, almost no action has been taken.

Chula Vista is the second-largest city in San Diego County, and its urban form is markedly different on the west and east sides. The original footprint of the city on the west side of Interstate 805 is denser and follows a clear grid. The expansion of the city on the east side is suburban and the streets follow the hilly topography closely. The diversity of spatial organization from one end of the city to the other poses an interesting design challenge when attempting to integrate agriculture because the available open spaces are quite different. This is an opportunity to present two distinct solutions in one city.

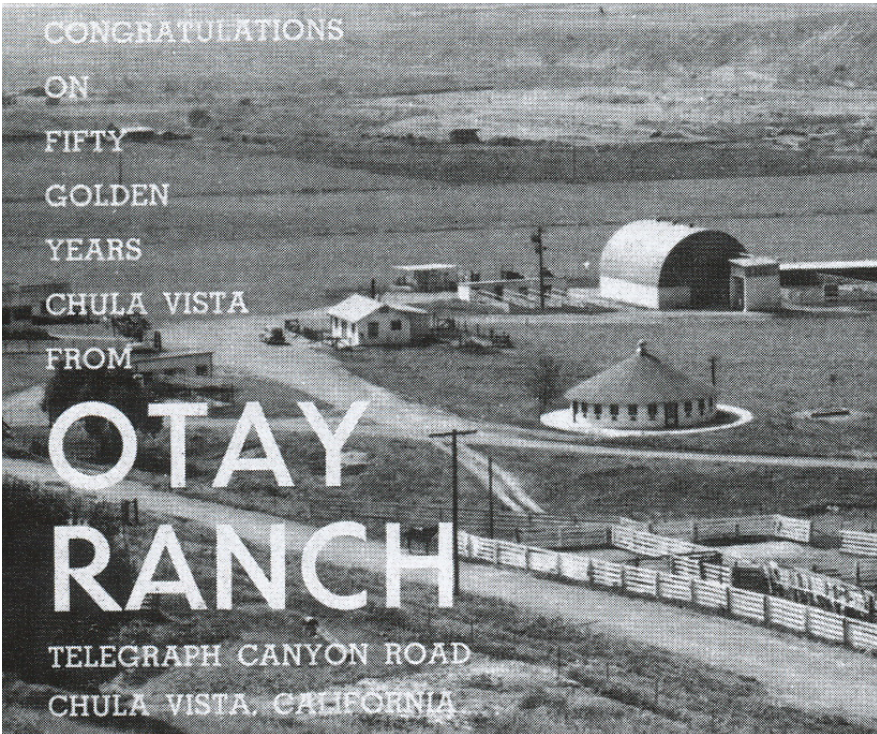
In this paper I explore how community gardening can enhance both urban and suburban contexts. Because little action has

been taken to make the city's legislation a reality, I propose to adapt a variety of open spaces for community gardens. On the west side of Chula Vista, this will more closely resemble conventional urban agriculture in places like San Francisco, where gardens are inserted in empty lots between buildings. The east side of Chula Vista, however, will take a bit more creativity. There the available land takes the form of vast parking lots and swaths of ornamental landscaping.

I originally intended to focus only on agriculture in the suburban environment because there is not much literature about it. I have realized, however, that because not much has been done with the legislation in place, there is an opportunity to make agriculture a part of the city as a whole. Chula Vista has an agricultural past, and creating a network of community gardens can reconnect citizens to that history. I intend to show the city what can be possible with proactive interest in the existing legislation by proposing gardens in a variety of sites in both the urban and suburban areas of the city. By incorporating agriculture as part of the social and economic life of the city, food can be used as an ordering principle, harnessed as a design tool, and employed as a method of community engagement and education. I propose the integration of agriculture as a tool to reconnect to the city's agricultural past and as a model for cities of the future. Agriculture definitely has a place in Chula Vista.



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CHULA VISTA: History & Context

Chula Vista's agricultural past has shaped the city it is today

OPPOSITE

1. Lemon packing houses on Third Ave and K St. A bank stands there today.

2. Otay Ranch featured in Chula Vista's Chamber of Commerce booklet for the city's 50th anniversary in 1961.

3. The December 18, 1925 edition of the *Star* newspaper celebrated Chula Vista's prosperity and agricultural, industrial, and residential developments.

AN AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE¹

The land that is Chula Vista today was once part of the Spanish empire. It was assigned by the Spanish king or his representatives to soldiers from the Presidio for grazing their animals. They called it El Rancho del Rey, the “King’s Ranch.” Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, and the Mexican government then gave the land to an English trader who was married to the last Mexican governor of California. This land was called El Rancho de la Nación, the “National Ranch,” and included the western half of today’s Chula Vista. Twenty years after the Mexican-American War, National Ranch was sold to Frank Kimball and his brothers to develop as an “American style farming community.” They designated the part of National Ranch that would become Chula Vista as the agricultural sector.

