

# *Converting Vacant Lots into Assets: Comparing National Community Garden Programs to Community Garden Projects in Columbus GA*

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## **Summary**

In the United States primary supporters of community gardening are either municipality Parks and Recreation departments or community Land Banks. However, Columbus Georgia the Parks and Recreation Department does not yet have a formal community garden program, and the city's Land Bank has only recently been established. This report offers eight recommendations.

### **Institutional Recommendations**

1. The Parks and Recreation Department and the Land Bank should together develop policies in conjunction that support and encourage community gardening in Columbus GA.
2. Land owners (Columbus Consolidated Government, the Land Bank, or other organization) should create a clear commitment that the land identified for community gardens will be in the hands of the community gardeners for a defined time period.

### **Support Recommendations**

3. Develop guidance on effectively identifying potential community gardeners and establishing a community of "community of gardeners." For example, how to get in touch and organize a group and how to manage a garden.
4. Publicize sources financial and technical support.
5. Publish maps of available land for community gardening. Make vacant lot maps of the city publically available, as well as vacant lots owned by the city, the Land Bank, or other organizations interested in supporting community gardening.
6. Make access to water resources (essential to community gardens) available including infrastructure and well as easy methods of payment or establishing the opportunity for a waver from the city's water authority.
7. Host a regular newsletter on "best local practices" to inform Columbus neighborhood associations, religious organizations, and NGOs of the accomplishments of groups within the

city. The newsletter would highlight various neighborhood associations, NGO projects.

Vacant lots identified by the Land Bank could also be mentioned in this periodical.

- 8.** Develop strategies to help intervene and support community garden challenges, such as aging garden membership, recruitment, or meeting the needs of a shifting membership.

## *Abstract*

Many aspects of community life are negatively affected by vacant lots, to include neighborhood vitality, crime rates, and the viability of commercial districts. Vacant properties have been identified by both elected and appointed officials as offering significant challenges to neighborhood revitalization and improvement. A variety of techniques have been used to address these problems, one such approach is the development of community gardens. Converting vacant lots into community gardens can improve the quality of life among neighborhood residents, help build social capital, and improve neighboring property values. Beginning with a review of the impact of community gardens and their management, this report identifies how other U.S. cities have converted vacant lots and how they are managed; this report also documents local community garden efforts in Columbus, and suggests possible courses of action for the community to consider.

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## *Background to the Project*

In spring 2011, the Mayor's Neighborhood Revitalization and Improvement Commission was given the task of identifying methods to counter blight, sustain local property values, create safe environments, and improve neighborhoods. The Commission's Vacant Lots sub-committee was charged with identifying strategies to meet the challenges of vacant lots. There are a plethora of vacant lots and abandoned structures throughout Columbus with some neighborhoods more impacted than others. This report focuses on one option for vacant lots, community gardens. As part of the Columbus Community Geography Center, this report examines the social, economic, and environmental impacts that vacant lots have on urban environments and how community garden conversions can negate those impacts. It reviews the role community gardens have played in local economic development and urban revitalization and identifies the various agencies and strategies used in establishing and maintaining community gardens. The report explores community garden "best practices" regarding urban revitalization; it looks at the organizations that usually create and manage municipal community gardens, and surveys community gardens in Columbus, GA in fall 2011. The report concludes with eight recommendations.

## **From Liabilities to Assets: Shifting Land Values and the Community Garden Literature Review**

One of the most visible signs of a city's decline is vacant and abandoned lots. Vacant lots neither generate revenue nor produce a significant amount of property taxes for the city. Accordino and Johnson (2000) documented the efforts many cities affected by vacant lots have taken to overcome

their specific situations, yielding a variety of approaches from which to choose. An excess of urban vacant land depressed land prices, property values, and tax revenues within a city. Maintenance of vacant and abandoned properties was doubly challenging when the city had a shrinking tax base due to those very properties (Logan and Schilling 2008). Vacant properties had a negative impact on property values out as far as 450 feet from the property (Temple University Center 2001). Greening of vacant lots, such as the establishment of community gardens, in Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood were found to increase the sales prices of nearby homes by as much as 30 percent (Denzil & Tappendorf 2011). Vacant properties could and should become the raw materials that a community can repurpose into a thriving urban environment. Vacant land reuse represents an opportunity for the economic growth of distressed urban areas (Bowman & Pagano 2000).