Kimball “decided Chula Vista’s crop would be lemons because the weather near the coast was perfect for lemons – not too hot or too cold.” By 1910, Chula Vista was known as the “Lemon Capital of the World.” In 1911, the residents adopted a charter and the area officially became the City of Chula Vista. Over the next three decades lemon production declined, as “more and more farmers switched to row crops or truck farming. Celery, above all, became the largest revenue earner by 1940; but tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, beans, and other crops were also grown.” By the start of the Second World War, Chula Vista was still primarily an agricultural community.

In 1941 Fred Rohr opened a factory to produce metal for military airplanes. This spurred a need for wartime housing developments, and farmlands were soon covered with housing. There was a population influx after WWII: “Soon lemon orchards and celery fields were taken out and replaced by homes and streets and schools and businesses.” The lemon growing heritage was not lost, however: “Many of the developers building on former lemon groves chose to leave one lemon tree in each backyard. So Chula Vista still has some lemon trees that are more than a half century old.”



4



5



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ABOVE

4. The grasslands of Chula Vista was perfect for raising cattle for California’s early hide and tallow trade.

5. By the 1940s, celery was the largest revenue-earner in Chula Vista’s agricultural community.

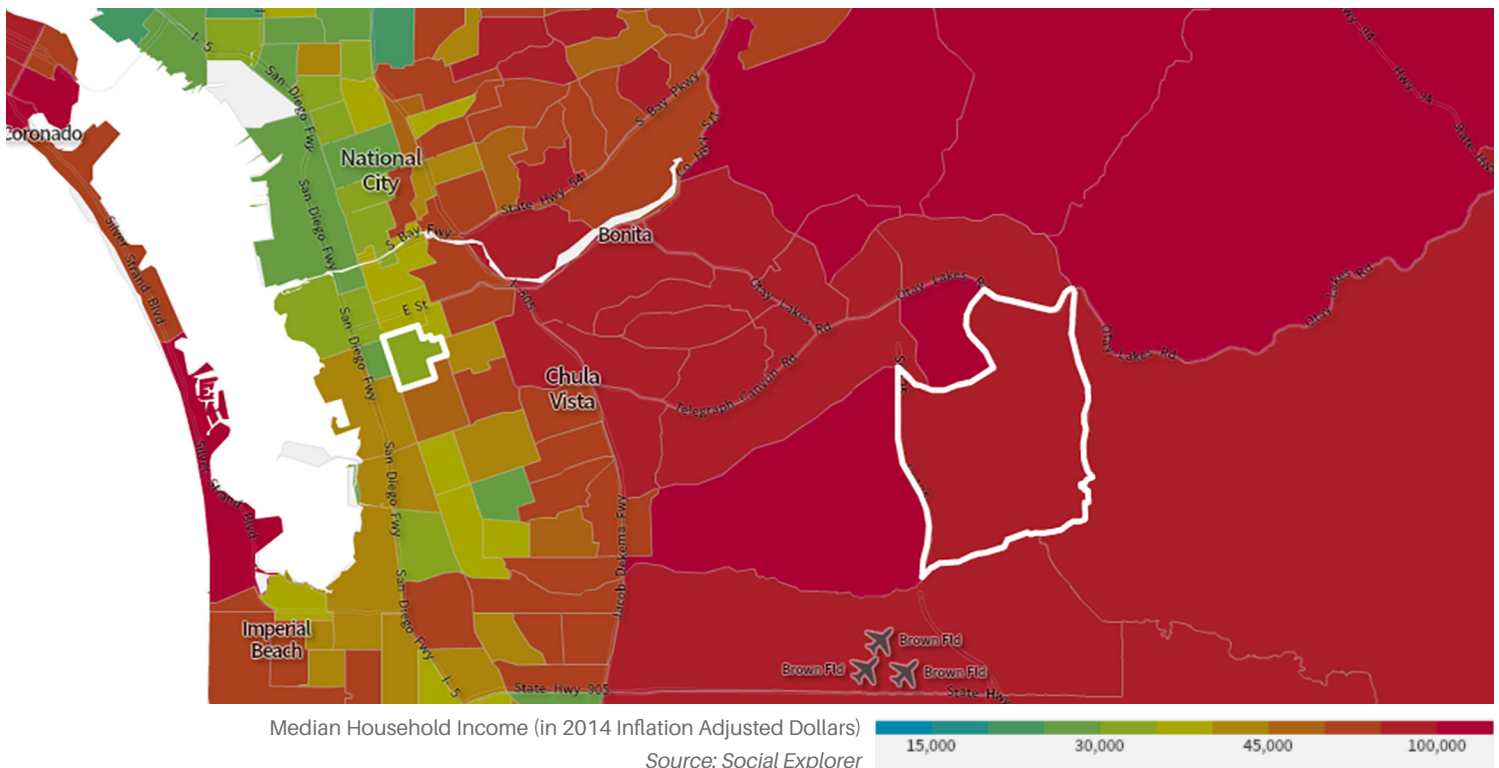
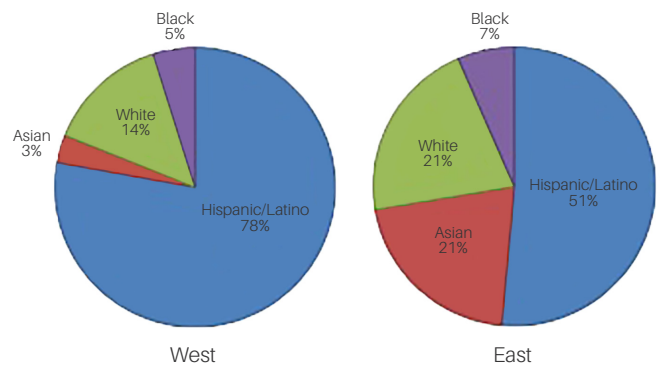
6. The explosion of suburbia in east Chula Vista.

The last lemon packing plant closed in 1960, and there were soon very few remnants of Chula Vista's agricultural heritage. Chula Vista became a bedroom community for the greater San Diego area. In the early 1980s, developers looked east to create master-planned communities. Eastlake was the first development to "build thousands of houses at a time on the rolling hills of what was then called the 'eastern territories'." There was a population explosion, and the expected build-out population of the city is 300,000. Of the several developments on the east side of the city, Otay Ranch is the only one still under construction today.

In recent years, Chula Vista has launched an urbanization redevelopment program for the older west side. Third Avenue is the heart of downtown Chula Vista. The original planner of the city, William Dickinson, had planned for Third Avenue to be the "original town center and business street. [...] Third Avenue is still called 'downtown' by most Chula Vista residents. Although its commercial importance has diminished over time, many are hopeful of a rebound" as the city works to make it the center of an urban core.

DEMOGRAPHICS

As mentioned earlier, the east and west sides of the city have very different physical characteristics. The biggest demographic difference is socioeconomic. Racially, Chula Vista has a rather large Hispanic/Latino population, especially Mexican. The data below supports my own experiential observations, and is from the 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates sponsored by the U.S. Census Bureau. For this data I chose the Census Tract numbers in which my chosen sites are located. West Chula Vista refers to Census Tract 127, and East Chula Vista refers to Census Tract 133.14; each is outlined in white in the map below.





URBAN AGRICULTURE POLICIES

An evaluation of the policies Chula Vista has, and how it can look
to other cities as examples

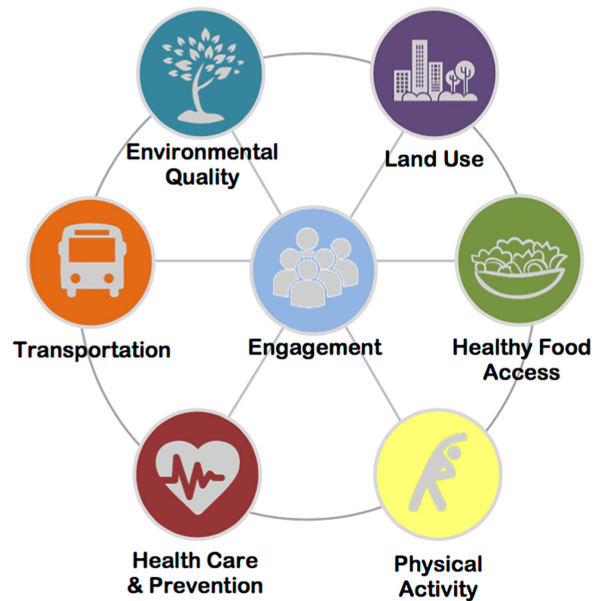
HEALTHY CHULA VISTA INITIATIVE

Last year the city launched the Healthy Chula Vista Initiative, which supports the city's Strategic Plan goal of creating a healthy community by creating policies and programs to improve the city's physical and social environments, promote awareness and access to services, and build community partnerships. The Healthy Chula Vista Action Plan (HCVAP) outlines seven key focus areas, one of which is healthy food access. It also outlines current city programs and policies that support community wellness. It provides a policy framework for Chula Vista to pursue funding and to strengthen and develop municipal policies and programs.

The Healthy Food Access focus area is especially relevant for my project. The city wants to develop an urban agriculture policy. It will evaluate the feasibility of additional farmers' markets to address food insecurity. Most importantly, the city will review the Community Garden Policy that was established in 2010 to ensure that barriers to urban farming are removed and to encourage community champions. The fact that the city chose to include healthy food access as part of the Healthy Chula Vista Initiative shows that community food growing opportunities are already of interest to city planners and policy makers.

COMMUNITY GARDEN POLICY

The Community Garden Policy was adopted in 2010 and provides guidelines for implementing community gardens on city-owned vacant land. The policy outlines the specific steps required to apply for a community garden. There are many steps, but the City appears to be supportive throughout the whole process. The biggest barrier to overcome is first to establish a community group that would be interested in maintaining a garden. That support would show the city that enough people are willing to care for the garden and believe that it would be beneficial for the



Source: Healthy Chula Vista Action Plan

neighborhood. Another major point in the policy is that the garden imposes no costs to the city, and that it will be operated by local volunteers. The city will support the establishment of the garden, but once operational, it is up to volunteers to maintain it.