Local governments can benefit from the transfer of vacant lots to responsible land owners via community Land Banks (Denzin & Tappendorf 2011; LaCroix 2011). Not only are costs for property maintenance avoided, property taxes are then paid by the new owners. Unlike in the past, urban revitalization now focuses on, among other methods, targeting infill development inside built up areas (Lopez 2009). Among the array of innovative green uses to revitalize the city included converting vacant lots into community gardens (LaCroix 2011). Community gardens have been defined as spaces communally cultivated and cared for, individually worked plots, as well as multiple caretaker areas (Schukoske 2000).

Housing values adjacent to green spaces have the potential to increase up to 20 percent (Cicea & Pirlogea 2011). Therefore, creating green spaces in a neighborhood is an opportunity to increase property values. The conversion of vacant lots into community gardens within residential areas could help to support a shift in housing values. The impact of a garden may vary across neighborhoods with different characteristics. Gardens in more economically challenged neighborhoods provide an affordable alternative to city parks, which are often located in more affluent neighborhoods and therefore less accessible to poorer residents. Been and Voicu (2008) have argued that gardens may be

more valuable to these residents, leading one to expect larger positive impacts (or smaller negative impacts) on residential property values in lower income areas. The garden's produce can offer at least some food security during the year, and in Columbus, gardens can be productive through much of the year. The potential effects of community gardens on surrounding property values and the greening of economically challenged neighborhoods, should aid local governments make sounder decisions about whether (and how much) to invest in (or encourage private investment in) community gardens and other green spaces. Such investments had a sizeable payoff for the surrounding community, and ultimately for the city itself, as it increased property tax revenues from the neighborhood (Been & Voicu 2008).

### **Community Garden Management at the City Scale: Top Down and Bottom Up**

Community gardens reflect various organizational structures, dependent upon whether the garden was organized by a municipal agency (a top down structure) or was organized from the bottom up. Gardens may be managed by appointed officials or by an elected group of officers. Other gardens were managed by non-profits, churches, local gardening associations, or the land owner. In some cities, the local parks and recreation department managed the community gardens. Gardeners are usually expected to pay fairly nominal annual or monthly fees which were used to pay for upkeep of the garden. The boards, either elected or appointed, manage these fees as well as tracked and organized the many working tasks that gardening requires before, during, and after the growing season.

Park department stewardship and land trusts were two methods used to maintain community gardens on a long-term basis. Dickinson, et al (2003) noted a diverse collection of community members was required to ensure thriving community gardens. The issue of who owns (controls) the land the garden occupies was essential to the success or failure of the garden.

Collaboration is important not only in the establishment of community gardens but also in the continuation of the garden. Asset mapping to identify resources, leaders, and other groups or individuals that may work together to bring the garden to fruition was identified as an important step in

establishing gardens (Beaulieu 2002). These assets may include churches, school, government agencies, garden clubs, food security groups, businesses, as well as individuals. Asset mapping was also a way to identify ethnic and minority groups to ensure their inclusion in gardening initiatives.

Long range security of community gardens must be considered when sites were proposed (Lawson 2007). Too often, community gardens continued to be considered simply vacant lots and, therefore, potentially developable. If officials proposed moving the garden to another location, the community viewed the proposal as ignoring the material and labor already invested in the endeavor by the gardeners. Some cities avoided these disruptions through not for profit land trusts created to purchase and protect the gardens.