In theory, starting a community garden seems straightforward, but there are complex regulations that pose obstacles. There are eight steps that the policy outlines (see right).

After meeting these conditions, the policy goes on to outline community garden establishment and maintenance guidelines. Although the policy is six years old, few gardens have taken advantage of it, and frankly, I am not surprised. The policy was not publicized, and there are too many steps to start a community garden on city-owned land. Creating community gardens on city-owned land has proven quite ineffective in expanding the community garden network across Chula Vista. If the city hopes to see this program result in gardens, they must first streamline the process. As an alternative, it is worth it to explore the conversion of privately-owned land as well.

Steps for Starting a Community Garden on City-Owned Land²

- 1** The community group must complete a written proposal to establish a community garden.
- 2** The proposal will be submitted to the city's Public Works Department, which will act as the lead in garden establishment and supervision for the city.
- 3** The city will accept or reject the proposal within thirty days of submittal. If the proposal is accepted, the city will prepare a list of potential sites as close as possible to the requested area.
- 4** The city and community group will meet to decide on a location for the garden, choosing from the sites selected in step 3.
- 5** The community group will develop an initial community garden site plan, then the city will help the community group develop a final site plan. The city must approve all garden site plans.
- 6** The city will conduct a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review for the site to make sure that environmental impacts of the gardens are addressed. The community group is responsible for any and all costs of CEQA compliance.
- 7** The community group must agree to administer and operate the gardens according to a User Agreement, which will extend a limited and revocable license for use of city-owned vacant land to the community group.
- 8** A development deposit may be required at the time of the agreement in order to reimburse the city for its staff costs.





BEST PRACTICES³

Urban agriculture is already an important topic of discussion among Chula Vista leaders – as evidenced by its inclusion in the Healthy Chula Vista Initiative and in the Community Garden Policy – but it is still in its infancy. The city needs to first define “urban agriculture” and “community gardens” in its Zoning Ordinance so that there is a clear understanding of them among citizens. What follows are two precedent studies of California cities that are making strides in promoting urban agriculture and making it an official part of the city’s zoning.

BERKELEY

The City of Berkeley, like Chula Vista, is working on defining its urban agriculture policies. In July 2012, the Berkeley City Council amended the Zoning Ordinance to exempt the sales of “non-processed edibles” (i.e. fresh produce, eggs) in residential districts. The amendment created guidelines for the sale of produce and homegrown goods, and made urban agriculture on occupied lots a “by right” use requiring only a zoning certificate. It also enabled small-scale Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in residential areas.

While this legislation was an important first step, it did not cover Berkeley's commercial and manufacturing districts, nor did it permit urban agriculture in unoccupied residential lots. Currently, urban agriculture is only allowed in two manufacturing zoning districts, and is prohibited in all other areas.

The lack of definitions or permitted uses for either "urban agriculture" or "community gardens" has made existing urban farms and community gardens in most zones technically illegal. Over the past few months I have worked with the Office of Councilmember Arreguín to submit an item to the City Council recommending the following zoning amendments to the Planning Commission:

1. Define community gardens in the Zoning Ordinance,
2. Establish community gardens and accessory structures including, but not limited to tool sheds, greenhouses, pergolas and trellises as a "by right" use in all zoning districts requiring only a Zoning Certificate, and
3. Permit group class instruction, community gatherings, and sale as an exempt accessory use subject to limitations on the number of persons and hours

That item will go before the City Council in early May 2016, and will go a long way towards closing the urban agriculture policy gap in Berkeley. However, a definition of urban agriculture and the use and permit guidelines by zone are still needed. Councilmember Arreguín and his team are proposing that urban agriculture be permitted "by right" as a primary use in all zones, but perhaps at different scales.

While Berkeley has allowed community gardens on public and private land, currently they are

not a permitted zoning use. This makes existing community gardens a non-conforming use, and creates barriers for the formation of new gardens. In addition, many of the accessory uses that community gardens need such as group class instruction, sales of produce or plants and accessory structures, require separate zoning permits. These separate permits cost time and money for non-profit, volunteer-run community gardens. Let that be a lesson to Chula Vista. Urban agriculture is already happening in the city, so the City of Berkeley should do what it can to support existing urban agriculture operations and to encourage new ones. Chula Vista can be proactive by including urban agriculture and community gardens in its zoning first, that way potential gardeners can avoid the issues with permitting and legalization.

SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco's urban agriculture policies have been successful in promoting the growth of community gardens. In 2011, San Francisco passed an urban agriculture ordinance that encouraged and increased access to locally grown food within the city and county of San Francisco. The ordinance designated urban agriculture as a "use category" defined as "the production of





food or horticultural crops for harvest, sale, and/or donation.” This is a good definition for Chula Vista to imitate because it is not too specific, and it includes horticulture.

San Francisco’s ordinance also established two distinct types of urban agriculture and defined their regulations:

Neighborhood Agriculture: less than 1 acre in size and is permitted in all zoning districts

Large-scale Agriculture: 1 or more acres in size (or smaller, but unable to meet Neighborhood Agriculture standards) and is permitted in “Commercial,” “Industrial,” and “Production, Distribution, and Repair” zoning districts.

Chula Vista could do something similar by differentiating what kind of urban agriculture it wants to allow in particular areas of the city. For example, Large-Scale Agriculture would be feasible in the undeveloped suburban areas.

San Francisco has additional regulations for when the sale of agricultural products is allowed. The sale, pickup, and donation of raw food and horticultural products grown on site from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. is allowed as long as sales do not take place inside of a residence. A “change of use” permit is required for either new gardens that are “principal uses,” or for existing gardens that want to start selling what they grow, depending on the district. The sale of value-added products is subject to additional regulations regarding business licensing, health permits, etc. It is important for Chula Vista to have similar sales regulations in place.

URBAN AGRICULTURE INCENTIVE ZONES ACT

The Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones (UAIZ) Act (State Assembly Bill 551) came into effect on January 1, 2014. It basically creates a contract to restrict the use of vacant, unimproved, or otherwise blighted land for small-scale production of agricultural crops and animal husbandry. Owners of vacant property

can apply for property tax reduction in exchange for dedicating the use of their property solely for urban agriculture for a period of no less than five years. The city/county may adopt rules and regulations consistent with the city, county, or city and county's zoning and other ordinances, for the implementation and administration of the UAIZ and of contracts related to the UAIZ. Contracts must be established prior to January 1, 2019 when the Bill sunsets.

A UAIZ cannot be established unless the legislative body of the city has consented to its establishment. The City of Berkeley is working on amending the Berkeley Municipal Code zoning districts so that community gardens are legalized and addressed in each zone before it can move forward with UAIZ. The City of Chula Vista would have to do something similar. The establishment of a UAIZ does not directly change anything in existing zoning codes regarding where urban agriculture is and is not permitted. In Berkeley, for example, zoning amendments would be needed to allow commercial farming on residential parcels so that the UAIZ property tax reduction could

apply to residential districts. The city would need to establish a process for landowners to put their land under contract.

San Francisco is the only city in California that has taken advantage of the state's UAIZ Act so far. In August 2015, San Francisco successfully designated the entire city as a UAIZ. Owners of vacant property can apply for property tax reduction in exchange for urban agriculture used for five years. The property must be in zoning districts where Neighborhood Agriculture or Large-Scale Agriculture uses are existing allowed uses. The benefit of the UAIZ Act is that it incentivizes urban agriculture for property owners that might not otherwise be interested. Chula Vista could establish a UAIZ in conjunction with its existing Community Garden Policy so that both privately owned and city-owned land are addressed.





EVALUATION CRITERIA

How to choose a site suitable for urban agriculture

SITE EVALUATION & MAPPING

The San Diego Community Garden Network (SDCGN) is a countywide resource for helpful criteria for selecting a garden site. It has suggestions for four types of land: school land, faith community land, privately owned lots, and government (city/county) owned lots. On the opposite page is a list of things to consider when selecting a site. It is a combination of the SDCGN list and my own.

I kept this list of criteria in mind when selecting sites to develop. Using primarily Google Maps and Google Earth, I surveyed the city for empty lots. I then created a map showing where those lots are located. My strategy was to initially identify empty

lots based on their lack of vegetation or buildings. Then, I would zoom in further to explore what the context was around them. I wanted to understand their neighborhoods as thoroughly as possible to determine if a community garden or other form of urban agriculture would thrive there

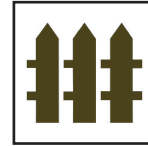
My mapping process was a relatively simple way to survey the city using easily accessible tools. As I stated earlier, my plan calls for one site on each side of the city as examples of what a community garden can look like in both urban and suburban contexts. The following two sections describe one site in the west side of Chula Vista, and one site on the east side.



This map illustrates how the grid of Chula Vista changes style from west to east. The west is orthogonal and orderly; the east is freeform and sprawling. Dividing west and east is a freeway which was constructed in the 1970s. Everything east of the freeway was constructed in the following years and is organized into several master-planned suburban developments. The dots mark potential sites for urban agriculture. The sites I chose to develop are outlined in green.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A SITE⁴

Fencing



The garden may be fenced or left open, depending on the desires of gardeners and city requirements.

Parking



Parking may not be an issue depending on the location. Make note of any parking regulations.

Property owner



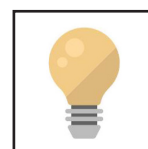
Find out who owns the land and if they are willing to lease it or to let you use it as a garden.