### ***Methods of Identifying Vacant Lots***

Many cities had no reliable methods for collecting data on vacant lots (Bowman & Pagano 2000). Officials often learned about vacant lots through informal means such as calls from neighbors rather than through regularly conducted city inspections. Indeed, information on the status of vacant lots sometimes resided among a variety of city agencies (for example, the tax office or code enforcement office) with little chance of a single point of contact having all available information on a single plot with the authority to take the necessary action to remediate any problems with the plot. The Bowman and Pagano survey revealed that less than 60 percent of 99 participant cities tracked vacant land via a computerized system (geographic information system (GIS)). Denzin and Tappendorf (2011) also reported cities had begun to use GIS tracking to identify, acquire, and turn depressed properties into community assets rather than impediments to the vitality of the city. The city must conduct a vacant lot inventory and environmental assessment so as to be prepared to implement appropriate programs with no loss of planning time. Logan and Schilling (2008) agreed that a single point of contact was important for managing a municipality's vacant properties and recommended the use of a land bank.



There are a number of reasons that vacant lots come into being. Population shifts; altered views on desirable housing; employer relocations; declining school reputations; or too small, irregular size, or undeveloped plots have all lead to vacant properties. Trespass and arson can speed the deterioration of vacant housing and if these structures are then condemned and razed, the vacant lots endure as unfortunate monuments to a failed or failing neighborhood (Schukoske 2000). These actions result in the lost of social capital and have lead to further disengagement by the residents of the area.

Community gardens have been a source of social capital as they were primarily created and managed by the community itself (Hancock 2001). Social capital is defined as “benefits accruing to individuals by virtue of participation in groups and on the deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource.”(Portes 1998). Hancock noted gardens served as a green oasis in what had become a debris-filled vacant lot overrun by rodents and other pests and often offered opportunities for community development. Dickinson, et al (2003) supported the role of community gardening as one approach to building social capital.

The relationship between social capital and community gardens has been made clear in the work of community garden coordinators in upstate New York. Communally tended gardens tended to be closely tied to a community service organization. Of the 63 gardens addressed, 87 percent reported the sharing of tools, cultivating, and produce indicating increased social capital. Gardens in low-income areas were four times more likely to lead to other neighborhood issues being addressed. Community gardens also lead to physical improvements in the neighborhood and resulted in increased property values which, unfortunately, lead to the loss of the garden if the property were to be sold. Long term tenure of community gardens was often precarious (Armstrong 2000).

### ***From New York to California: How US Cities Create Community Gardens***

When US communities decide to embrace community gardens they have two major tools: the city Parks and Recreation programs (Austin, Portland, and Seattle) and the Land Bank (Fulton County, Georgia, Philadelphia). The following case studies articulate the various models.

### *Parks and Recreation Model*

The City of Austin regulates community gardens through its Parks and Recreation Code which recognizes community gardens as a proper civic use of the land (Schukoske 2000). In 2000, there were 26 active community gardens in Austin. These gardens varied in size and organization. For example, the University of Texas (UT) garden contained 15 individual 4'x 8' plots; 3 organization 10'x10' plots; 3 UT dining hall plots; 3 demonstration plots; plus additional landscaped areas. The UT Campus Environmental Center manages the community garden. Students, staff, and faculty may rent the individual plots for \$10 per term and 2 hours of community service per month in the garden. Organization plots are available for \$25 per term and 6 hours of community garden service per month. In contrast, the Windsor Park Community Garden was comprised of 28 individual 4'x 10' plots, fruit trees, and over 900 sq ft of tilled land planted with vegetables which were free to the community. The Windsor Park Community Garden charged a \$20 per year membership fee, a \$20 annual fee for an individual plot, as well as 1 hour per month community service in the garden.

Portland's Planning and Zoning Code identified community gardens within its definition of "Parks and Open Areas" (Schukoske 2000) in an effort to provide stability and tenure to both established and new gardens. The Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent of the Bureau of Parks were authorized to enter into agreements with public or private property owners and Community Gardens Project members. This program encouraged gardening, food production, and intergenerational activities to increase the benefits of the gardens to more individuals.