Water access



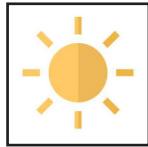
You will likely tap into the same water supply source as a building that would be located on the property.

Power



Check for available outlets, and if it's a private property, check with the owner about access and possible costs.

Sun



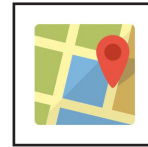
Full sun (6-8 hours per day) is ideal, but having shade structures for gathering is also important.

Shed/toolbox site



Make sure that the size of your shed does not exceed the city's building requirements for community gardens.

Neighborhood



Get to know the interested demographic and what their vision is for the garden.

Soil



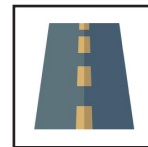
Test the soil for heavy metals and toxins to ensure that it is safe to garden there. Also check texture & drainage.

Composting site



A compost supply increases soil fertility and manages waste. Place in shaded area not too close to gathering space.

Accessibility (pedestrian & vehicular)



Make sure there is enough space for a vehicle to access the site, and that there is clear, unobstructed pedestrian access.

Area-specific plants



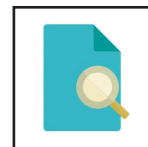
Check what plants grow well in the region, or from other parts of the world with a similar climate and ecosystem.

Estimated number of plots



Measure the useable space and divide it by your intended plot size. Remember to leave room for paths between plots.

Site history



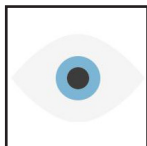
History tells what kind of soil or pollutants might be found on the site. Research the ownership history.

Topography



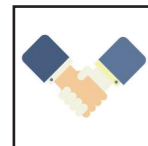
Flat land is the most ideal for growing, but a slight slope works well for terracing.

Visibility (safety & publicity)



The garden will be better protected from vandals and thieves if it is easily visible for neighbors.

Potential partners



What organizations in the area would be interested in investing or managing the garden.



EAST & WEST SITE: Proposals for Development

**An evaluation of one site on each end of the city, and proposals
for how urban agriculture can improve them**



ABOVE
Although the entire lot is viable, the southwest corner (outlined in pink) is my primary focus. The lot is already partially occupied by a turf field and a private playground.

OPPOSITE
The site, facing northeast.

EAST SITE

2015 Birch Road, Chula Vista, CA 91915

The site I have chosen on the east side of Chula Vista is located in the Otay Ranch subdivision. As the name suggests, this area was once an active ranch, but since the early 1990s it has become a suburban development. The site is an empty dirt patch in the parking lot of the Otay Ranch Town Center (ORTC), an outdoor mall. I chose it because I think it is the perfect place to start a community garden in this neighborhood.

The ORTC is an appropriate place to integrate agriculture into the suburban environment because it is already a gathering place for the community and is right at the heart of the eastern core of Chula Vista. By starting a garden at the ORTC, visitors to the shopping center from all over

the county will be exposed to agriculture, and hopefully inspired to learn more about it.

The ORTC is also an excellent site for my project because it makes use of vacant space in a way that is environmentally beneficial. According to the site plan for the ORTC, the area I am interested in is destined for more parking. I have shopped at the ORTC frequently since it was constructed in 2006, and I can say from experience that there is plenty of parking already. In fact, finding parking has never been an issue, even during peak holiday seasons. Turning the dirt patch into a space for the community to gather and grow food would be far more productive socially and aesthetically.

HOW THE SITE MEETS THE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Type of Land

The site is privately owned by General Growth Properties, a company that focuses on developing high quality retail properties across the country. A lease would be needed to use the land. Obtaining an acceptable lease requires advocating for the garden and negotiating acceptable terms.

Site Conditions

Sun - Full sun, no existing shade structures, open orientation toward the south.

Soil - Has never been developed, mostly untouched since it was compacted and leveled when the mall was constructed. Soil type is Diablo Clay, which is dark and silty, drains well, and has an effective rooting depth 40-60". The pH is slightly to moderately alkaline to neutral. The topsoil will most likely need to be amended.

Topography - Generally flat, with a 2-15% slope.

Water Access - City of Chula Vista via the mall, but nothing is currently installed on the site.

Power - San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E)

Visibility - Completely open, which is good for the publicity but not for security. A fence of some kind will need to be installed.

Parking - Plenty! It is surrounded by a parking lot.

Accessibility - The site is most easily accessible by car, and most people in this area use cars as their primary mode of transportation. There are three bus routes that stop nearby that are an 8-10 minute walk from the site. Some routes are only available part of the day.

Context

Site History - Nothing has ever been constructed on this site. The mall was built in 2006, and before that the land was a ranch with some vegetation.

Neighborhood - The ORTC is at the urban core of east Chula Vista. People visit from all over the county and northern Mexico, but on average visitors to the ORTC are people from the surrounding suburban neighborhoods. The demographic is multi-ethnic with a lot of young families. The crime rate is low. Interest in a garden is yet to be determined, although the weekly farmers' market at the mall has been a success.