With over 2000 acres of vacant land, Seattle's mayor and city council recommended community gardens be part of Seattle's comprehensive plan in order to expand gardening opportunities (Bowman & Pagano 2000; Schukoske 2000). The "P-Patch" Community Gardening Program, a centrally controlled allotment style of community gardening, was included as a priority in the Acquisition and Development and the Environmental Education sections of the city's Parks

Department Comprehensive Plan (MacNair 2002). The P-Patch Program was moved from the Department of Housing and Human Services in 1997 and reassigned to the Department of Neighborhoods. This transfer to a department focused on strengthening communities reportedly yielded great benefits with some gardening programs actively involved in providing food to the homeless as well as involving the homeless in growing food (Francis 1989). More than 80 community gardens are managed through the City of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods. Department of Neighborhood staff collaborated with the Housing Department, volunteers, and the P-Patch Trust to support, develop, and manage the community gardens. In 2009, the P-Patch Program was incorporated into the City's on-going planning and community building efforts.

#### *Land Bank Model*

Fulton County (Atlanta), Baltimore, Philadelphia, and the city of Easton have all explored the connection between Land Banks and community gardens. Georgia is one of a handful of states to expressly grant municipalities the authority to create Land Banks (Logan & Schilling 2008). Atlanta reported approximately 5,800 acres of vacant land (Bowman & Pagano 2000). The Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority was able to forgive taxes on abandoned, tax-delinquent properties (Schukoshe 2000; Denzin & Tappendorf 2011). All property acquired by the Authority was inventoried, appraised, and maintained in accordance with applicable laws and codes. The Authority was empowered to manage, maintain, protect, rent, lease, repair, insure, alter, sell, trade, exchange, or otherwise dispose of any property on terms and conditions determined at the sole discretion of the Authority and in accordance with applicable law. The Authority was authorized to assemble tracts or parcels of property for community improvement or other public purposes, and to that end may exchange parcels. To protect against long term speculation, construction or rehabilitation of any conveyed property must commence within 3 years or the Authority was authorized to establish the forfeiture of the property.

In the year 2000, Baltimore reported a total of 1,000 acres of vacant land (Bowman & Pagano 2000). Maryland passed legislation creating a Land Bank for the City of Baltimore in 2008 so it could sell vacant land (Logan & Schilling 2008). The popularity of community gardens often rise and fall with changes in the economy. By 2011, community gardens were once again becoming more popular, serving both as a method of clearing vacant lots while also serving to improve the quality of life for residents without a nearby source of fresh fruits and vegetables (Corrigan 2011).

Philadelphia is one of the communities that implemented initiatives specially addressing vacant and abandoned properties. In order to reduce duplication limiting the effectiveness of its land management programs, Philadelphia created a consolidated and streamlined process for identifying and addressing vacant lots. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's (PHS) Philadelphia Green program began a 1974 effort to mitigate the presence of in excess 30,000 vacant city properties. Philadelphia used Land Trusts for an estimated 1,200 gardens established on vacant lots. In 1986 the Neighborhood Gardens Association (NGA) (a Philadelphia Land Trust) was established by the Philadelphia Green program in an effort to provide permanent protection to established community gardens (Francis 1989). PHS, through a contract with the city, cleans and greens lots in targeted neighborhoods. Site selection was based on a variety of criteria, including providing safe routes to schools and other public buildings. Philadelphia residents maintained these lots via government-funded seasonal employment. Improved lots were inspected every two weeks between April and October to remove trash and mow the grass. These improved lots have been used for housing, commercial areas, or preserved for community gardens, parks, or play areas for the neighborhood. Thus the neighborhoods had the potential to raise property values, create new investments, and improve the health and safety of the residents (PHS 2011).

While land banks can work at the county and the city level, the small community of Easton also explored community gardens through the medium of land conservancy. Their first community garden was initially established on a privately owned, neglected, corner lot on South Street in 1992 in order to

minimize the “attractive nuisance” of the vacant lot. In 2009, the property was purchased by the Town of Easton with funds secured through the East End Neighborhood Association, the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, and others. The small space contained raised beds supporting the gardens of eight community members. Plots were rented for a small, annual fee. The annual garden spring clean up often expanded into a neighborhood cleanup, this is one example of the development of social capital. A committee of three oversaw the organizational needs of the garden (Attraction Magazine 2011).