Potential Partners

Hotel - A new hotel is under construction just north of the site. The proposed garden could supply fresh produce to the hotel, creating an agro-tourism element for visitors.

Restaurants - In return for funding, the garden could supply part of its produce to restaurants at the ORTC.

Public Library - An environmental/agricultural education program could be developed with the library at the ORTC, which is a short walk from the site. The library already has popular programs for children, as well as a section of the library devoted to gardening and landscaping with native plants. Having an active garden at the mall would provide a place for children and other library-goers to put food-growing skills into practice.





TOP
The site, facing southwest toward the ORTC.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

Depending on the partnership gardeners are able to secure, I have identified three options for the site.

1 *Commercial Garden*

In this option the partners would be the hotel and/or restaurants at the ORTC. In exchange for growing food for the hotel kitchen and the restaurants, the garden would receive funding. The site is quite large, so a variety of plants could be grown, as well as a greenhouse and small orchard. This would be good for the hotel/restaurants because they could advertise their food as directly farm-to-table, and patrons would know exactly where their food was coming from. They could even visit the garden.

In this option, participating community gardeners would gain business skills in addition to gardening skills by interacting with the hotel/restaurant personnel. The downside to this option might be that it minimizes the community development component. To remedy that, I would propose that part of the garden be maintained for personal use by the gardeners. In this option, gardeners would be able to grow food for themselves and grow food to be sold.

2 *Demonstration Garden*

In this option, the garden would be used for educational purposes where the community could come to learn about urban agriculture and gardening techniques. The garden would be a demonstration site were gardening professionals could offer workshops about topics like drought resistant landscaping, native plants, composting, home gardening, etc. The site itself should be very well designed to include all those components. There would be areas for teaching, plenty of shaded areas for seating, a greenhouse, and a combination of raised beds and beds directly in the ground. There would also be a kitchen area with appropriate tools and seating.

In this option, the primary workers in the garden would be gardening professionals. At least some of them would have to be full-time staff. They would lead groups of volunteers to maintain the garden together, and they would organize events at the garden for the community. The garden could also serve as a fieldtrip destination for schools and groups from the library or local recreation centers. The main purpose of the garden in this option would be to serve as a resource for the community as a whole. There would not be individual rentable plots. Members of the community would care for the garden as a group and reap its rewards accordingly.

3 *Rentable Plots*

In this option the site would be comprised of rows of raised beds or rentable plots, depending on the quality of the soil, and there would be a small yearly fee to rent a plot. The shared components would be a toolshed, compost, a greenhouse, fruit trees, and a few plots for demonstration. There would also be a shared kitchen area with shaded seating. The garden would have open houses occasionally, but typically it would be open only to people with plots. A lockable fence for added security would surround it since most of the plants are for personal consumption.

This option could still include an educational component, but on a smaller scale. For example, the library could have a few plots for its children's program. It could also have a commercial component if the hotel or restaurants wanted to rent a few plots for specialty plants. The primary purpose of this option, however, would be for recreation and to reduce spending on household groceries. It would encourage social interaction for hobby gardeners of all ages.





ABOVE: This site is approximately the same size as the outlined part of the East site.
BELOW: The site, facing northeast.

WEST SITE

385 H Street, Chula Vista, CA 91910

The site I have chosen on the west side of Chula Vista is located at 385 H Street between 3rd and 4th Avenue. This is right at the center of Chula Vista's urban core, with apartments bordering the site. To the west on H Street there is a hospital and a mall, and to the east there is a church, a school, and a mixed-use multi-story building with a café, restaurant, and offices. H Street is a major corridor that connects east and west Chula Vista.

The site is a vacant lot made up of two parcels. The site would make for a successful community garden because of its strategic location, but also because apartment complexes and small houses surround it. Residents have little access to garden space. This area of Chula Vista is



already popular for shopping and recreation, so a garden would complement an already active urban environment. The site has direct access to the sidewalk, so it is easily accessible by pedestrians. Its location on H Street gives it enough visual exposure to attract curious community members.

HOW THE SITE MEETS THE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Type of Land

The site is privately owned, but has been listed for sale since November 2015, for residential or commercial use. Unless purchased, a lease would be needed to use the land. Obtaining an acceptable lease requires advocating for the garden and negotiating acceptable terms. It is unclear which of the two parcels (or both) is for sale.

Site Conditions

Sun – Full sun, no existing shade structures, open orientation toward the south. There is partial shade on the west side in the afternoon.

Soil – The land was previously developed and has been vacant since last year. Soil type is Huerhuero-Urban Land Complex, which is a mixture of loam, clay loam, and sandy marine sediments. It has been altered by cut and fill operations and leveling for building sites.

Topography – Generally flat, with a 2-9% slope.

Water Access – City of Chula Vista

Power – San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E)

Visibility – Partially open; there is currently a chain link fence on the south and east sides, and a wooden fence with trees on the north and west sides.

Parking – Parking will need to be included in the design. The parking bordering the east side is gated so it is most likely private.