### **Community Garden Management at the Garden Scale**

The structure of community garden sites is as diverse as the people who work them; however, they fall into two basic modes: the communal-plot garden and the individual plot garden. Communal plot management can be divided into two types: individual allotment gardens where each community gardener has his or her own plot. Then there are gardens that planted, tended and harvested as a single unit.

In communal plot gardens, produce was divided among the individuals working the plot according to their efforts or the items may be grown in for individual consumption, to donate to a local food bank or other non-profit organization, or to members of the neighborhood. Some community gardens are based on a large land parcel with multiple community residents tending it. Each participant typically worked an established number of hours performing gardening chores. There were no separate plots in this model. The rules of this type of community garden were often strict and in many municipalities there were waiting lists to join the garden.

Individually farmed plots or allotments usually provided food for a single family. Individual plot gardens were usually rental plots from a central management authority (Flachs 2010). In these, each individual group is free to grow what they choose for consumption, although there may be established rules to assure stability. Some plot based-models have fees attached where members may pay a minimal yearly fee. If the community garden is associated with a non-profit organization, fee rates may be minimal or non-existent. In this case, community gardeners must contribute hours to the

community garden and attend organizational meetings in order to remain active. Some allotment community gardens have fees attached; others are sponsored by community churches or non-profit organizations which accept volunteer services in exchange for community gardening privileges. In many organizations, senior members receive a reduced fee and local community organizations may receive plot privileges but they must remain active in the garden.

All gardens need a management structure. Community gardens may be a simple collection of plots individually worked but with some communal management by a management committee engaged in strategic decision making whose members may be drawn from the community or from partner groups (Holland 2004). Gardens can be managed by the gardeners themselves. Gardens can also be controlled by an external group such as a city department or other management group. For community gardens to flourish there must be clear criteria established and followed for deciding how land will be allocated. Issues such as access to water resources and how to pay for that access is also something a management plan should include.

For individual allotment community gardens, there appeared to be no established “common” plot size. Plots varied widely in relation to the amount of land available at that location, demand for the plots, the physical limitations of the gardeners, etc. Thus, plots ranged from 5’ x 10’, 10’ x 10’, or 10’ x 15’. Size also often depended upon the overall size of the garden as well as if the garden was individually or communally gardened. Gardens designed to be ADA compliant had narrower, raised beds to facilitate those individuals with more limited mobility challenges.

This paper will not address community gardens associated with schools. In these instances, the gardens usually serve as an educational device for altering the exercise and eating habits of the school children as well as provided exposure to the natural world. These were usually active only during the school year with little provision for gardening during the summer. These gardens are more commonly referred to as “school gardens.” However, school gardens can have a strong community garden component, sometimes sharing produce with community organizations, or planting fruit bearing trees

and shrubs on land accessible to the neighborhood. One such Columbus school-community garden is Clubview Elementary School in Midtown, Columbus. The program started as an effort to enrich the Parks and Recreation After School Program. Its leader, Mrs. Marlene Culpepper, plans to plant fruit trees and bushes in publically accessible parts of the school grounds and she gives the food grown in the school garden to a local NGO that supports culinary education for the homeless.

### ***Analysis of Columbus, Georgia's Community Garden Initiatives***

At the community scale, the Columbus Consolidated Government's Parks and Recreation Program does not have a community garden program at present. In early 2011 the city chartered the Columbus Land Bank Authority (CLBA) and as yet the Land Bank has not sponsored a community garden. However, it hopes to be able to create gardens in the near future with a few procedural changes in city governance.<sup>1</sup> Without these two entities working in the area of community garden development, the community has recently created several community garden projects. In a survey of the community conducted in fall 2011, five community gardens were identified in Columbus, Georgia: Deborah A Jones Memorial Garden, Homeless Resource Network Garden, Columbus Housing Authority's Wilson Homes Garden, Girls Inc Garden, Bibb City Home Owners Association Garden.. These gardens were established by religious institutions often in conjunction with NGOs, Columbus Housing Authority community gardens, a NGO sponsored garden for the homeless, an NGO sponsored gardens for an afterschool and summer girls program, and a home owner's association garden. As these examples indicate, several agencies are often involved in a single community garden.