Accessibility – There are five nearby bus routes, including two that connect to the Otay Ranch Town Center and the east site. The site is also easily accessible by car, as H Street connects to two major freeways. The only access point is on the south side.

Context

Site History – There were previously houses on this site, on both parcels. They were all demolished by February 2015.

Neighborhood – This is an urban area at the heart of downtown Chula Vista. The site is between the 3rd Avenue historic corridor to the east, and the Chula Vista Mall to the west. A bank, apartments, and a parking lot border it, and there is a 7-11 store across the street. The neighborhood is largely Hispanic/Latino, and interest in a garden is yet to be determined. There is a weekly farmers' market on 3rd Avenue.

Potential Partners

IRC New Roots – The International Rescue Committee (IRC) New Roots program creates projects that increase healthy, locally-grown, culturally-appropriate foods in San Diego for refugee and low-income communities. There are already a few urban farms in San Diego County, but none in the south part of the county. As a well-established organization, the IRC would have the resources and expertise to start a garden in Chula Vista.

St. Rose of Lima Church and School – St. Rose of Lima Parish is on the corner of 3rd Avenue and H Street. It has several active groups and ministries that may be interested in creating a garden, perhaps to host weekly community dinners for the hungry. The school is K-8 and a garden within walking distance would be an asset to its curriculum.

Scripps Hospital – The hospital is west of the site, on H Street across 4th Avenue. The hospital could benefit from low-cost fresh produce, and could use the garden for education about healthy eating.



DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

Depending on the partnership gardeners are able to secure, I have identified three options for the site.

1 *Demonstration Garden*

In this option, the garden would be used for educational purposes where the community could come to learn about urban agriculture and healthy eating. Scripps hospital would be the key partner. The garden would be a demonstration site where gardening and health professionals could offer workshops about topics like composting, home gardening, how to eat seasonally, etc. The site itself should be very well designed to include all those components. There would be areas for teaching, plenty of shaded areas for seating, a greenhouse. There would definitely be a kitchen area with appropriate tools and seating.

In this option, the focus would be on increasing access to fresh, healthy, affordable food. There would have to be some full-time workers to lead workshops, and to lead groups of volunteers to maintain the garden together. There would be a few rentable plots, but the garden would primarily be a communal effort.

2 *New Roots Garden*

This option would be similar to option 1, but would follow the New Roots model and be joined to the network of other New Roots gardens. Its focus would be on improving food security for low-income people. In addition to access to fresh produce, community gardeners would also learn about sustainability, food enterprise, building leadership, and advocacy.



TOP
The site, facing northwest. Note the wooden fence and mature trees.

3 Rentable Plots

In this option the site would be comprised of rows of raised beds or rentable plots, depending on the quality of the soil, and there would be a small yearly fee to rent a plot. Sponsorship from the church would be key in this option. The shared components would be a toolshed, compost, a greenhouse, fruit trees, and a few plots for demonstration. There would also be a shared kitchen area with shaded seating. The garden would have open houses occasionally, but typically it would be open only to people with plots. A lockable fence for added security would surround it since most of the plants are for personal consumption.

This option could still include an educational component, but on a smaller scale. For example, the school could have a few plots for each grade. The primary purpose of this option, however, would be for recreation and to reduce spending on household groceries. It would encourage social interaction for hobby gardeners of all ages.





CONCLUSION

Through my research I have discovered that urban agriculture on a large scale is possible in Chula Vista, but the city must first provide some legislative clarity. I originally intended to focus only on agriculture in the suburban environment because there is not much literature about it. I have realized, however, that because not much has been done with the legislation in place, there is an opportunity to make agriculture a part of the city as a whole. Chula Vista has an agricultural past, and creating a network of community gardens can reconnect citizens to that history.

My can project serve as a guide for how to start a community garden and how to integrate urban agriculture as a whole into the fabric of Chula Vista. I have shown a straightforward way for identifying vacant lots and I have provided a set of criteria for evaluating the land. I have created options for sites in both urban and suburban areas of Chula Vista. And finally, I have explained how urban agriculture fits in with the Healthy Chula Vista Initiative, and I have described how Berkeley and San

Francisco can serve as examples of how to address urban agriculture in the city's zoning ordinance. Moving forward, I would like to continue my research in order to help the city develop a concrete urban agriculture policy.

My vision for the future of Chula Vista is for the inclusion of urban agriculture to guide future development. What would Chula Vista look like if it were crisscrossed with a network of urban agriculture? Imagine if all the empty lots were converted to usable green spaces. Imagine if community gardens were carved out of barren parking lots. Imagine if every citizen was within walking distance of fresh, local produce. Chula Vista has the available land, but the next step to make urban agriculture a reality is to encourage citizens to take action and to advocate for it. Chula Vista can serve as a model for other similar initiatives in San Diego County, and it can become a forerunner in the urban agriculture movement. Once the "Lemon Capital of the World," agriculture definitely has a place in Chula Vista.

NOTES

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