#### *Religious Institutions and NGOs*

The Deborah A. Jones Memorial Garden was established in the East Wynnton neighborhood approximately 7 years ago as a collaborative effort between the membership of the Allen Temple

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<sup>1</sup> Within its first year, the CLBA facilitated the identification and transfer of eight city owned vacant lots to the Columbus Habitat for Humanity. These lots were to be maintained by Habitat for Humanity until their March 2012 Collegiate Challenger Blitz, at which time houses were to be constructed on the lots. Habitat for Humanity was expected to transfer two lots to the CLBA at a later date for future development. NeighborWorks Columbus (another local community NGO) also expressed interest in transferring property to the CLBA.

African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Wynnton United Methodist Church. It received some early assistance from two NGOs: Habitat for Humanity and NeighborWorks. The garden leader, Minnie Fluellen, who died in 2011, named the garden for her daughter. The fenced garden is located across the street from the Michael M. Fluellen Community Center. The gardeners are older local residents who are often also active at the community center. As part of the revitalization of the neighborhood, the community garden had built relationships that have lasted beyond the growing season.

This garden is a mix of individual allotments and a larger community plot. The garden had 21 individual raised plots approximately 4' x 12', and a much larger plot located at the rear of the garden. The larger plot's produce is made available to the Wynnton Neighborhood Network (a local interfaith nonprofit social service organization that supports a food bank). The plots were rebuilt and had additional soil added in 2010 by a member of the Wynnton United Methodist Church. There were trees around the outside of the garden and a number of benches located throughout the garden in both shady and sunny locations. There was a neat compost structure at the rear of the garden, which helped ensure the garden remained neatly maintained. Gardeners paid \$3 per month with this amount paying for water and grounds maintenance. Tools were stored in two small buildings for all gardeners to use. This garden was in use from early spring until late in the fall. There were no formal rules established for this garden.

As part of the garden, there has been some focus on youth and gardening. In 2007 there was a Junior Master Garden 2 week day-long summer program with a grant from the Mildred Miller Fort Foundation at the Debra A. Jones Memorial Garden. In addition recently there has been a local community-based youth intervention program that used the Debra A. Jones Memorial Garden in 2011 (Judith Davidson).

*Columbus Housing Authority Gardens*



The Columbus Housing Authority (CHA) that manages subsidized housing in the city recently established a community garden at the Luther C. Wilson Homes. This garden was established through a joint effort among the UGA Cooperative Extension, Strong4Life Campaign, and the CHA. Much of the initially installed plantings were easy-to-grow fruit trees and shrubs, such as blackberry, blueberry for the youth living in the apartments. If funding continues, the garden areas will eventually include a raised-bed vegetable garden for adult residents. The gardens were neatly planted raised beds surrounded by tidy brick walls with installed underground sprinklers to ease the watering effort. This was a grant-funded effort with an emphasis on the educational benefits for youth living in Luther C Wilson Homes.

Plans are to expand this initiative in 2012 with the arrival of additional grant funding. An adjacent location approximately 20' by 80' in size will be converted into 12 to 13 individual garden plots. The plots will have a separate irrigation system from the garden plots installed in 2011 in front of the housing authority office. Residents of Luther C. Wilson Homes have already been selected to garden these plots. Food produced in each plot will be used by the gardener, gifted to a neighbor, or provided to a local food bank. The goal of the initial garden is to fight childhood obesity (8-12 years) and is part of a grant-funded project with Strong4Life. The project also includes education with plans to cooking lessons for healthy eating (Davidson 2011).

Girls Inc of Columbus (an after school and summer program supported by the NGO Girls Inc) and the UGA Cooperative Extension established a garden in early 2011 at Gerrard Girls Inc Center in South Columbus. The girls installed 9 raised bed vegetable gardens at one location with the assistance of a dozen master gardeners, numerous other adult volunteers, and almost three dozen girls. The youth hand watered the garden and harvested vegetables throughout the summer. Fall gardens have been planted with the expectation that the plots will be in use from early spring to late fall each year.

*Homeless NGO*

Another local community garden effort was established in 2009 by an employee of the Homeless Resource Network (HRN). The employee and his friends cleared a portion of land behind the HRN and planted an assortment of vegetables which were made available to the homeless living in the wooded areas nearby, as well as any other individuals needing food. This garden has no affiliation with the HRN other than sharing the same block. When the original gardener departed, his replacement at the HRN continued the gardening project in 2011. The garden was watered and provided produce to the homeless and others. They harvested and prepared a sweet potato dish for the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Banquet on the Bridge in November 2011 where they also passed out bags of dried lima beans harvested from the garden during the meal. A smaller crop of winter vegetables was currently growing in this garden in late 2011.

#### *Neighborhood Association Garden*

The Bibb City Neighborhood Association revitalized an overgrown triangle memorial garden. With the assistance of University of Georgia Extension Master Gardener Volunteers, neighborhood association members purchased supplies and plants at a reduced cost from a local grower. The city's Parks and Recreation Department removed overgrown shrubs and amended the soil before planting and watered during the summer. The master gardener volunteers designed the site and the association members planted it. A Bibb City resident has offered a different vacant lot for a future community garden. A second triangle has been identified for a community ornamental garden.

Without a Parks and Recreation Community Garden program and fully developed Land Bank, we see several recent garden efforts established. However, with the help, support and guidance, Columbus Consolidated Government's Parks and Recreation Department and the Land Bank could be powerful forces in establishing more community gardens.

### **Conclusions**

Community gardens have been seen by a number of municipalities as important tools for urban redevelopment. Community gardens offer many benefits to the community. Neighborhoods are beautified, gardeners have greater food security, and social capital is increased through social interaction and community building. Greening of vacant lots increases the value of adjacent properties while vacant lot reclamation also rebuilds social capital when neighborhood residents collaboratively engage in the planning process. Community gardens have the potential for transforming vacant lots into sites that have a positive influence on the surrounding community. Across the United States the primary supporters of community gardening have either been municipality Parks and Recreation departments or Land Banks. However, in Columbus, the Parks and Recreation department has not developed a community garden program, and the city's Land Bank has only recently been established. A second question is whether the Columbus Consolidated Government land would be accessibly for potential community garden development.

In fall 2011 there were only five community gardens in Columbus Ga, a community of over 189,000 people. We make eight recommendations to support the growth and development of community gardens in the community.

1. The Parks and Recreation Department and the Land Bank should develop policies in conjunction with each other that support and encourage community gardening in Columbus GA.
2. Land owners (Columbus Consolidated Government, the Land Bank, or other organization) should create a clear commitment that the land identified for community gardens, will be in the hands of the community gardeners for a defined time period.
3. Develop guidance on effectively identifying potential community gardeners and establishing a community of "community of gardeners." How to get in touch and organize a group and how to manage a garden.
4. Publicize sources financial and technical support.

5. Publish maps of available land for community gardening. Make vacant lot maps of the city publically available, as well as vacant lots owned by the city, the Land Bank, or other organizations interested in supporting community gardening.
6. Make access to water resources (essential to community gardens) available including infrastructure and well as easy methods of payment or establishing the opportunity for a waiver from the city's water authority.
7. Host a regular newsletter on "best local practices" to inform Columbus neighborhood associations, religious organizations, and NGOs of the accomplishments of groups within the city. The newsletter would highlight various neighborhood associations, NGO projects. Vacant lots identified by the Land Bank could also be mentioned in this periodical.
8. Develop strategies to help intervene and support community garden challenges, such as aging garden membership, recruitment, or meeting the needs of a shifting membership.

Finally, almost all these gardens were on the Urban Garden Tour for the Georgia Organics State Conference in spring 2012 led by the Davidson, Jennifer, Columbus Consolidated Government Extension Agent and Agriculture and Natural Resource Agent for the University of Georgia.

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